

# **WOMEN & ENVIRONMENTS**

\$4  
Winter 1989

**A CANADIAN  
WOMEN'S  
HOUSING CO-OP**

**ANTI-NUCLEAR  
ACTIVISM**

**WOMEN'S  
SPACES IN  
NORTHERN INDIA**

**A HISTORY OF  
INTERNATIONAL  
WOMEN'S DAY**



April 7 & 8, 1989

**Women Plan Toronto Conference** is being held to discuss women's concerns regarding employment, housing, mobility, safety, social support, health, environment, planning, and children's needs issues.

For more information contact: Women Plan Toronto, 736 Bathurst St., Toronto, Ontario, M5S 2R4.

April 7-10, 1989

**Beyond Survival: Women, Addiction and Identity** conference to be held in Toronto. The conference will explore different forms of addiction, theoretical concepts and clinical practices from a feminist perspective.

For more information write: 150A Winona Drive, Toronto, Ontario M6G 3S9 (Tel): 416-658-1752.

April 10 — 14, 1989

**The 6th International Trade Fair and Congress for Environmental Protection Technology** will be held in Dusseldorf, West Germany.

Contact: Anne Santarelli, Dusseldorf Trade Shows, The Empire State Bldg., Suite 4621, New York, NY, 10118 USA.

April 21 & 22, 1989

**Parallel Issues and Solutions for Rural Women in Ontario and in the Third World** conference to be held at Ridgeway College near London, Ontario.

For more information contact: Cross-Cultural Learner Centre, 533 Clarence St., London, Ontario, N6A 3N1.

April 29 — May 3, 1989

**American Planning Association** is holding its 1989 Planning Conference. Included in the conference is a seminar on April 30 on Diversity and Supply in Low-Cost Housing.

For more information contact: 1989 National Planning Conference, American Planning Association, 1313 East 6th St. Chicago, IL 60637 USA.

May 12, 1989

**Gender and Aging**

Conference at St. Jerome's College in Waterloo, Ontario, organized by the Women's Studies Programs of Wilfrid Laurier University and the University of Waterloo will address issues of gender, aging and: poverty, housing and health. Speakers include Janet McClain, Anne Martin Matthews, Neena Chappell.

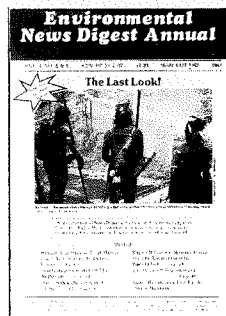
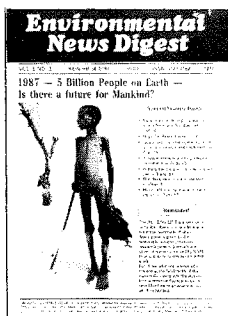
Contact: Juanne Clarke, Co-ordinator, Women's Studies Program, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, N2L 3C5, (519) 844-1970 ext. 2516.

June 14 — 18, 1989

**The National Women's Studies Association**

is holding its eleventh annual conference at Towson State University in Baltimore — exploring feminist transformations through feminist education in the classroom, and in the community.

For more information contact: Suzanne Hyers, National Conference Director, National Women's Studies Association, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742-1325 USA.



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periodicals available or the money to subscribe to all these periodicals. The subscription rate for a year is US\$40/ (by airmail) OR US\$30 (by seamount). All payments to: SAHABAT ALAM MALAYSIA/ Friends of the Earth, Malaysia, 43, Salween Road, 10050 Penang, Malaysia. A small donation to support the work of this non-profit environmental conservation organisation will be greatly appreciated.

**Note: Due to the expensive bank commission levy on overseas cheques, please try to send all payment to us by BANK DRAFT/INTERNATIONAL MONEY ORDER.**

# WOMEN & ENVIRONMENTS

Vol. 11 No. 2 Winter 1989

March/April 89

## A WORD FROM US

This Winter issue is an eclectic collection. We have included articles about women in India, and women across Canada all working to improve their everyday lives. The articles on enclosed spaces for women — an all women's co-op in Vancouver, women's dwelling in India — demonstrate how spatial arrangements can both reflect and have an impact upon women's lives and lifestyles.

We take pleasure in recognizing how many environmental activists are women. And we reaffirm that the personal is political. Ann Hansen and Elizabeth Dowdeswell offer personal insights into the struggle to change this crazy world we live in, and tell us that we can make a difference. This issue includes many others who are also involved in this struggle. We plan, in future issues, to address more environmental issues, and to broaden both our scope and our exposure.

In our ongoing effort to promote *Women and Environments*, we have found that our pioneering work is often unknown. When we connect with other well-established women's groups and environmental organizations, they are quick to recognize the links between their goals and ours. We have joined the Ontario Environment Network and the Canadian Environment Network, both umbrella groups representing an enormous range of environmental interests. To further extend our reach, WEED is spreading underground and sending up new growth. We have begun working with two women and environments networks — WorldWIDE in the USA and the Women's Environmental Network in Great Britain — to draw attention to the massive social, environmental, economic and health problems affecting women. Our collaboration grew out of a serendipitous contact at the 1988 World Congress on Philanthropy, and we, along with women's alliances around the world, are beginning to identify local issues and experiences through regional conferences to be ultimately shared at a large international conference in 1992, the 20th anniversary of the Stockholm Conference on the Environment.

It has not been a particularly cold or snowy winter in Toronto; this, combined with last summer's heat and dryness have us very worried about the greenhouse effect. It has, however, been a hard winter. We and people we love have suffered illness, loss, memories of past abuses. We have wanted to hibernate along with other warm-blooded mammals. But the days are getting longer, spring will come, and we will continue to flourish. □

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**Managing Editor:** Judith Kjellberg

**Editorial Board:** Gaye Alexander, Rosemary Foulds, Schuster Gindin, Regula Modlich, Anella Parker Martin, Barbara Sanford, Miriam Wyman

**Editors this Issue:** Gaye Alexander, Rosemary Foulds, Miriam Wyman

**Book Review Editor:** Rosemary Foulds

**Editorial Assistant:** Helen Humphreys

**Circulation:** Lisa Pottie

**Layout & Design:** Helen Humphreys, Barbara Sanford

**Founding Editors:** Rebecca Peterson, Gerda Wekerle

**Cover Illustration:** Angela Evans

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# If I Were in Charge of the World ...

by Elizabeth Dowdeswell

**T**he real wisdom of the ages is often found in simple children's stories. I have a particularly favourite poem written by Judith Viorst. It's called, "If I were in charge of the world:"

If I were in charge of the world  
I'd cancel oatmeal,  
Monday mornings,  
Allergy shots, and also  
Sara Steinberg

If I were in charge of the world  
There'd be brighter night lights  
Healthier hamsters, and  
Basketball baskets forty-eight  
inches lower

If I were in charge of the world  
You wouldn't have lonely  
You wouldn't have clean  
You wouldn't have bedtimes  
Or "Don't punch your sister."  
You wouldn't even have sisters

If I were in charge of the world  
A chocolate sundae with whipped  
cream and nuts would be a  
vegetable

All 007 movies would be rated G  
And a person who sometimes forgot  
to brush  
And sometimes forgot to flush  
Would still be allowed to be  
In charge of the world.

The wishes of a child — and perhaps a few of us adults. I didn't choose this poem as a rallying cry, urging us all to rise up and take over the world. But it did cause me to think — what if? What if we women were in charge of the world? What would happen? Would it be any different?

In the business of environment we're surrounded by references to women. We concern ourselves about the fate of Mother Earth and the unpredictability of Mother Nature. We are guided by the wisdom of Rachel Carson and the persistence

and creativity of Dr. Helen Caldicott. In fact, it is rare that a single book actually changes the course of history ... yet Carson's *Silent Spring* did exactly that. It is credited with spurring revolutionary changes in government policy toward the environment — and it was instrumental in launching the environmental movement that has made "ecology" a part of everyone's vocabulary. Its message is as pertinent today as when it was first published.

And that's where I'd like to start — by surveying some of our environmental challenges.

1 Pollution is a problem that's never over — one has to stay everlastingly at it.

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*In the next century the projected population of earth is between 8 and 14 billion, 90 percent of the increase occurring in developing countries*

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2 The solution to pollution is becoming less than clear-cut. Even if one follows the rules of:  
Don't produce;  
Reduce;  
Recycle and treat;  
Incinerate or landfill.

(in order of preferred choice) — there is always something left. And there are three choices with whatever is left — put it in the air, the water, or the earth (not much of a choice!).

3 The environment business is filled with uncertainty — both scientific and technological. In many cases we simply don't know what the risk is. Our understanding of the increasing variety of

toxic chemicals and particularly of their synergistic and cumulative effect is imperfect to say the least.

4 A climate of fear and anger has developed. We're almost at the stage where people are saying not only "Don't swim in the water" but "Don't touch anyone who has." This climate is not conducive to developing good public policy.

5 We seem to be forever debating, often with no conclusion, the siting of new waste disposal facilities, the reduction of toxic substances, development versus preservation of wetlands. Harry S. Truman was noted for the sign on his desk saying, "The buck stops here." There

are times when our decision-making process results in the buck stopping nowhere. It simply bounces around as we undertake more studies, or declare the problem to be the mandate of another level of government, or take a landfill decision that ultimately becomes a water quality problem, substituting potential air pollution through incineration because there are no more sites for landfill ... and so it goes, round and round.

6 And for those who put their faith in regulation and prosecution, there is increasing evidence that the system is best serving the lawyers. A person from New Jersey asked why it is that they

have the greatest number of hazardous waste sites while New York State is known to have the greatest number of lawyers. The answer came back — New Jersey got first choice!

That is by no means the entire list of challenges we face — it's only a sample. In fact, as this world becomes increasingly interdependent there's an even more important challenge on the horizon. The case is outlined most compellingly in the recently released report of The World Commission on Environment and Development (The Brundtland Report) — *Our Common Future*, which is at the same time a warning of things to come and a statement of hope. Consider these facts:

- Last summer we marked the birth of the five billionth human being. In the next century the projection is between 8 and 14 billion, 90 percent of the increase occurring in developing countries.
- Economic activity has been concentrated in industrial countries. With one quarter of the world's population, they consume about 80 percent of the world's goods. That leaves ¾ of the world's population with less than one quarter of its wealth. This pervasive poverty is perhaps the greatest threat as countries use up and damage scarce natural resources as they race to development.
- The trends in ecological change are depressing. During the short time the Commission was at work they witnessed a drought-triggered crisis in Africa that killed perhaps a million people, the Bhopal disaster in India, the Chernobyl nuclear accident and the death of an estimated 60 million people from preventable disease related to unsafe water.

Faced with these facts, the Commission concluded that, "rather than growing, as we must, we cannot even sustain the present scale and pace of growth if it rests on a continuing draw-down of the Earth's basic environmental capital." (If energy use, for example, rests on continuing environmental subsidies in the form of air pollution, acid rain and climate change. If we continue to cut 10 trees for every one we plant. If we persist in getting rid of the world's chemical garbage in the cheapest rather than the safest way.)

But I don't mean to spread doom and gloom. The Commission's Report holds out hope. It suggests that the many economic, trade, agricultural, energy and developmental assistance policies now in place that actively, perhaps unintentionally, encourage forms of development that are unsustainable, can be changed. For example, we can design agricultural subsidy systems that not only provide necessary income support for farmers, but also

induce practices that enhance the soil and water base for agriculture.

*Our Common Future* proposes sustainable development as a new model of economic growth. It demonstrates that a degraded and deteriorating environment and resource base is not only a major environmental threat; it's a major economic threat. The old debate about interest conflicts between environment and economic development has been stood on its head.

Policies that are unresponsive to this link between a sound environment and a sound economy need to be changed and it is that need for change that leads me to look for new perspectives. Some of our modern day thinkers like Fritjof Capra and Marilyn Ferguson talk about an emerging paradigm shift — a new pattern or framework of thought — distinctly new ways of thinking about old problems. They suggest that a feminist perspective has been influential in the emergence of this ecological paradigm.

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### *Ecological awareness will only fully develop when we combine our rational knowledge with intuitive wisdom*

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The view of man as dominating nature and woman, and the belief in the superiority of the rational mind, have been supported and encouraged for the better part of history. "It is now becoming apparent that overemphasis on the scientific method and on rational, analytic thinking has led to attitudes that are profoundly anti-ecological. In truth, the understanding of ecosystems is hindered by the very nature of the rational mind. Rational thinking is linear, whereas ecological awareness arises from an intuition of non-linear systems."

Ecosystems sustain themselves in a dynamic balance based on cycles and fluctuations (non-linear processes). Linear enterprises such as indefinite economic and technological growth interfere with the natural balance and sooner or later will cause severe damage. (That's one of the messages of Brundtland). Closer to home it's the message of coping with fluctuating lake levels, the message of learning to live with nature.

Ecological awareness then will only fully develop when we combine our rational knowledge with intuitive wisdom. Interestingly, such intuitive wisdom is characteristic of traditional native cultures, in which life was organized around a highly refined awareness of the environment.

In the mainstream of our culture, however, the cultivation of intuitive wisdom has been neglected. There is a striking disparity between the progress we've made in the development of intellectual power, scientific knowledge and technological skills, on the one hand, and of wisdom, spirituality and ethics on the other. The expressive dimension concerned with quality of life, relationships and relatedness; with emotions and the whole human being, has been poorly understood and not encouraged.

Capra describes our progress as being largely a rational and intellectual affair, so much so that we're faced with paradoxical (and ludicrous) situations. "We can control the soft landings of space craft on distant planets but we are unable to control the polluting fumes from our cars and factories. We propose Utopian communities in gigantic space colonies, but cannot manage our cities. The business world would have us believe that huge indus-

tries producing pet foods and cosmetics are a sign of our high standard of living, while economists try to tell us that we cannot "afford" adequate health care, education or public transport. Those are the results of overemphasizing our yang side — rational knowledge and analysis — while neglecting your yin side — intuitive wisdom, synthesis and ecological awareness."

Whether we look at the interrelatedness and interdependence of all phenomena through the ancient Chinese idea of yin and yang or through more modern systems theories, it is clear that a healthy system (be it individual, society or ecosystem) has a balance between an integrative tendency to function as part of a whole and a self-assertive tendency to preserve individual autonomy. Rachel Carson herself was a realistic, well-trained scientist who possessed the insight and sensitivity of a poet. She had an emotional response to nature, for which she did not apologize.

But ours has not been a healthy system. The competition, aggression and linear, analytic thinking has dominated responsive, co-operative, intuitive behaviour. We see around us a mechanistic view of the world with technology of mass production and standardization pursuing the illusion of indefinite growth.

But gradually a shift is taking place. There is a rising concern with ecology. Citizen groups are forming around social and environmental issues. They point out limits to growth, advocate a new ecological ethic, and develop appropriate "soft" technologies.

More attention is being paid to the strong nurturing impulse that extends to all living things; to the tendency to integrate rather than separate; to the ability to empathize; to a predilection for egalitarian relationships; to a preference for negotiation as a means of problem-solving; to a scale of values that places individual growth and fulfillment above abstractions; to an attachment to the day-to-day process of sustaining life.

That's a fundamental shift in thoughts, perceptions and values. It's a recognition that we have to correct the imbalance between our "masculine" and "feminine" sides. It's a recognition that our lives will be enriched when we really believe that nurturance is as important as independence; intuition as valuable as intellect.

And the shift is coming just in time. We can no longer subscribe to a narrow perception of reality. We're living in a globally interconnected world in which biological, psychological, social and environmental phenomena are all interdependent. These problems cannot be understood within the fragmented methodologies that are characteristic either of our academic disciplines or of our neatly separate government agencies.

It is clear that our challenges will not be met with traditional, entrenched modes of thinking; fresh and innovative perceptions need to be brought to bear. I'm reminded of an old New Yorker cartoon in which the King announces that he can so repair Humpty Dumpty — he just needs *more* horses and *more* men. In just that irrational mode we try to solve problems with our existing tools, in their old context.

We ask the wrong questions. We ask how we are going to provide adequate national health insurance, given the increasingly high cost of medical treatment. That question automatically equates health with hospitals, doctors, prescription drugs, technology. Instead we should be asking how people get sick in the first place. What is the nature of wellness?

The question is not how we can tame the environment, but how can we learn to live as part of the environment? Our current paralysis in environmental decision-making is expensive not just in terms of dollars, but in terms of public and environmental health, and in an erosion of public confidence. The stage is set for escalating confrontation unless there is a greater *understanding* of respective inter-

ests and of political and technical capabilities so that we can design a process that will lead to cooperative political action.

- We need to stop looking for people to blame, for scapegoats;
- We need to stop being driven solely by our economic system with neglect of social and political processes;
- We need more education to demystify science;
- We need more research — and time and patience as we push forward the knowledge frontier;
- We need political courage;
- We need the public involved in environmental decision-making.

I am reminded of the lines of an American writer who said: "Women are repeatedly accused of taking things personally. Quite frankly I can't see any other honest way of taking them."

Trying to think through what it was that I really wanted to say this morning was agonizing and personal. A tug of war was going on within me. I have resisted believing that men have certain inherent qualities while women have others. I had

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***"There are no passengers on Spaceship Earth. Everybody's crew."***

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no wish to get into an ideological debate about gender and society, the nature-nurture controversy or biological determination.

So what did I say about women and the environment? Is there anything to say? Do we make a difference? I'd never really thought about it before. But there are some things I believe:

- I believe that ours is a world out of balance — children die of hunger as nations pour billions of dollars into destructive weapons; perishable resources (our heritage of the future) are sacrificed to the demands of the present.
- I believe that what our environment needs is nurturing and caring, a more humane, more enlightened way of living together.
- I believe that efforts to preserve the

planet and its diverse forms of life can only succeed if they are supported by both masculine and feminine perspectives and energies. Marshall McLuhan was right when he said, "There are no passengers on Spaceship Earth. Everybody's crew."

- I don't believe that women have cornered the market on nurturing and caring. It may well be that socialization has more fully developed certain qualities in women — but those qualities are not gender-specific.
- There are also some things I believe about women. I believe a woman's place is everywhere. We are agents of change who are changing ourselves. We should not be afraid of who we are and what special qualities we bring to environmental challenges.
- Finally, I believe that coalitions are reservoirs of potential strength. We must join together. To a great extent we're all in the same battle. We are divided by religious and political and social differences — and I don't expect all of you to carry the banners that I'm prepared to carry. But for the things we want done, for the challenges we face, we have to work together, to ally ourselves with like-minded people in business, industry, government and the home. This is a good place to start.

And to end on a personal note — what do I think about women and the environment? Working for, in and with the environment has struck a deep and resonant chord in me. It gives me satisfaction and meaning, frustration and joy. And I can answer the question — If we were in charge of the world would it make a difference? My answer is a resounding YES. □

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***In preparing these remarks I have been influenced by and have borrowed from the thoughts and words of Fritjof Capra in *The Turning Point* and Marilyn Ferguson in *The Aquarian Conspiracy*.***

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*Elizabeth Dowdeswell is Regional Director General of Conservation and Protection at Environment Canada. She first presented these reflections at "A Time for Action" Conference in Toronto on March 18, 1988.*

Anne Hansen:

## The Making of an Anti-Nuclear Activist

Anne Hansen grew up with activism. Her environmentalist mother has been involved in the abortion rights movement for many years. She describes her father as "very aware and cynical", traits which Anne has inherited to mix with a wry sense of humour; a remarkable ability to express herself in words; and a commitment to making the world a better place. She is also a talented artist; a picture can speak more than a thousand words, she feels, and she uses her art to express anti-nuclear and pro-choice views in a delightful series of paintings printed on post-cards.

Other than her parents, Hansen's mentors and influences include Dr. Rosalie Bertell, head of the International Institute of Concern for Public Health, whose writing she describes as "scientific, but with emotion". Another is Dr. Helen Caldicott, who has raised world-wide consciousness about our spiral toward nuclear disaster.

Hansen claims no scientific learning, but has a serious political interest in the ghastly manipulations used by the pro-nuclear lobby to "dupe" the public into believing that nuclear power is necessary, desirable and perfectly safe. As a feminist, she abhors manipulation and oppression in all of its forms, and feels she must exert her influence in what purports to be a democratic society, so that taxes and other resources are used for the ultimate good of everyone.

Hansen is "not a group person", she says, but she belongs to and volunteers with several local and international groups, such as Energy Probe, Greenpeace, the International Institute of Concern for Public Health, and the Canadian Coalition for Nuclear Responsibil-

### *As a feminist she abhors manipulation and oppression in all of its forms*

ity. Her activities are mostly individual however; art and writing. She has had several articles published, including "The Big Nuke Dupe" in *The Humanist in Canada*, Summer, 1988.

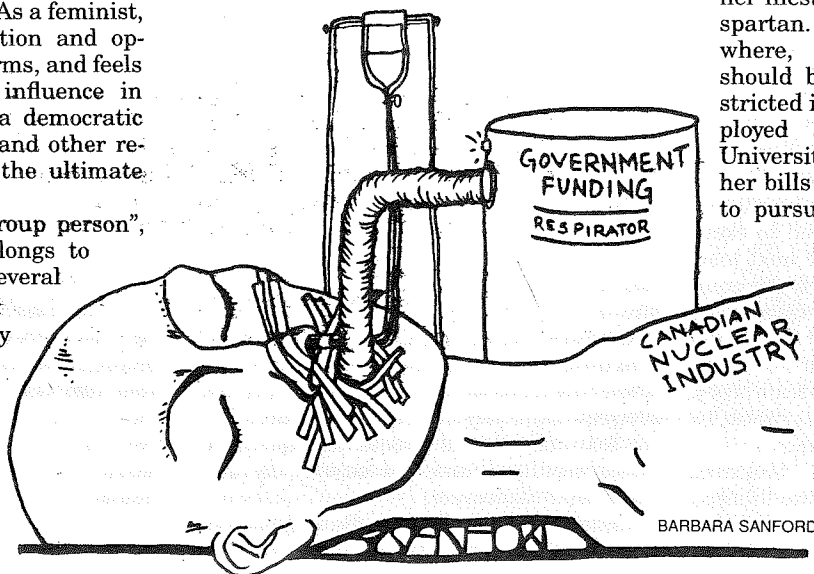
Do women have a particular sensitivity to nuclear and other environmental issues? Anne knows many passionate and enlightened women and men, and of course many of both sexes who aren't. She's not sure if women as a whole are more sensitive, but the fact is that men have been largely responsible for creating the mess, and women are waking up to the fact that if something isn't done to reverse it, we all face destruction. Women are

playing a more active and visible role in environmental issues, and can be very effective, she feels, in reversing the damage. On the down side, however, women are also portrayed in high profile roles selling the nuclear industry's propaganda in the Canadian Nuclear Association ads that Anne critiques in the accompanying article.

Hansen feels people bring a range of talents to the anti-nuclear movement, and there's much to be accomplished. People are becoming more concerned, but remain confused about what they can do. There's a real need to develop positive action, something people feel they can grasp and do.

Does Anne get discouraged? She says humour and her network of friends are important to her in not becoming overwhelmed with the enormity of it all. Among these are Mendelson Joe, a well-known and popular Toronto-based musician and painter, who helped her with the publication of her post-card art.

Anne's goals come down to a rather tame set of energy conservation measures, and learning to use technology in less destructive and more creative ways. To some of us, her lifestyle might seem somewhat spartan. She rides a bicycle everywhere, and suggests that cars should be banned, or severely restricted in the inner city. She is employed as a secretary at the University of Toronto. The job pays her bills and gives her the freedom to pursue her environmental and artistic interests, and to write. The accompanying article attests to her broad knowledge of the issues related to nuclear power, and her powerful ability to present the case for necessary and immediate reform of Canada's nuclear industry! □



# The Big Nuke Dupe

by Anne Hansen

In its current series of glossy, expensive ads in Canada's national magazines the Canadian Nuclear Association purports to perform an unprecedented public service by beginning a long term program of talking "with Canadians" about things nuclear.

## Core Issue

Part of the first ad, entitled *Core Issue Reads*: "... it's certainly no secret that we haven't gone out of our way to talk to Canadians about the benefits and concerns associated with nuclear energy. That's about to change. With this ad, we begin a long-term program of two-way communication. And we welcome your comments and opinions."

The industry, which receives mammoth handouts of our tax dollars, attempts to portray the existence of a new nuclear "glasnost" by inviting queries from the public. The impression is given that *misconceptions* about the product (in other words, the public's inability to do its own research), and not the product *per se* (or its manufacture) are to blame for nuclear energy's poor popularity rating.

But how many times has the nuclear industry demonstrated its "*what's-your-question-got-to-do-with-our-answer?*" mindset as it blithely proceeded to erect the next reactor, or shuttle the next load of tritiated heavy water through our communities? After all, public meetings were held, literature tables set up, questions permitted, and answers given — never mind that they were *unsatisfactory* answers about things that matter most to us — our health and our money!

In reality, an "educational" program like the CNA's is analogous to the tobacco lobby making pronouncements on the benefits of smoking. The CNA even refers

to *Core Issue* as an "ad", yet says "information" is forthcoming. Sales pitch plus information equals propaganda. The CNA apparently has the "McDonald's complex": They want us to think they're doing it all *for us*.

Unfortunately, they're doing it all *to us!* Aside from taking our money to tell us what they think we should hear, they've insulted our intelligence. The ad reads: "Most Canadians have an opinion on the subject of nuclear energy but most of us have little information about it," and that "Our industry shouldn't be surprised that most Canadians are not well informed...." On the contrary. The reason why we have strong opinions on nuclear energy is that we *do* know something about the issue.

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## *Canada has been called the world's "nuclear dope dealer!"*

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To begin, many Canadians are learning about a perverse, obscure federal law called the *Nuclear Liability Act*. Under this legislation, the government has agreed to let the operators of nuclear energy plants (and their parts manufacturers) off the legal hook from substantial citizen's claims should a reactor accident throw our lives and health into chaos. No insurance company will cover our homes and property from nuclear accidents: they know the risk is too high. However, the *Nuclear Liability Act* bestows upon the nuclear industry a virtual exempt-from-responsibility clause not enjoyed by any other manufacturer.

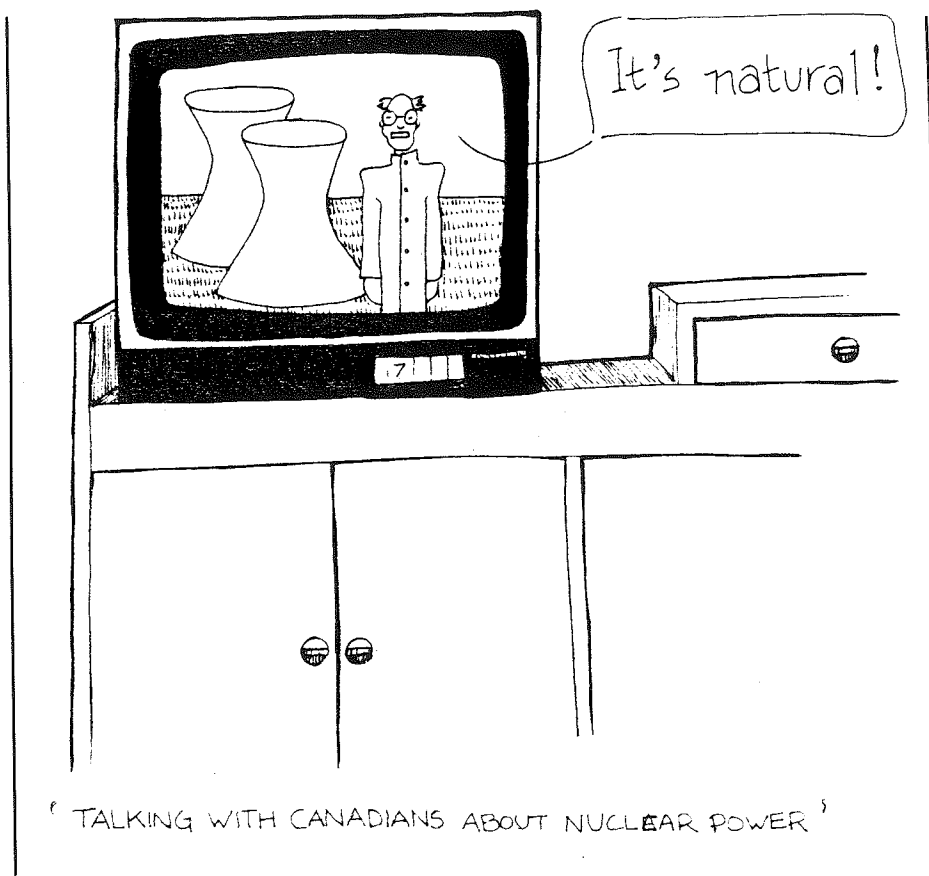
Canada is both the world's biggest producer and exporter of uranium — the es-

sential food of nuclear reactors. In fact, we've been called the world's "nuclear dope dealer"! Uranium waste poses grave danger at both ends of the nuclear fuel cycle: "For example, just mining the uranium to fuel the Darlington Nuclear Generating Station near Toronto, for one year, will leave enough poisonous mining wastes or "tailings" behind to render all the water in Lake Huron undrinkable. About every three years, Darlington will produce highly radioactive "spent" nuclear fuel poisonous enough to contaminate the water in all of the Earth's freshwater lakes."<sup>1</sup> These radioactive elements and their potential for leakage into the air and water will last for centuries — and it's accumulating daily. How much longer can we play the "plunder now, pay later" game?

In addition to the problem of uranium mining wastes, reactor sites also suffer from a disposal crises. Like all nuclear waste, there is no known *safe and permanent* method for disposal of spent fuel rods. Hundreds of thousands of these lethal casings are stored temporarily in "swimming pools" at nuclear stations. The lifespan of a reactor is limited to about thirty years. Entire nuclear reactors eventually have to be decommissioned or buried because they are lethally contaminated. Who wants one of these radioactive architectural shrines on their street? Or next to their children's school?

In their mail-out "*Nuclear Facts*" package, the CNA provides the following comforting information: "Radioactivity in the used fuel decreases with time. For instance, used fuel is 100 times less radioactive after one year and 1,000 times less radioactive after five years." One doesn't have to be a scientist to see the emptiness of a statement like this. Obviously, this claim means absolutely nothing unless





BARBARA SANFORD

we're told how radioactive the used fuel is to begin with. "I've lost 7 kilograms since I started my diet" doesn't tell you my weight.

They try to tell us not to confuse nuclear energy with nuclear war, that the only connection between the two is the word "nuclear." Just so we don't get the *good* atoms mixed up with the *bad*, the advertisement pulls out the old "peaceful atom" chestnut — designed to quell our darkest fears of nuclear war. It's common knowledge that nuclear reactors (especially our own Candus) produce expensive, highly-coveted "byproducts" (including tritium) of the kind essential to making nuclear bombs. The "peaceful atom" program has a lot in common with the nuclear bomb business: They share skills, fissionable substances, refineries, enrichment facilities, personnel and university research laboratories. To the victims offorty-five years of nuclear industry fiefdom on this planet (uranium miners, indigenous peoples, A-bomb survivors, atomic veterans and downwinders), it matters little whether their deaths and injuries are caused by "peaceful" or not-so-peaceful atoms. We're already waging nuclear war against ourselves by polluting the planet with radiation.

Has the nuclear industry appealed to

the biological community for their opinions on nuclear technology, or are they relying solely on the judgements of nuclear scientists, engineers and "health physicists", who are paid beneficiaries of the nuclear program? Author Paul McKay says the nuclear industry has "consistently downplayed and even dismissed the health dangers associated with nuclear energy, and distorted the truth by making constant but scientifically invalid comparisons with the benefits of nuclear medicine."<sup>2</sup> In their predictable ritual of persuasion, the nuclear industry too commonly falls into the apples and oranges trap: they compare the risks of nuclear energy with auto accidents, airline disasters, and smoking. However, they don't tell us that a nuclear catastrophe is singularly dangerous in that it can necessitate mass evacuation, specialized clean-up procedures, and pose serious long-term hazards. Moreover, in most cases, people smoke and travel by *choice*. We simply do not have a choice whether or not to be victims of nuclear industry carelessness.

Another mainstay of the nuclear establishment is "victim-blaming." In an article documenting an increase in illness around Chernobyl an apologist for the nuclear energy program is blaming the Chernobyl *victims* for their ills! We're told

that an unprecedented rate of illness is widespread around Chernobyl because the population has been exercising "self-restraint in their consumption of milk, fresh fruit and vegetables. Thus their bodies are being deprived of irreplaceable nutritional components, weakening resistance to illness."<sup>3</sup>

In the nuclear age, it seems the truth becomes a lie and the lie becomes the truth. What is the nuclear industry's fault is now the victim's fault. When we get sick we're to blame for avoiding the foods they've contaminated. On the Canadian front, when asked to improve their safety standards, a nuclear industry spokesman is reported to have implied that added safety features can help cause accidents.<sup>4</sup> An odious facade of safety is portrayed when nuclear advertisers substitute the terms "health effects" for cancer and leukemia, "dose receptors" for human radiation victims, "recommended dose" for acceptable dose (as if it's vitamins!) and "rapid disengagement" for explosion.<sup>5</sup>

Our elected representative misleadingly refers to the "nuclear energy option", when in truth nuclear energy use has never been an "option" (choice) for the public to make. The Atomic Energy Control Board (AECB) has never held a licensing or rule-making hearing in public.<sup>6</sup> At the Canadian Nuclear Association annual conference in Toronto (1973), an AECL spokesman is reported to have said. "An adversary process as practiced in the U.S. licensing system cannot succeed in Canada and must be avoided if the Canadian nuclear industry is to succeed."<sup>7</sup>

In fact, the use of nuclear technology and the inherent waste it creates has caused many governments to call upon armed guards to enforce energy policy against peacefully assembled, unarmed, protesting citizens. Anti-nuclear scientists have been barred from giving testimony at civil disobedience trials of U.S. nuclear power plant opponents. Citizens' vision of fission clearly conflicts with that of the nuclear peddlers.<sup>8</sup> Let us also note the conspicuous absence of pro-nuclear citizens' advocacy groups (aside from the odd groups of people living off the avails of the nuclear industry). Why do world centres of intellectual enlightenment not draw thousands to the streets in support of new nuclear projects?

The core issue really is not "trust" as the CNA ad suggests. The core issue is for rational people to make sense out of Canada's commitment to self-destructive energy policies! Many countries (Sweden, China, USA, Austria, Yugoslavia, Holland) have cancelled orders for reactors or stopped building them.<sup>9</sup> Yet our elected representatives are still anesthetized by hollow nuclear industry safety assurances, and are still allowing more nuclear

reactors to be built! Ontario Premier Peterson was one of the Darlington nuclear project's harshest critics when in Opposition. Now he has given the green light to Darlington and the appearance of an amber light to even a Darlington II!

### Vital Signs

Before entrusting our health to the nuclear business however, it is important to remember that while nuclear medicine may save lives — nuclear power, food irradiation and radioactive dumps do not. The ad says, "... few people realize that what we call 'radioactivity' is itself only natural." Just because it's natural doesn't mean it's good for us. Arsenic, cyanide and certain mushroom species are also "natural" — but deadly. In presenting this "whole earth" picture of natural radiation as benign as granny's kitchen compost, the ad fails to acknowledge a host of unnatural products created by nuclear manufacturers. Plutonium, for example, is a deadly radioactive element existing nowhere in nature. It takes an eternity to lose half of its radioactivity (24,000 years), and there is no safe and permanent method for storage or destruction of this (or any other) killer radioactive waste. (After 24,000 years, what are we supposed to do with the other half?). Plutonium is a byproduct of nuclear power manufacture, and is also an ingredient used in nuclear bombs — two things many people feel we could use less of — unless, of course, you're in the business of making or selling nuclear materials.

We're told that nuclear medicine has "already eliminated the need for a good deal of disruptive and occasionally hazardous exploratory surgery." Does this blanket assertion take into account all the possible human diseases created by disruptive and hazardous levels of man-made background radiation — from uranium mining, bomb tests, power plant emissions, and medical wastes? Why are the side-effects and long-term consequences of nuclear medical procedures not mentioned?

Nuclear waste is nuclear waste. "Medical" atoms are no more friendly than the other "peaceful" atoms that all too often manage to find their way into our drinking water and onto our children's dinner plates. In the fall of 1987 the world witnessed yet another act of nuclear sloppiness when, in Brazil, lethal cesium-137 powder from an abandoned hospital radiotherapy machine was accidentally spread around.

This nuclear industry self-congratulatory pitch about concern for public health is a bitter pill for this taxpayer to swallow. The nuclear industry is clearly more con-

cerned with their own health than they are with ours — otherwise why would they have to advertise their product as if it were cigarettes or aspirin?

### "Making the Grade"

The next ad, entitled "Making the Grade," tells of 38 million taxpayer dollars spent on a training school for nuclear reactor operators at Pickering. The advertisement says: "At first glance, it looks like any other Canadian college. Lecture theatres, workshops, classrooms, labs. But take a closer look and you'll find these students focusing their energies on just one subject."

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## *The "peaceful atom" program has a lot in common with the nuclear bomb business*

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Unfortunately, in focusing too much on their favourite subject — making nuclear energy — the nuclear industry seems to have let their grades fall way behind in other subjects — namely nuclear waste disposal. This crisis is widely acknowledged in the recent all-party Commons Committee Report, entitled *High Level Radioactive Waste in Canada: The Eleventh Hour*. Recommendation 15 of the Report reads: "A moratorium on the construction of nuclear power plants in Canada should be imposed until the people of Canada have agreed on an acceptable solution for the disposal of high-level radioactive waste."

Quite clearly, one wouldn't embark on a skydiving endeavour with the expectation of inventing a parachute on the way down. Yet this is how we seem to have (mis) managed our nuclear fuel cycle program. Similarly, we wouldn't give adult responsibilities (like operating nuclear reactors) to those who aren't yet toilet trained — and toilet training means the ability to control one's waste. The nuclear establishment seems to be spending a lot of our dollars making grand promises of a forthcoming miracle for the safe disposal of nuclear waste, yet no solution seems to be visible on the horizon. Although excavation is being undertaken by Atomic Energy of Canada Limited at the Whiteshell Underground Research Laboratory in Manitoba, a member of a citizens' group is quoted thus in *The Eleventh Hour*: "The presence of the Lac du

Bonnet hole proves only one thing: that AECL is capable of creating a hole in the rock."

The CNA ad concludes by saying that "our operators preform under a self-imposed code of ethics that stresses constant improvements and concern for safety." Unfortunately, the ethics of the technological elite are not always consistent with people's ethics. For example, Swedes voted in a 1980 referendum to scrap all 12 reactors at Sweden's four nuclear power plants by the year 2010. The first of these will be decommissioned by 1996, and the second the following year. At the Canadian Nuclear Association annual meeting (in Saint John, New Brunswick;

1987), Decima Research Limited reported the following: "9 out of 10 Ontario residents are concerned about suffering a nuclear power disaster — Nearly 7 out of 10 believe Canada is likely to suffer a similar disaster to the deadly Chernobyl accident — 94 per cent are concerned about whether nuclear waste can be safely disposed, with 90 per cent viewing disposal as the biggest problem with nuclear power."<sup>10</sup>

The nuclear industry tries to tell us that Canadians want more information on nuclear energy. That doesn't mean we want more nuclear industry advertising — or more nuclear energy. When countries all over the world are abandoning nuclear power, it is time that members of our own federal government wake up to the dangers inherent in the nuclear fuel cycle — from the mining of uranium to the isolation of spent reactor fuel.

Taxpaying Canadians are usually interested in knowing if their dollars are spent sensibly. Ontario Hydro (or "Ontario Nuclear", as it should be named) shoulders a debt of \$23 billion.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, scientists attempting to develop safe energy sources are left out in the cold — not because their ideas are impractical — but because the big nuclear machine has gobbled all the funds. Our funds. One sensible alternative is the sun. It provides power for free. And when the sun doesn't shine, the winds blow and rivers flow. Have any studies linked hydroelectric or wind power to birth defects, thyroid disor-

ders, pneumonia, cancer, leukemia, or spontaneous abortions? More importantly, if we had less energy to use, we might learn to get along with less. Who could say that's bad — other than our energy suppliers? With financial encouragement, our industries can make gadgets and buildings that use energy efficiently.

I strongly believe it is the responsibility of the public to educate its leaders (and "misleaders") on matters pertaining to our nuclear future (or "non-future" as it might well be!). Otherwise, we are passive participants in our own suicide. After too many Windscales, Chalk Rivers, Three Miles Islands, Chernobyls and McClure Crescents under their belt, the nuclear industry desperately seeks artificial respiration to stay alive. Canadians cannot afford to buy their line (even though we paid for it!), which is in every sense of the word "artificial!" We must speak loudly against our part in poisoning the planet with all manner of products promoted by our nuclear business. Every taxpaying Canadian is a shareholder in this industry.

The publishers of these ads should strongly reconsider the implications of their role in pushing the nuclear habit. Based on a demonstrated record of fiscal mismanagement and flagrant disregard for public safety, this industry quite realistically threatens to destroy life on earth. Surely greater responsibility is to be expected from Canada's national news media. Selling our nuclear mess just isn't smart business — for Maclean's, the Globe & Mail, Time, Saturday Night or anyone else. □

## Report from

# WOMEN PLAN TORONTO

December marks the end of **Women Plan Toronto's** municipal election project aimed at raising awareness about issues of concern to women in Metropolitan Toronto. Despite fierce competition for media attention and public interest due to the federal election campaign which took place during the same period, we feel we achieved what we set out to do.

Our election issues booklet, *Do You Know?*, collectively written by WPT volunteers in consultation with community resource people, looks at current municipal issues — affordable housing, transportation, community planning and economic development, safety, children's issues, and education. It poses questions such as *Will you vote to overturn any municipal by-law that discriminates against low and moderate income not-for-profit housing?* and *Would you initiate a motion to have at least one staff person within the planning department of your city consider planning documents and proposals from the perspective of women, to reflect women's concerns about urban design, safety, and accessibility?* The questions were used by women to address candidates at all-candidates meetings and during door-to-door canvassing.

Questionnaires to record candidates' attitudes used the questions contained in the booklet. A team of fifty volunteer "ward-watchers" living in wards all across Metro Toronto agreed to approach the candidates in their ward on behalf of WPT. For wards with "ward-watchers" we sent questionnaires to the candidates directly from our office. We estimate that questionnaires and copies of the booklet were sent to 60 percent of the 470 or so candidates in metro seeking office as metro or city councillor or public school trustee. We received responses from 40 percent of the candidates running for office. A higher response rate might have been achieved if the local city clerk's department had been more helpful in providing our "ward-watchers" with accurate, complete lists of the addresses and phone numbers of individuals seeking election. The short space of time between the final date for nomination and the election day meant that in many cases questionnaires could not be mailed, and had to be hand delivered if they were to be included in the results released at a press conference one week before the election. The public interest generated from the press conference had to be handled by volunteers over the phone.

Candidates and incumbents were graded on their performance and/or potential for the future in terms of supporting issues of concern to women once in office. We relied heavily on voting records, public statements, and issues highlighted in campaign literature, which were then compared to the responses given on the questionnaire. We expect that our evaluation of candidates and the recorded information on the questionnaires will be used by community groups in the coming three years to hold their politicians accountable for their election promises. WPT will be looking at ways to effectively monitor city politicians and to respond to policy and planning initiatives in all municipalities across Metro Toronto.

Our monthly election newsletter kept the 400 local community groups and interested individuals on our mailing list informed about WPT activities.

Our series of election workshops provided an opportunity to meet informally with widely-varying women's groups.

To increase female (and all) voter participation, we concluded that there is a strong need for a publicly funded program to explain the workings of municipal government to voters, especially those for whom English is a second language. □

**Debbie Hierlihy**

1 Quote from "Background Information on Nuclear Power, Ontario, and Darlington," N. Rubin, Energy Probe, Toronto 1986.

2 Quote from "Electric Empire: The Inside Story of Ontario Hydro," p. 87, in *Between the Lines*, Ontario Public Interest Research Group, Toronto, 1983.

3 *Globe and Mail*, Toronto, September 15, 1987, p. A7.

4 *Ibid.* August 20, 1987, p. A14

5 For a full list of euphemisms used in "nuclear mythology," see *Nuclear Energy: The Unforgiving Technology*, Fred H. Knelman, Hurtig Publishers, Edmonton, 1976, p. 87.

6 *Toronto Star*, May 15, 1986, p. A21.

7 Fred H. Knelman, *op. cit.*, p. 110

8 *Energy War*, Harvey Wasserman, Lawrence Hill & Co., Westport, Conn., 1979.

9 *No Immediate Danger?: Prognosis for a Radioactive Earth*, Rosalie Bertel, The Women's Press, Toronto, 1985.

10 *Toronto Star*, July 16, 1986.

11 *Globe and Mail*, November 25, 1987, p. A21.

12 *Toronto Star*, June 16, 1987, p. A21.

13 *Toronto Star*, April 20, 1988, p. A21.

# International Women's Day in Perspective

by Sylvia Gold

An apt French expression reminds us of our mortality and a certain reality: "Plus ça change, plus ça reste la même chose." The more things change, the more they stay the same. As a counterpoint to this down-to-earth commentary, one is reminded that "You can't go home again," that although events seem to repeat themselves, they never do so in quite the same way, with quite the same effect, being shaped by time and circumstance.

So it is with ideas, the most powerful of influences on our lives. Were we able to hear the voices of women through history and across cultures, we would hear their ideas about family, work, caring, appreciation for one's efforts, respect and dignity. In this century we have named some of these issues — equal pay for work of equal value, employment equity, maternity and parental leave, opportunity costs, child care, occupational health and safety and anti-discrimination legislation.

Every March 8, International Women's Day (IWD), events around the world continue to express women's concerns and name the issues. It is instructive to reach back to the beginnings of IWD and recapture the ferment of those days, heady indeed as women, first in the United States and then in Canada, Germany, Sweden, France and Russia, spoke out and joined together, advancing the issues and bringing them out for open discussion.

A fascinating history of IWD by Renée Coté<sup>1</sup> makes the point; IWD was instituted at the second International Conference of Socialist Women in Copenhagen in 1910, following successful American Women's Day celebrations in 1909 and 1910. The IWD goal was to stimulate the participation of socialists in the struggle for the right to vote for women.

Gertrude Breslau-Hunt denounced the

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## *Women's greatest challenge is to find ways of consolidating the many common interests we have*

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exploitation of women workers who were underpaid, did not have the right to vote, and were denied the most basic rights. The date of her speech was May 3, 1908; the place, Chicago. The first official Women's Day was February 28, 1909.

In that first decade of the twentieth century, two major currents of thought emerged. One, utopian Christian cooperative socialism, which favoured an autonomous women's movement; the other, scientific marxist socialism, which found the former too conservative and believed in class struggle (women and men of the working class struggling together) rather than fighting between the sexes. The two currents of thought persisted.

On February 27 1910, Women's Day was celebrated from coast to coast in the US. Women spoke of economic and political equality, the vote, and the deplorable working conditions of women. Carrie Allen spoke of the slavery of women in factories and of women closed up in their kitchens. The strike of shirtwaist makers, from November 22 1909 to February 15 1910, involving 20,000 to 30,000 workers, 80 per cent of them women, had just ended.

It was the first massive strike by women against intolerable working conditions, and was accompanied by massive arrests and police brutality. It was not to be the last women's strike on the North American continent.

Another notable conflict developed, between those who argued for the vote for women and those who were working for improvements in the paid workforce and were unwilling to contribute their energies to women's suffrage. Emma Goldman maintained that all political regimes of her time were absurd and unresponsive to life's urgent problems, and she criticized middle class American women who saw themselves as equals of men and even superior to men in their qualities and virtues, and scoffed at these women who expected the vote to bring miracles.<sup>2</sup>

Elizabeth Gurley-Flynn of the Industrial Workers of the World said that the suffrage movement did not concern the working class. She saw the fight for women's rights as a class issue and saw no common interests among all women, no "war of the sexes, and no natural solidarity among women only."<sup>3</sup> The divisions between the women who wanted to speak of socialist goals and the women fighting essentially for the vote were clear.

The American Socialist Party recommended in July 1910 to the International Conference of Socialist Women that the last Sunday in February be International Women's Day. Women's suffrage emerged as the major theme of subsequent Women's Days.<sup>4</sup>

In parallel, women from Canada, Germany, Sweden, France and Russia were celebrating — or at least holding events — on International Women's Day.

Ethel Whitehead, speaking in the US in 1910, made these points:

- More and more women are being forced

# ALTERNATIVES

PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIETY, TECHNOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

- to work in industries;
- They have struggled with men, but they have another battle, the "handicap of their sex." With rare exceptions they are paid less than men;
- Women's sex becomes a commodity and maternity, which should be her greatest joy, the consecration of her femininity, becomes a malediction.

There, my friends, is the fight for women's rights circa 1910. Where did we go from there?

What is most provocative about the events of the first International Women's Days is that they were born out of women's articulation of women's experiences and women's aspirations.

Women have expanded the early IWD focus but have not given up the core concerns — working conditions in the home and the workplace, the reconciliation of responsibility for others with a sense of self, and the most perplexing of challenges, building support networks to achieve results. Women's greatest challenge is to find ways of consolidating the many common interests we have, and negotiating, wherever possible, with others. □

1 Renée Côté, *La Journée internationale des femmes*. Montréal: Les Editions du remue-ménage, 1986.

2 Emma Goldman, "Women Suffrage," in *Anarchism and Other Essays*, Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1969, p. 204.

3 Côté, *op cit.* p. 122.

4 *Ibid.*, pp. 128-143.

*Sylvia Gold is President of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women. Her article is a shorter version of a presentation made in February 1988 at the McGill University Conference on Women, Work and Place. Papers from the conference are to be published in a forthcoming book edited by Audrey Kobayashi.*

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The following two articles have come to us from very different sources, but have a common theme — the changing environment for women in India. As a country it epitomizes for many of us the constraints that a very traditional culture has on women. Relentless modernization and development, spilling over from the western world, and the need for new survival responses to that so-called 'progress' has meant some very significant changes for

women in this ancient mix of traditions and cultures. In one instance, urbanization and constraints on space have broken down taboos and physical barriers that kept women virtually invisible. In another, women's traditional responsibility of providing the necessities of life for their families has become a problem-solving model, a political force to be reckoned with, and an economic enterprise that commands respect.

# Surviving with SEWA in Western India

by Tracey Heffernand

India is experiencing one of the worst droughts of the century, with 15 out of 18 districts drought-stricken. Gujarat is one of the hardest hit states. Over 50 percent of the cattle — the main source of livelihood for Gujarati peasants — have already died. By June 1988 75 percent will have perished — and if the rains do not come again...

While no one seems untouched by the water shortage problems, there is no question that it is the poor in the rural area, and especially the women, who are the most drastically affected. In Gujarat, as in many parts of the Third World, it is the women who are primarily responsible for water collection.

Pratibha is a volunteer community health worker in a village south of Ahmedabad, one of Gujarat's major cities. We arrived in her village in the early afternoon to find her sleeping in her house. She explained that she had just returned from fetching water; while before the drought she may have spent two to three hours at this task now, due to the need to walk long distances to a water source, she may spend up to ten. As a result, Pratibha can no longer do any community health work: she barely has time to devote to her children, her small green, and her other domestic responsibilities. For Pratibha, the drought has meant an increase in malnourishment, disease and poverty, in her village, and in her family.

But in the midst of this drought, desertification and death, the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) has begun to organize women. Based in Ahmedabad, SEWA was started by Ela Bhatt, former head of the Women's Wing of the Textile Labour Association. In 1972, confronted by a group of women working in the informal sector (self-employed) demanding higher wages and asking her for help, Ela

queried: "How can you have a labour movement in a country where 89 percent of the total workforce is outside of the labour movement, outside of the economy, and just lumped together as unorganized labour?" And then she took a radical and unprecedented step and the Self-Employed Women's Association was born.

Initially, SEWA organized women around the issue of lack of access to credit for women and, encouraged by the members, a bank for poor women was established in 1974. Daycare centres, literacy programs, and co-operatives followed. The bank now has 10,000 members; SEWA has some 25,000 members.

Efforts to organize women in the rural

harvesting, and the creation of employment for women through cottage industry co-operatives. It also includes wasteland development, an innovative program under which women form a co-operative and then apply for permission from the government to develop barren or unproductive publicly owned land. When the property titles are registered, the women reforest the area and plant food crops. Since water shortage remains a major problem, SEWA has been promoting the desalination of sea water for use in irrigation. The government has been hesitant to pursue this "expensive" option. Says Anila, "Expensive? No doubt. But how does that compare with the loss of human

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*"How can you have a labour movement in a country where 89 percent of the total workforce is outside of the labour movement?"*

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areas are more recent and much of the mobilization has focused on the issue of drought. According to Anila Dholakia, the Director of SEWA's rural wing, the drought is the result of deforestation caused by overgrazing, the use of wood for fuel, and extensive logging. Big landowners have put increasing amounts of hectareage under cultivation in order to take advantage of the income generated by cash crops such as tobacco and peanuts. Now everyone is paying the price. In Anila's words, the effect of the drought has been "to push the rich into the middle class, the middle class into poverty, and the poor, well, there are no words to describe it."

SEWA's drought management program includes forestry programs, rainwater

life?"

In the heat and dust of Ahmedabad, where even a major river has been reduced to a trickle of water, SEWA's efforts to alleviate the effects of the drought for rural poor women seem long and hard and, at times, even fruitless. But the women of SEWA continue to "keep on keeping on." States Anila, "Women give us life. So why not entrust the task to women to enrich our planet with water." □

*Tracey Heffernand has worked in the Philippines with SAMAKAWA, an urban poor women's organization. She is currently working at MATCH International as a program officer.*

# Women's Local Space: Home and Neighbourhood in Northern India

by Amita Sinha

**B**oth Hindu and Muslim communities are segregated along gender lines in Northern India. In traditional village households this social duality is reflected in space while spatial organization in turn reinforces this duality. When a new spatial layout of the home and community is introduced, such as in a planned housing project, traditional gender segregation becomes difficult to maintain. Together with changes in social and economic structure this causes a breakdown in gender barriers. The restructuring of gender roles in the direction of greater equality contributes to the process of social change.

To explore this effect of space on traditional behavioural norms, I interviewed 50 households in each of two settings in Northern India — the Islamic village of Ujariyon, on the outskirts of Lucknow, and a housing complex of largely Hindu households in the city itself.

In rural Northern India, society is conceived as being divided into kin (which encompasses most of the villagers) and non-kin who are hostile outsiders. A protective attitude towards women entails a restriction on their contacts with the dangerous world outside the kin-circle. Violation of women (impudent gazing may be considered as symbolic violation) brings dishonour upon her family, therefore it is imperative that women should not even be in the presence of unrelated men; if they happen to be, then they should veil themselves. *Purdah* refers to physical segregation of living space, as well as the covering of body and face.

The social interaction between the sexes in an Islamic setting are governed by rulings derived from the *Quran* and the *Hadis* (sayings of Prophet Mohammad). Those men and women, whose kinship as defined by jurists, does not allow them to marry, are permitted to be on familiar terms with each other and may live in the same house. Those whose relationship is otherwise, have to avoid each other's company and the women should practice *purdah*. These social norms, based on Islamic rulings, have been adopted by the Hindu society in Northern India.



Indian women in rooftop courtyard

A. SINHA

*Purdah* also includes a set of norms which govern the behaviour of women in the presence of males within the home and outside in public areas. The concept also governs the proper behaviour towards both male and female elders, which should be respectful of their superior status. Thus a daughter-in-law will cover her head even in the presence of her mother-in-law and an adolescent daughter will assume a respectful posture when her

father arrives. The forms of *purdah* extend to the tone and pitch of voice used, "awaz ka *purdah*" and the practice of eye-avoidance, "nazr ka *purdah*."<sup>1</sup>

The above set of norms are internalized by the growing girl so that even though *purdah* may not be practised as such, her behaviour in the presence of older kinsmen, distant relatives and total strangers is marked by self-consciousness and inhibition. This behaviour is characterized as

being modest and as part of feminine identity.<sup>2</sup> A woman who does not subscribe to it is considered "be-sharam" (without shame) and disrespectful.

The rural dwelling is seen as being divided into "mardana" (male) and "zenana" (female) territories, with control by the respective sex group, occupying the front (close to the street) and back of the house respectively. Women carry out all their activities in the interior rooms, *dalan* (semi-open space like a verandah between the rooms and the courtyard) and *aagan* (courtyard). The roof is another open area besides the courtyard, which is used by women freely. Houses have either a ladder or steep, narrow staircases leading from the courtyard to the roof. Men spend most of their time in *baithak* (room in the front of the dwelling close to the street) and *sahan* (transitional open space between the house and the street). They come in the courtyard and *dalan* only for specific purposes. On entering the female quarters men announce their arrival by clearing their throats or calling out so that women may assume respectful poses, keep their faces turned or covered. Men are aware of being in the female territory and heap ridicule upon those who spend too much time there.

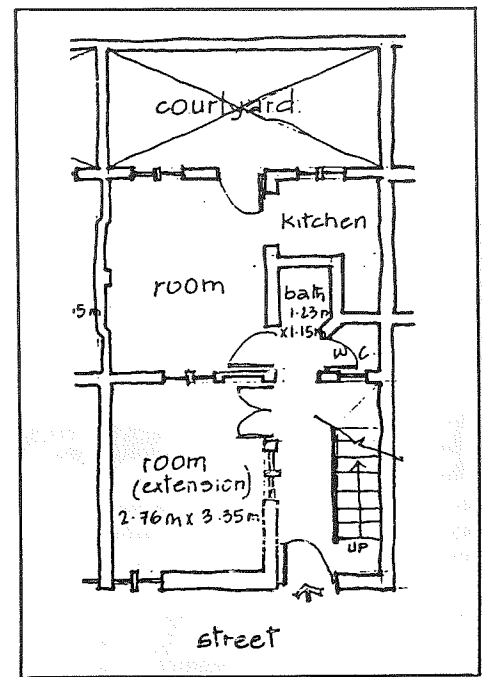
Usually the differentiation into male and female areas is achieved by the spatial arrangement of rooms and open spaces. Sometimes a symbolic dividing line is achieved by stringing a curtain across the *baithak*. Women sleep in the interior room, or, in the hot season they may sleep in the *dalan* or the courtyard. Men sleep in their own quarters, moving in summer from the house to the street.

Most rural families are extended, with

space. The mother-in-law (in Rayapur, an "urbanized" village in the outskirts of Delhi), does the outside work while the daughter-in-law takes care of the work inside the house.<sup>3</sup> Outside work includes shopping for provisions and vegetables, and doing other errands involving contacts with tradesmen and other artisan specialists. Thus the appearance of the young daughter-in-law in public or her contact with outside men is minimized. Women who live with their mothers-in-law do not normally attend the neighbourhood women's gatherings for marriage or other ceremonial events. Households are almost always represented by older women.

Women work as seamstresses at home in Ujariyon, doing embroidery on different items of clothing. The work is obtained from the inner-city area of Lucknow where there is a wholesale production of embroidered clothing. The women workers only contribute their labour and have no control over obtaining the order of work or its sale. They have no means of advertising their services and work entirely on the basis of personal recommendation. They also require a male intermediary to sell the products of their labour. The home location of work allows the women to remain secluded in their house and the village.<sup>4</sup> Living within the extended family makes it possible for some women to do this kind of work while the other women do the household chores.

The women visit frequently during daytime among their close kin circle, meeting in the inner courtyards of each others houses. These female networks represent a source of information regarding arranging marriage matches, assessment of the



Plan of a dwelling in the housing project

roofs are connected by small doors (about four feet high) set in the dividing boundary walls. In one neighbourhood, about ten houses were connected in this way, so that women never had to use the street.

Within the village, the free and uninhibited use of space shifts diurnally. During daytime, when the men are outside the village working, women do not cover themselves while going to neighbours' houses. After dark, when men meet in each other's houses to discuss and decide village affairs, the women stay indoors and do not venture outside, except on emergencies. Thus after dark, all open spaces become the male arena. The network of alleys winding between houses are felt to be less public and women can be seen in them during daytime.

The daily life of the women in the village centres around the home. They may visit other relatives in the village but they are not to be seen in areas such as the bazaar, or the mosques. In Islam, women are exempted from participation in public religious activities around which the social life of the village centres. While men pray in a congregation in the mosque, a woman normally prays alone at home. Practising Muslims would consider their prayers nullified if they looked at a "na-Mahram" person (with whom marriage is permitted) while praying, since looking might arouse sexual desire causing them to repeat their prayers. The belief in

### *The division of the village dwelling into male-female areas cannot be maintained in an urban housing colony*

a generational division in the tasks performed. It is felt that the older women should now rest after being engaged in household tasks all their life and the work should be taken over by younger women, especially the daughter-in-law. The older women, however still retain control over household affairs in decision-making, except when there are young children in the family. A new mother is freed of other tasks to care only for her child. As the child grows older, the grandmother may take a major share in looking after him or her, particularly if the mother has a new baby.

The division of labour among women has consequences in the way women use

family wealth, and keeping track of relatives — information which has considerable impact on decisions made by men and social relations among them.<sup>5</sup>

In rural areas and in traditional caste neighbourhoods in the inner city in Northern India, public areas are defined by the absence of women. The house and neighbourhood form has evolved in response to the need for purdah. Since adjacent houses belong to brothers cousins or uncles and nephews, they are connected by a door in the courtyard providing a private means of access to women. In the older houses found in inner-city areas of Lucknow (associated with a traditional lifestyle similar to that in the village),



menstrual and post-partum pollution also means that women cannot visit the shrines at such times. Menstruating-women may not pray and Maudidi suggests that this is one reason why women should not pray in public in a mosque, since their periodic absences would draw attention to their condition.<sup>7</sup>

The women are not present in any non-religious public gatherings such as sports contests. As a young woman explained to me:

"We cannot go to the sports event (being held in an open space near the bazaar) because all the elderly men of the village will be present on such an occasion."

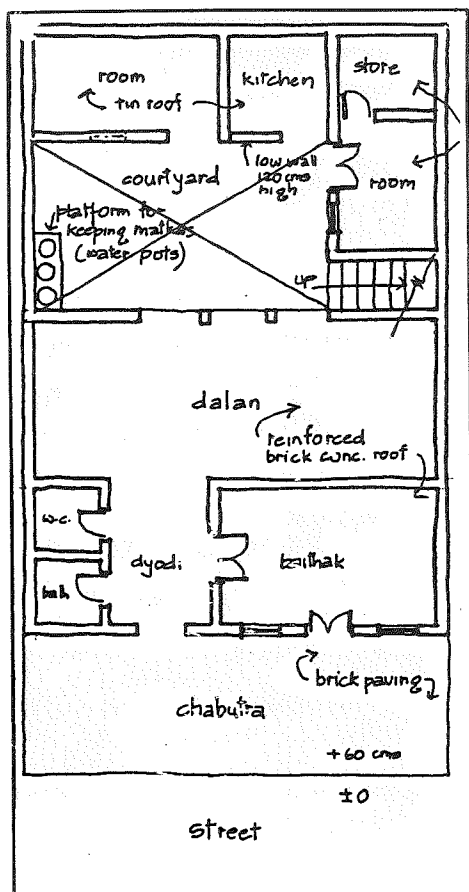
Public events may be attended by women if there is a provision for separate or enclosed spaces. Men and women may also attend public events on different days or on different times of the day. An example is women who visit *Dargah Sharif* (a mausoleum attached to a mosque) on Thursday nights (*Jumarat*) for prayers and for *mannat* (distribution of sweets if a wish has been granted).

Women experience social space as divided into zones of differential danger or risk.<sup>8</sup> At the centre of her social world is her courtyard which can be considered to be her domain. Beyond that are other parts of the house, the village alleyways, fields, the bazaar and *Ganjshahida* (graveyard in the south outside the village), in which she moves with increasing hesitancy. The predominant fear in *Ganjshahida* is that of evil spirits and ghosts to which pregnant women, new brides or any beautiful woman are prey in the dark or at noon.<sup>9</sup> The bazaar is another area, in which no respectable woman will be found lingering since it is perceived as a place where young men hang out, calling out comments, and following women.

### Public areas are defined by the absence of women

Sharma writes about the code of public behaviour which applies to all women in Harbasi (a village in Hoshiarpur district in Punjab), and Ghanyari and Chaile (villages in Himachal Pradesh):

They may not linger unnecessarily in the streets. They might not, for instance, stop to take tea or chat at the eating houses in the bazaar unless accompanied by a male relative. Nor might they raise their voices in laughter or anger as they might in their own courtyards or alleyways or attract attention to themselves in any way



Plan of a courtyard dwelling.

... the women experienced a sense of unease in public places which was sufficient to inhibit their behaviour. The sense of "being out of place" in the main street or the bazaar is enough to ensure that women go about their business discreetly and then return home briskly when it is done. Their appearance in public is conditional — upon discreet behaviour and having some specific business. They cannot use the public space in the casual manner permitted to men.<sup>10</sup>

Women are allowed use of public areas if they observe purdah, which makes them "invisible." Among the Pirzada women (a Muslim community living near Delhi), going out is a traumatic experience, so much so that many of the older women said that they rarely go out at all. They do not possess the elementary skills in negotiating road traffic. Since they have always been accompanied by a man or a boy from their families, finding their way is difficult. Wearing a *burqa* also hampers movement and may cause the woman to be very uncomfortable during the hot summer months. The women described themselves as "*kue ka mendek*," a frog-in-a-well, as people with intellectual and

physical horizons limited to the tiny patch of sky directly above their heads.<sup>11</sup>

The change from a rural society to an urban one in which caste and kinship plays a less significant role and nuclear families predominate, acts in concert with different building forms in affecting women's observance of purdah and their use of public and private areas. The spatial configuration of urban houses and their smaller size together with changing relationships in the nuclear family structure, have influence on women's use of space. Though a semblance of a courtyard is maintained in the new housing, it is too small for socializing, so many women use the front step to sit and talk or sometimes take out a *charpoy* (string cot), thus adding vitality to the street life. The division of the village dwelling into male-female areas cannot be maintained in an urban housing colony. Purdah, for example, is not as consistently practised in nuclear households in the city.

A complete breakdown in gender segregation does not, however, occur in the city. The persistence of traditions does not allow the intermingling of sexes. The woman is still inhibited in the presence of elderly kinsfolk and male outsiders. In-laws in the house cause the woman to adopt a different standard of behaviour. She has to cover her head and stay indoors so that proper decorum can be maintained. The housewives complained of visits by relatives, especially in one-roomed households. Sometimes neighbours help out by loaning a room for the duration of the visit. Women do not use the front room (which was always seen as the *baithak* — room meant for visitors, whenever it was built) when male visitors are present, or when the father-in-law resides there. The housewife rarely joins her husband in entertaining his male friends; usually she prepares refreshments and sends them by child.

Although men and women may participate in the same neighbourhood events, they do so separately. Sitting areas are separate on religious and ceremonial occasions. The women talk to their neighbours on the street or visit them during the day, while the men use the street to talk in the evenings.<sup>12</sup> Women's social world is confined to the neighbourhood, while the men, due to their work in the city, have a greater choice in selection of friends. The woman's role in maintaining neighbourhood life is more important than the man's, since he is away for most of the day.

A nuclear family in an urban area brings greater mobility to the women. Free from the constraints of observing purdah in a traditional household, the woman ventures into the public areas of the neighbourhood. She may go to the

local bazaar to buy daily provisions, and pick up her children from the school nearby. The expansion of the woman's social space also changes her attitude towards the house. It is no longer just a container of the family but also a symbol of social mobility. Socioeconomic mobility is symbolized by the acquisition of household gadgets which enable the housewife to compete with her neighbours.<sup>13</sup> As one of my informants said: "I don't like this colony. The other women are always showing off... They talk about their husband's position and the things they have such as

### *A woman's social world is confined to the neighbourhood*

a TV and scooter. There is a lot of jealousy here on account of that."

The nuclear household also means that the woman is more isolated, particularly if her natal family resides in some other city or village. A greater proportion of her time is taken up in looking after her husband and children, her immediate family. Her tasks are not shared by the mother- or sisters-in-law. A housewife from a rural background says: "My father and brothers do not care to know how I am now that I live in the city. I have to run a shop (in the front part of the house) to make ends meet."

Of course, other factors and influences are affecting changes in family patterns, and contributing to new attitudes to women's status at home and in public. Women's activities in the city extend more readily, of necessity, beyond the confines of their smaller households. This opens up opportunities such as employment in the outside world, makes them less the invisible daughters-in-law, and more the visible wife and mother, with a decision-making role in the family and community. □



The courtyard of Northern Indian dwellings is traditionally women's territory

A SINHA

1 Jeffrey, Patricia. *Frogs in a Well — Indian Women in Purdah*. London: Zed Press, 1979.

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3 Vatuk, Sylvia, "The Aging Woman in India: Self Perceptions and Changing Roles" in Alfred De Souza (ed.) *Women in Contemporary India and South Asia*. New Delhi: Manohar, 1980.

4 Bardhan, Kalpana, "Women's Work and Lives in Some Southern and Southeast Asian Countries: In Relation to Family Strategies in Various Micro Contexts," Tokyo: United Nations University, 1987.

5 Das, Veena, "Indian Women: Work, Power and Status" in B.R. Nanda (ed.) *Indian Women: From Purdah to Modernity*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1976.

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10 *Ibid*.

11 Jeffrey, *op. cit.*

12 Vatuk, Sylvia. *Kinship and Urbanization — White Collar Migrants in Northern India*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972.

13 Bardhan, *op. cit.*

*Amita Sinha is a PhD candidate in the Department of Architecture, University of California, Berkeley. This article is based on ethnographic research carried out in 1987 in India as part of dissertation work. Her research interests include social and cultural issues in architecture and urban design in developing countries.*

# Sitka Housing Co-operative: Women House Themselves

by Hinda Avery

**T**he Sitka spruce withstands winds better than other evergreens and is the first to grow closest to the water's brink, often on the edge of a forest. Sitka is also a reminder of a group of striking saw-mill women who milled the Sitka tree. The name Sitka is an appropriate choice for the Sitka Housing Co-operative, in Vancouver, British Columbia, which is owned and occupied by 42 women.

The Sitka co-op is a dream come true. Twenty women who realized they could never afford their own homes met in August, 1981 to start an all-women's co-op. Their task was not an easy one, and needed persistent lobbying. Linda Baker, their architect, had to fight Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) through the entire design process because the standards set by the Corporation, the funder, were different from those of the women. After five years of concerted effort, Sitka Housing Co-operative was finally completed.

Sitka is striking in many ways. It is particularly attractive. It fits into and complements the surrounding neighbourhood. The buildings themselves are formed around an around an inner core, creating a circular courtyard which serves as communal space. Units are different one from another; they are individually designed, non-typical and non-repetitive. Sitka was built to support and reflect the concerns of its owner/occupants — children's needs were given top priority, "Environmental Suites" were included, communal spaces co-exist with private spaces. And most important, it demonstrates that women working together can overcome obstacles and create housing for themselves and their children. The Sitka Housing Co-operative is a landmark: it is the first women-initiated housing project

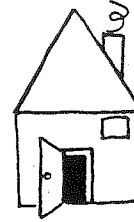
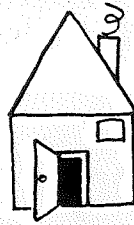
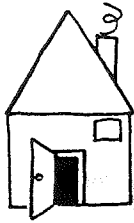


SITKA CO-OP

The co-op was specifically designed to fit in with the existing houses on the street

in British Columbia and the first major all-women's housing co-operative in B.C. designed for and by women. The architect involved herself in the community spirit of planning and, as a result, was able to meet the needs of the residents. Sitka serves as an example for future all-women's housing co-operatives. It has broken new ground, and, the women of Sitka are demonstrating what urban design, community development and planning are all about. □

*Hinda Avery has interviewed members of the Sitka Housing Co-operative and Linda Baker, the project architect. These interviews document the evolution of Sitka and the delicate process of developing and translating visions of housing for women in built forms. Ms Avery is, as she puts it, obsessed with urban design, and feels that it is an area that combines her interests in feminist, social, political and aesthetic issues. She is presently doing a Doctorate in Education focusing on Feminism and Architecture at the University of British Columbia, where she also teaches art, art education and urban design.*



G. SCOBIE

## Members of Sitka Housing Co-operative

### Can you give me some historical information about Sitka?

We had our first meeting in August of 1981 as there was a great need for more housing for self-supporting women. We wanted to provide housing for women likely to be living on their own, including those living alone in their old age, and so we didn't see that we needed multi-bedroom units as CMHC wanted. They saw their role as providing housing for families, so we had to persuade them that self-support women were within their definition.

We started out with quite a large group. About 20-25 people would come to the meetings, and in 1982 we incorporated as a co-operative housing association. We had some trouble finding a resource group like Inner City or Columbia Housing to develop us. The CMHC encourages a starting co-op to work with a resource group like Inner City to deal with complications like construction and mortgage financing. We had some trouble convincing Inner City because they didn't think that CMHC would fund an all-women co-op.

Between '82 and '85 we talked to almost every level of government in an attempt to get some commitment for funding. Margaret Mitchell, the NDP representative for Vancouver East, got us an interview with the regional manager of CMHC for the West. We also did some lobbying by phoning the MPs responsible for housing in Ottawa, the Liberal MP and the Conservative MP, and talked to their constituent assistants. Then we wrote to the national women's organizations and got letters of support from them.

Inner City kept putting us on their list of co-ops for allocations and sending it to CMHC; the list would come back and we wouldn't be on it any longer. Even without allocations we began to interview archi-

itects in the winter of '84 because we needed architectural drawings to convince CMHC. We also needed property so we got a real estate agent to start looking for land.

### Why did you decide to go with Linda Baker?

She had the most experience, and we had the most affinity with her. She clearly cared the most about the project and liked the way we worked as a group. She treated us the most seriously, too. She brought a portfolio with her — really treated us like a potential client group.

### Did she do a complete drawing for you?

She did some sketches first, and then after some commitment from CMHC, the next stage of drawings. She asked us what our ideal building looked like. We said we wanted a lot of space and light and were concerned about soundproofing. We had some ideas, too, about how a women's co-op would be different from a mixed co-op. For instance, we wanted it to have a sense of community with the suites looking onto a courtyard, and we wanted a townhouse look to it so it would feel like a house: and we wanted yards for the kids. We wanted kitchens that looked onto living or dining rooms so people could sit and talk to someone in the kitchen or could watch the children from the kitchen.

What we hadn't realized was that CMHC had quite different ideas about how people should live. Linda would get all excited about designing, generated from discussions with us rather than using pre-conceived ideas and selling them to us. She really encouraged us to think about the process of designing our own

homes. That's what made it exciting to work with her.

### She mentioned to me that she felt you liked the more traditional kind of design, the old houses.

Definitely. We were quite concerned that the project fit on the street. We were already going to be different enough without having the exterior of the building stick out like a sore thumb. For design priorities, we decided to spend more on structure than on expensive carpets or kitchen cabinets. We wanted a sound framework, a good guarantee on the roof, and adequate soundproofing.

We also have six environmental suites in the co-op for people with sensitivities to things like common building materials. This necessitated a long struggle with CMHC to get us 10 percent more than the allocated amount to provide extras for the environmental suites. We got a ventilation system to bring air in from outside to improve air circulation. The kitchen cabinets were sealed so that no press-board is exposed and gassing off is minimized. Exterior plywoods were used throughout instead of chipboard. We were the first CMHC-funded co-op to build these environmentally sound suites, and there were some conditions attached to the funding. For example, people who live in them must have medical documentation as to their allergies. We also had to agree to a study being done by the National Research Council after a year.

### Does the neighborhood know that you are an all-women co-op?

Oh, sure they do. As all women in a mixed socio-economic neighbourhood, we've

been concerned about how we present ourselves to the neighbourhood and about our security. The senior citizens across the street at Woodland sit on the bench outside and watch us. Their first theory was that we were a home for unwed mothers. The adolescent boys in the neighbourhood do a lot of name-calling and teasing of the kids in the co-op. Sometimes we do get harassment from the bar up the corner at 1:00 in the morning.

#### **So how do you respond?**

Mostly we ignore it. We have a security committee and make sure the grounds are well-lit. We also have a security check with everybody taking turns at night to make sure all the gates are closed, etc. We have a system of keeping track of incidents through a log book.

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### *The future of co-op housing is nebulous at the moment*

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#### **Do you inform the police?**

Yes. The police have been called several times. But I think the best approach to dealing with these situations is just to make sure that you're active in the community, sitting on the residents' council, making people aware of your concerns, and letting them know that you are responsible, interested and active participants. Our awareness of our uniqueness has given us more of a sense of community.

#### **So in your sense of community, is it a feeling of family, a feeling of moral responsibility, people caring about each other in a way that's different than other co-ops, than other communities?**

I think we're very aware of being each other's neighbours, and there's a better than average gossip network. There's also probably a better than average sense of helping each other out with mutual child-care arrangements or having someone look after your cat if you're away. I don't think there's an obligation to do that, but a willingness. There is a sense of cohesiveness amongst the members of this co-op that is not necessarily the case in other co-ops. It can be developed in other co-ops, but I think we began with it because we have a sense of our identities.

#### **Isn't it different because you are working together but also living together at the same time?**

You're not actually living together because you're still in your own living unit. You have to share chores outside in the common area, but we aren't living together in that sense.

Right now I feel that we're going to have a fairly stable population with not many moving in and out. I think that will be a benefit as we've become a cohesive group. Also, people have talked about what it's going to be like to live here in their old age. Particularly amongst the group of women who worked to build the co-op, there's the sense that this is their permanent home and that they expect to grow old here.

#### **Do you work together on political issues?**

There's been some working together on political issues exterior to the co-op, but not in a cohesive way. We have quite a cross-section of political views and personalities in the co-op, and it takes a while of working and living together to mold any sort of collective vision.

#### **Can you give me an example of the differences between Sitka and other co-ops?**

Well, the role of the board versus the role of the committees and the role of the general membership and who makes decisions. We make our decisions by consensus as much as we can; the general membership is the ultimate bearer of decision-making.

#### **Does it take a long time?**

Yes. Many people don't feel the board should have much power or be given a leadership role, but that the general membership should have leadership. Different people have ideas for the future, but we're still finding out our basis of unity for common projects that we could do as a group like providing day-care or a soup kitchen or a vacation spot for ourselves outside the city.

We have one member who sits on the area council and we're active in the co-op movement. We have people on both the federal and provincial organizations.

#### **Do you see a lot more women's co-ops happening in the future, here in Vancouver?**

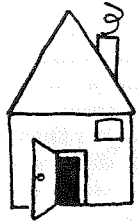
The future of co-op housing is nebulous at the moment, and the funding arrangements have been changed. I think what you will see is more self-initiated housing, whether it's co-ops or city-funded housing. This will be for specially defined groups or groups that define themselves as different. For example, the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre is providing housing for street women.

#### **How do you feel, now that you have built Sitka?**

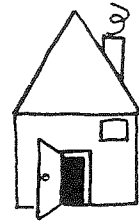
I feel proud of Sitka. It's a commitment to providing affordable housing for women. There are many struggles that the Feminist Movement has won over the past decades; not all of them have had such tangible results. That's one of the rewards: that you can look at this building and say you've accomplished this. □



SITKA CO-OP



## Linda Baker: Architect



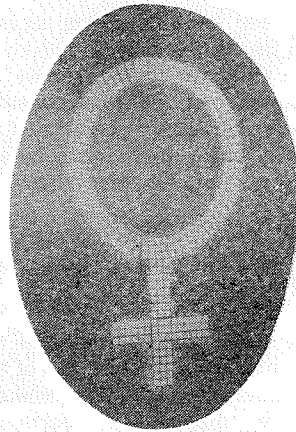
### Could you give me some historical background on the co-op project?

There was a small group of women who were aware that with their incomes they could never afford to possess their own homes. They got together and started talking about alternatives to living and lifestyle. There were probably four or five women, initially, who met to create a non-hierarchical housing alternative that eventually became an all-women's housing cooperative.

### What were their concerns when choosing a female architect?

They selected a woman architect hoping that she would bring to the project a similar understanding and perception of their dream for permanent housing. They also wanted someone with experience of the government rules and regulations to help implement this.

So I was selected, and we started talking together. First they showed me a large, older, Victorian home on the east side that they wanted to renovate into various suites and make additions to. But CMHC would not allow renovations, because part of their premise was new construction. So then they had to look for a site. They wanted to stay on the east side because that's their community base. We finally located a site on the corner of Woodland and Graveley, that had several older houses on it. Given that we couldn't renovate older homes, we tried to re-create the feeling of what an older home is with new construction. We examined some of the characteristics of older homes like the roof lines, detailing around windows, and vertical heavy wood railings. We then tried to incorporate these ideas into our concept of a co-op building. I copied the roof



### *Women need safe, affordable housing*

forms from the original three buildings on site — the direction and pitch of the roofs — and then I filled in because we had to create a larger density than the original. Therefore, the corners of the site are fairly low and dense-looking; they're very close to the single family look of the older homes. The style is "east-side eclectic" because it reflects the detailing of shapes, the forms, the feel of the neighbouring traditional or new buildings. I wanted it

to fit in and complement the buildings which are considered characteristic of that area. That's also what the group wanted. I think the neighbours appreciate that. They seem to have a lot of respect for the building.

### Tell me about the density of the new zoning, the infill, etc.

The building was filled in between the three anchored points on the corners to create 26 suites. A lot of suites are non-typical, or non-repetitive. To make it economically viable we had to reach densities of the existing zoning, and those are far in excess of the old zoning.

Co-ops tend to want to keep things all the same so that one member does not have something the other member doesn't have. Now, the women in Sitka have everything different. Some may have large storage areas and some may have large living rooms. Some may have views, and some may not.

### Did you work with the individual members and ask them what they wanted?

Yes. Most of them wanted the feel of an older home, not the feel of an apartment. An apartment is usually on one storey. Well, we've got two-storey one-bedroom apartments. We tried to create all outside front doors wherever possible. We've got doors off the courtyard and doors off the street. We have doors off the corridor but in exchange for that people have fantastic views. We've got presence on two streets, not unlike the houses in the area, and in addition to that we've got space on the inside. We brought down the roof so that maximum sun could get into the courtyard. Many suites look out into the court-

yard, which CMHC doesn't allow because they claim there is a lack of privacy. But the women said that they wanted to see their children in the courtyard and who might be lurking there. Secure, safe, affordable housing was their main banner. So we created a courtyard with windows, with units facing it, and it became an internal gathering place.

The whole livability issue evolved from the people themselves. I was asking them questions, and at first they were fairly defensive, wondering why I was asking such questions. We had to build up a trust. These were questions that they had never been asked before or even considered consciously. We spoke mostly about feelings. I would ask them how something felt because we were creating homes within. They were into every detail of the process, right down to the best materials to use. They wanted to transfer the handicap allowance to the environmentally handicapped — those people with allergies — which had never been done before. So we were designing several suites while they were fighting with CMHC to get the special allowance for this. We were also studying different materials and researching ventilation systems.

#### **Could you comment on design, on whether women have a different approach to housing and design?**

In working with women I find that they respond to space differently than men.

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### *The style is "east-side eclectic" because it reflects the shapes and forms of traditional neighbourhood buildings*

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They tend to relate to smaller spaces. I created in this project several large storage areas. The women wanted a little window in them so that they could convert them into studies though the spaces are no more than the size of a bathroom. They can find the smallest space usable and adapt to it in the most interesting ways. Then again, they also want larger spaces for the kitchen, living and dining areas, because they spend a lot of time there. They want a connected living area where children can be observed and run around and are not separate from the cooking area.

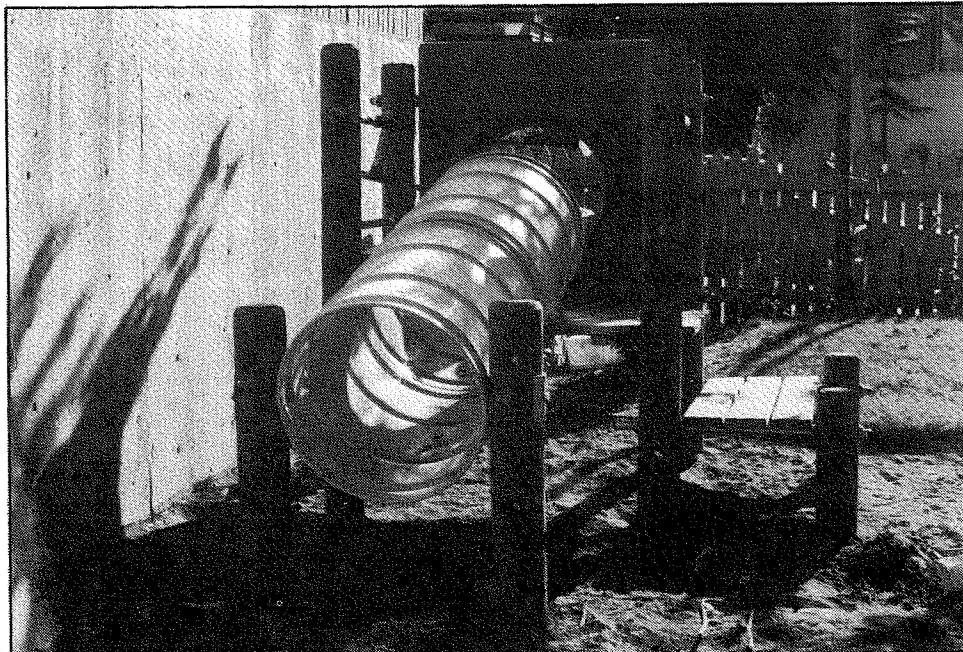
We've passed through the period of the modern home being a machine for living, which the average person finds very hard to relate to as a reality.

#### **What do you think the future holds, for similar projects?**

I think we're on a threshold right now providing housing for women. This project was initiated by women, and you'll find more of the same as they find no other alternatives. It is happening now in Vancouver with several groups. There's a group which is providing housing for single mothers. This arose because several middle-class women found themselves divorced, poor, with children, and unable to find housing. Other groups are into totally subsidized rental accommodations for women on welfare. There is a common denominator here: women need safe, affordable housing, and they are starting to learn how to get themselves through the different programs. We're all aware that we have a housing crisis, not just in Vancouver or B.C., but in other cities and provinces. Co-ops are the housing of the future because the average person is no longer thinking it's her/his right to be able to afford single family housing.

#### **Why do you feel Sitka will become a landmark?**

The city is now using Sitkas as the redevelopment standard for that area because it is compatible with the neighbours and gentle within the neighborhood. It's also organic in terms of how people there have come together. The neighbours value the project highly because it blends in and values the same things they value concerning the buildings in the area, the detail, the scale. This project is considered a very good neighbour. □



SITKA CO-OP

Children's play area

## An Ecofeminist Cassandra

### Rape of the Wild

Andrée Collard with Joyce Contrucci  
London: Women's press, 1988  
ISBN 0-7043-4097-6  
(paper 240 pp. \$14.95)

### Reviewed by Francesca Reynolds

Let's get one thing clear right from the start: if you are not mentally prepared to have your consciousness, culture and assumptions challenged at every level, sharp and direct as a sock on the jaw, beware! *Rape of the Wild* will probably make you so uncomfortable you will stop reading after the first chapter and miss out on one of the most courageous statements on ecofeminism ever made.

Andrée Collard's central argument is that "man-made" destruction of nature is inextricably linked with the exploitation of women and is innate in the values of our society. She illustrates how a form of the "Gaia principle" of interconnectedness played a vital part in the goddess-religions practised in ancient cultures: humans saw themselves as parts of the earth and its life cycles rather than as "masters of the universe." Patriarchal societies work on the latter principle: God is above the earth. He is its Creator and He appointed man to rule over it.

Collard analyses how the latter mode of thinking shapes our society's treatment of earth, women and animals. She argues that "the identity and destiny of woman and nature are merged." Our capacity for childbearing, our menstrual cycles mirroring the lunar cycle, our patterns of caring for our homes, children and surroundings give us intimate connections with the earth and an instinctive urge to protect it. Patriarchy represents separation from the earth, and a conscious dichotomy between feeling and reason. This separation and "superiority complex" has led man to exploit nature, believing it belongs to him.

Collard explores the issues of hunting, vivisection, human health, consumerism, conservation, eugenics, the "sexual revolution" and reproductive technology,

demonstrating a common theme: patriarchal societies are unwilling to let anything just BE on its own terms, in its own wildness. The situation will deteriorate while our society persists in being obsessed with domination and control as a form of self-definition.

How seriously the reader takes Collard's arguments will depend on how important she/he considers the psychological interrelationships between "masculine" and "feminine" principles, and between men, animals and women. I believe the author is giving us a vital message, and applies her own "Gaia principle" in her writing as she connects each controversial issue into an extremely complex, meticulously thought-out whole. The only problem I find is that perhaps her efforts at linking the issues have been achieved at the expense of her covering too much ground. I agree that these issues are connected, but dealing with such sheer breadth of subject matter in one book can easily lead to mental/emotional overload for the reader, who might be left confused and ambivalent. Despite this, I was awed by Collard's uncompromising directness and depressed by her accuracy. I suspect that, unfortunately, much of what she says will be labelled melodramatic, pessimistic or hysterical; mostly because it touches on so many brutal truths we do not want to hear. I have yet to find a man who has read the book. There is a difference between the patriarchal society and the entire male sex — Collard pins the blame on the former (which includes men and women) rather than the latter. However, since men are the prime beneficiaries of patriarchy, I suspect that a vast majority of men would feel threatened if they took this book seriously so they will reject it out of hand rather than take that risk. This could also be the case for some women. Whether this is a fault of the book is open to question. Collard's love for living things and her rage against the polluters are obvious. In fact the whole book is a synthesis of her love, rage and reason. She is brave enough to tell us that she finds no easy answers, but is passionately concerned to tell us the truths she has found. It's therefore ironic and frustrating that her clear-sighted honesty — the best thing about the book — will prevent those who need to read it most urgently from ever taking it seriously. □

Francesca Reynolds is a member of the Women's Environmental Network.

## Gender Readings

### Women and Men: Interdisciplinary Readings on Gender

Greta Hofman Nemiroff, editor.  
Toronto: Fitzhenry & Whiteside,  
1987. 565 pp. \$24.95 (paper).  
ISBN 88902-6491

### Reviewed by Janet W. Salaff

There are far too few Canadian volumes on women and men in society, and this thoughtful work fills an important gap. Thirty writers and one photographer have material in this book, mainly articles republished from feminist journals in Canada and elsewhere. The editor searched for a balanced set of readings to launch a course on female-male relations, found them mainly in published materials and solicited a few to fill key gaps. The result is a fine coverage of material. Despite the secondary nature of most of the articles, nearly every one is a gem and worth putting together in this handy volume. They provide useful concepts, link them to experience, and raise action-oriented "what is to be done" ideas for their solution. The solicited articles are shorter and lack the density of the found texts.

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*This is the age of the resurgence of romantic love and fancy weddings.*

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The book is divided into four major parts: 1) The Epistemology of Gender; 2) Life's Conditions, Stages and Choices; 3) Work, Communication; and 4) Power. In the second part, the sections on the Body and Fertility are extremely interesting and timely, with Christine Overall's important article on mothering for money and Palmer's piece on natural childbirth as a cult. The section on Relationships includes Kathleen Morgan's classic philosophical piece on romantic love, which applies concepts from de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*, and extends them to our cur-



rent age. In this age of the resurgence of romantic love, fancy weddings and the decline of criticism of addictive love, this piece is a useful foil for discussion and thought. Esther Greenglass' compilation of recent census and other data on indicators of inequality in romantic and other marriages should compel readers to reassess their relationships. Louise Dulude's piece on "getting old" focuses on strategies to improve the lot of most people in their "golden years." Unfortunately Manion's article on solitude, an important topic, is too short to do more than cover a few basic issues. It has potential, and one would have liked it lengthened and thereby deepened, to do justice to the important topic of women's image as men's dependents.

In sum, I would highly recommend this volume for use in a classroom: sophisticated high school, community college and university students can all find useful material here. □

*Janet Salaff is sociologist whose area of study is family formation in Asian society. She has written three books on Chinese family formation in Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan. Her most recent volume is **State and Family in Singapore: Restructuring an Industrial Society** (Cornell University Press, 1988).*

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BARBARA SANFORD

**W**omen in Toronto Creating Housing (WITCH) turned one year old in January. The group contains a wealth of diverse talent, from women architects and builders to women experienced in co-operative housing management and development, real estate, planning, housing research and tenant advocacy. Members of the group share common values and objectives with respect to women and housing, and are on the verge of defining a future role for themselves as feminists involved in the Toronto housing scene.

WITCH was formed following a meeting with the Advocates for Women's Housing (AWH) in Scranton, Pennsylvania in January of 1988. That meeting involved the review of a pre-fabricated housing system capable of providing employment and affordable housing for women in the United States. A handful of Toronto women active in the housing field began to meet to discuss the feasibility of such a system in Canada. Their discussions, and the group, soon expanded to address other women's issues generally neglected by the Canadian housing industry.

Two courses of action have emerged as the initial aims of the group over the past year. One involves designing and developing a housing project by and for women in the Toronto area, while the other involves acting as a resource group for

other women in the housing field. WITCH has been exploring these options through meetings with non-profit housing developers, city planners, provincial and national women's advocacy groups and with other women's housing groups in Canada, the United States, India and Sweden.

Last fall WITCH defined its primary objective as the development of feminist, alternative housing models. These are conceived as both conceptual models and as real built forms. The group plans to explore and experiment with the concept of housing adapted to meet community needs in general, and women's needs in particular. The idea is to create housing which benefits the users, which empowers women, and which creates an environment in which resources, information, and emotional support can be shared. Actual projects, sites and funding sources are being considered.

WITCH also wants to ensure that women involved in creating feminist housing alternatives are adequately paid and valued for their work. While WITCH members currently volunteer their time, energy and skills to the organization, and may continue to do so for some time, they hope that through a process of networking, advocacy and empowerment, WITCH may eventually provide remunerative employment for women creating housing. □

**Barbara Sanford**

## Letter from the Feminist Library

As you know the Feminist Library lost its grant on appeal in June. Because of the shortage of time there were two emergency meetings for London-based women called, to which 80 women came, where we discussed the options open to us:

- (1) being assimilated into a poly-technic library;
- (2) continuing on volunteer labour;
- (3) moving the books to the Nottingham Women's Library on loan.

At the meetings the decision was taken to keep the Feminist Library as an autonomous resource and nine women volunteered to form a co-ordinating group which will: re-apply for the grant; facilitate the day-to-day running of the Library; and organise an extensive publicity campaign.

As we are a totally new group we are unable to produce the summer Newsletter but hope to produce one by the end of the year.

With the help of volunteers we plan to open the Library from the beginning of September on Tuesdays (11:00 a.m.-9:00 p.m.) and Saturday and Sunday afternoons (2:00-5:00 p.m.)

We urgently need donations and volunteers and would be grateful for any practical and/or financial support you can give us.

In sisterhood,  
Feminist Library Co-ordinating  
Group  
Hungerford House  
Victoria Embankment  
London WC2N 6PA  
England

## Call for Papers

The *Fireweed* guest collective is planning an issue on Asian women and would like submissions of poetry, short stories, essays, visual arts, reviews, interviews, oral histories, biographies, photographs and theory from Asian women across Canada. Deadline for submissions is April 10, 1989.

For more information contact: *Fireweed*, P.O. Box 279, Station B, Toronto, Ontario, M5T 2W2.

## Feminist Geography

A conference on feminist geography was held in the Netherlands in January 1988. The reader of this congress, *On Not Excluding Half of the Human World*, is published and can be ordered at the address below. It consists of four lectures by Janice Monk and an introduction by Lia Karsten. Dutch discussion points are included. Reader available at: Instituut voor Sociale Geografie, Afdeling Vrouwenstudies, Jodenbeestraat 23, 1011 NH Amsterdam.

## Women and Shelter Report

Organized by the governments of Zimbabwe and Sweden, within the framework of the UN International Year of Shelter for Homeless, the seminar on Women and Shelter held in Harare, Zimbabwe from November 30th to December 5th, 1987, was arranged to examine the shelter conditions of women in fourteen African countries. Information papers were submitted from these fourteen countries (Angola, Botswana, Ethiopia, Guinea Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Malawi, Somalia and Uganda) as well as from liberation movements and International Organizations. The papers represented both the views of individuals living under oppressive shelter conditions, and the views of people involved in the field of Women and Shelter; and were representative of governmental and non-governmental groups. The discussions centred on the shelter situations of three types of women — urban poor women, women on peasant farms, and women on plantations and other worksites, and developed strategies for each group with respect to: health and services, construction of shelter, work and training, land and legislation, organization and finance, research and information.

The report details the proceedings of the seminar and provides useful information of interest to policy-makers, planners; to anyone involved or concerned with Women and Shelter.

For further information contact: Government of Sweden, Ministry of Housing and Physical Planning, Jakobsgratan 26, S-103 33 Stockholm, Sweden.



## Buy Bonds for a Birth Centre!

The Toronto Birth Centre, after a futile pursuit of government funding, has decided to sell bonds to raise the \$150,000 needed to open the Centre, the first of its kind in Canada.

A non-profit association of parents and professionals, the group has been working for several years on the concept — a Centre that will offer comprehensive care and education to families throughout the childbearing process. They are committed to putting health care decisions back into the hands of recipients of that care. Research of existing birth centres in the US shows they are safe and responsive to family needs in comparison to traditional, less flexible medical models.

Bonds are being issued at \$500 each with a modest rate of return. Karen Walker, spokesperson for the group encourages people to look at this as a socially-conscious investment in safe, non-interventionist and compassionate child-birth care — for themselves, family members, and the community at large. For more information, contact Karen Walker, the Toronto Birth Centre, 31 Groveland Crescent, Don Mills, Ontario, Canada, M3A 3C4. (Phone: (416) 44-8936).

**Women's Housing Projects in Eight Canadian Cities**

*Gerda Wekerle*

Toronto: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 1988, 191 pp.

This report provides the first in-depth analysis of women's housing projects in Canada. It analyzes and compares ten non-profit housing projects located in eight cities which have been developed either by or for women, focusing on the development process and physical design of the housing, and on residents' experience of living in this housing. The report also makes seven recommendations designed to alleviate the problems in developing housing that is responsive to the needs of women.

**Our Common Future: A Reader's Guide.**

Earthscan Publications Ltd.,  
3 Endsleigh St., London WC1H ODD,  
England; 1987; 40 pp.; \$8.95

In 1983 Norwegian Prime Minister Mrs. Gro Harlem Brundtland — the only politician in the world to go from Environment Minister to Prime Minister — was approached by the Secretary-General of the United Nations to form an independent commission to study current and future changes in the world's environment; particularly the accelerating population growth and subsequent depletion of resources. The 400 page report took five years to complete and the team of scientists, diplomats, ministers, and lawmakers examined present problems, predicted future ones, and proposed ways in which the basic needs of the rapidly growing population could be met in the next century. The Commission's three objectives were to: "re-examine the critical environment and development issues and to formulate realistic proposals for dealing with them; to propose new forms of international co-operation on these issues that will influence policies and events in the direction of needed changes; and to raise the levels of understanding and commitment to action of individuals, voluntary organizations, businesses, institutes, and governments."

*Our Common Future: A Reader's Guide* is a 40-page version of The Brundtland Report; detailing the main points and proposed changes, and including many photographs and tables. It covers major issues such as: Population and Human Resources; Achieving Food Security; Urban Environments; Industry; and Species and Ecosystems, in a clear and concise manner and is intended not just for the decision-makers involved in this process, but for the ordinary individual as well.

**Women's Work, Markets, and Economic Development in Nineteenth-Century Ontario**

*Marjorie Griffen Cohen*

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988. 224 pp.

\$14.95 paper.

In this study Cohen concentrates on the importance of women's labour to the capital accumulation process in 19th century Ontario, in both independent commodity production and in the capitalist sphere. She also focuses on family productive relations and shows that although the economy of the family rested on the mutual dependence of male and female labour, there was not equality in productive relations. Within the family economy the male ownership of capital had significant implications for the control over female labour.

**Spaces for Children: The Built Environment and Child Development**

*Edited by Carol Simon Weinsten and Thomas G. David*

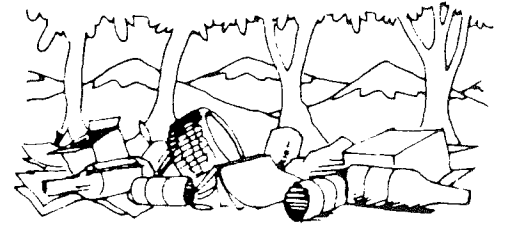
New York: Plenum Press, 1987, 322 pp.

This collection of papers focuses on the importance of the relationship between children's development and the built environment. The contributors include; designers, architects, child advocates; and researchers involved in environmental and developmental psychology, education and sociology. The book concentrates on small-scale built environments — child care centres, schools, houses, playgrounds and residential institutions, and offers many interesting design solutions to creating exciting and innovative children's spaces. All the papers include bibliographic references.

**In a Man's World: Essays on Women in Male-Dominated Professions**

*Ann Spencer and David Podmore, editors*  
London: Tavistock Publications, 1987.

Focusing on the problems and pressures experienced by professional women in Britain, the contributions to this book deal with women lawyers, general practitioners, engineers, scientists, and academics, as well as women in personnel management, the Civil Service, and health service administration. Also included is a cross-national contribution, looking at the position of professional women in India.



WPIRG

**Excess Packaging: Strategies for Waste Reduction**

*Waterloo Public Interest Research Group,*  
Waterloo: University of Waterloo, 1988,  
20 pp.

This report is taken from the proceedings of a one-day conference of the same name held at the University of Waterloo in June of 1988. The objective of the conference was to bring citizens, government, and industry together to discuss differing packaging perspectives, current waste reduction and to establish an agenda to control excess packaging and explore ways to work together on the problem. Published in this report are the keynote addresses, questions and comments of conference participants. Also included is a detailed resource section, listing (mainly Canadian and US) publications, associations and agencies that deal with the problem of excess packaging.

To order this report send cheque or money order at \$2.00 per copy, plus appropriate money for postage to: WPIRG, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, N2L 3G1.

**Family Bonds and Gender Divisions: Readings in the Sociology of the Family**

*Edited by Bonnie Fox*

Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press Inc.  
1988, 517 pp.

This collection of readings studies family life and gender roles, providing cross-cultural and historical perspectives, as well as focusing on concerns of contemporary family life. Discussed are: gender society socialization, love, sexuality, family violence, child bearing, child rearing, two-career marriages, divorce and housework.

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