

# PRIORITIES

Vol. 1, No. 9

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"I have always been a supporter of the women's liberation movement. But I just do not believe that women, as a group, are oppressed under capitalism."

(Premier Dave Barrett to the Provincial Council, Sept.73)

A Publication of the N.D.P. Women's Committee

Priorities is published monthly by the Standing Committee on Women's Rights of the B.C. New Democratic Party. Its intent is to provide a means of communication and discussion for NDP women in order to further the interests of the women's movement and of democratic socialism.

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Priorities welcomes submissions from its readers. All such submissions must be signed, although names will be withheld or pseudonyms used on request. Where necessary the Editorial Committee will edit for clarity, brevity and taste.

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All unsigned articles are the collective responsibility of the Editorial Committee.

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"The issues and demands raised by the Women's Liberation Movement are integral to the development of a democratic socialist society. The N.D.P. actively encourages and provides support for women organizing around the demands of women's liberation and commits an N.D.P. government to creating the legislation necessary to realizing these demands."

(From the B.C. NDP policy on Women's Rights)

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VOLUNTEER LABOUR

## CONTINUED...

ments, nor the validity of the question. Correspondingly, there was little initiative displayed in changing the situations in their departments in these respects, nor any evident intent to do so. The fact that the responses were for the most part only acknowledgements that our request had been received, rather than any real attempt to answer the questions asked, points to the fact that although women's policy exists on an academic level, the low-priority assessment assigned to the question by the Premier is held generally throughout the Cabinet.

It is to this main issue that women must address themselves in the future and to which women candidates and women's activities must dedicate themselves -- the implementation of Party policy, and the right of the Party rather than the Government to assign policy priorities.

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## WIDE REPRESENTATION

The NDP Women's Committee is pleased to report that approximately 200 women attended the policy conference. These delegates represented a broad spectrum of interest. The following is a list of the various groups which the delegates belong to:

The B.C. NDP Women's Rights Committee, The Burrard Women's Group, The Abbotsford Istar, The Mental Patients Association, Spartacus Book Co-op, Women's Place, U.U.W., Pedestal, Indian Homemakers Association, Women In Teaching, Vancouver Women's Action

Group, North Shore Women's Centre Committee, Company of Young Canadians, Public Housing, Canadian Women's Coalition, Vancouver Status of Women, Voice of Women, Kamloops Women's Centre, Lower Mainland Welfare Rights, F.A.P.C., League for Socialist Action, Status of Women Council, Kits Area Child Care Society, Vancouver Women's Health Collective, Young Socialists, IWA local 1-352, B.C. Teachers Federation, Task Force on the Status of Women, Vancouver Health Society, R.N.A.B.C., Vancouver Unitarian Church, P.T.A. Port Moody, P.T.A. District 43 Council, Consumer Action League, Grape, and Douglas College.

The above list was compiled from the registration form, a number of groups may therefore have been omitted. In particular there were representatives from several day-care centres including South Hill and Pooh Corner.

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## A NOTE TO NEW READERS

The January, March and August issues of Priorities are totally sold out.

Other issues are available on request (25¢ a copy) and are also available at Women's Committee meetings, conferences and at the upcoming Provincial Convention.

Please do not ask us to back-date your subscription as we cannot comply with your request.

If you are not a subscriber take this opportunity to get a subscription. If you don't you may lose the opportunity of having a copy of this "mind-expanding" newsletter.

# REPORT OF THE WOMENS POLICY CONFERENCE

Following is a detailed report of the panel presentation and workshop discussions at the recent NDP Women's Committee Policy Conference. The presentations and recommendations made on the first day of the conference--which was open to non-NDP women--laid the groundwork for discussion and resolutions made at the closed NDP Women's Conference the following day. In all, approximately 200 women, attended over the weekend.

## LABOUR :

The labour panel consisted of three speakers eminently qualified to speak on the issue of women in the labour force.

The first speaker, Marge Storm, long time Party worker and union activist, is a local officer and plant chairperson of Local 1-357 of the I.W.A. Marge spoke of the difficulties facing women union members in their struggle for equal treatment, particularly in trades such as the woodworking industry where there are so few women workers. She pointed out that when the I.W.A. won the fight for equal pay for women, the companies responded by not hiring women, since women workers were seen as valuable only because they represented cheap labour.

A plywood worker for 27 years, Marge said she reserves the right for herself to criticize the I.W.A. However, as a militant trade unionist and supporter of women's rights, she concluded that it was essential that women workers organize, and that only through the union can women attain equal rights in employment.

Nancy Conrad, a member of the Ombudsservice of the Vancouver Status of Women, outlined some of the problems with the present Human Rights Act. She pointed out that to be effective in combatting the extensive discrimination that exists, the Act must put the onus on the employer to prove that discrimination does not exist and not, as presently, on the employee to prove that it does. She also argued that the Act should be extended to bind the Crown.

Nancy explained how so called "protective legislation" such as the Factories Act encourages discrimination. In such cases where the act stipulates that women in factories or on an assembly line must be provided with chairs to sit on or with a resilient floor surface to stand on, the employer uses these stipulations to avoid hiring women. In place of such legislation, she said, there should be legislation ensuring safe and healthy working conditions for both women and men. Nancy added that as far as restrictions on employment is concerned, the only requirement should be that a person is mentally and physically capable of carrying out the required tasks.

On the Provincial Maternity Act, Nancy said that the Act does not prohibit an employer from firing a woman if she is pregnant nor does it require that an employee who has taken off time to have a baby be reinstated at the same salary or job when she returns to work.

In arguing the need for equalizing pension benefits, Nancy

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## LABOUR . . .

cited the ironic fact that the Pensions Act does not include female Members of the Legislature.

Jackie Ainsworth of the Working Women's Association outlined the problems that unorganized women encountered when they attempted a strike at Denny's Restaurants. Jackie said that this represented the first strike of waitresses in 30 years and the first initiated by waitresses themselves. The picket line that the women were able to maintain seriously affected the restaurant's business, and had the employer not been able to bring an injunction against the picketers she felt they would have been successful. She also stressed the need to repeal the anti-labour legislation and the importance of organizing women, particularly in the service industry.

Jackie also spoke of the organizing efforts at UBC where there are 1,100 unorganized workers, 1,000 of whom are women. Last fall 35% of the workers had signed up with the union, even though the physical area of the "plant" spread over 1,000 acres and even though 300 of the women were in one woman offices. This effort took five months. As the law stands, 51% of the workers must be signed up within four months in order to have a certification vote; consequently, the organizers are forced to begin another campaign to get workers signed up.

A workshop on labour was held later in the day and many of the points raised in the panel were discussed and resolutions addressing themselves to these and other problems women in the work force face were formulated.

Melodie Corrigan-

## CHILDCARE :

The situation of childcare in British Columbia was reflected clearly at the Policy Conference. I sat and watched as real concerns about the lives of our children were transformed into exhaustion, frustration, and conflict. The warning words of the speaker on childcare, Sandra Currie, didn't seem to catch on very well. She said she was tired of talking about briefs, regulations, legislation, and standards because she feared that this snare would make us forget the real needs of our children.

The problem is that it isn't entirely our fault that we are in that snare. In order to get childcare centres we must, each of us, become experts in briefs, legislation and standards, and we must become knowledgeable on all the whims and characteristics of every bureaucrat, politician, and civil servant involved in the "childcare" business. There are lots of them. By the time we do all that we are lucky if we even see our children, never mind giving thought to their needs.

There is no conflict about the basic goal; we want free, 24 hour a day childcare, available to all children in B.C.

The questions we have are many. How do we want childcare administered? In what kind of facilities do we want childcare to exist? What amount of community-parent-staff control do we want and in what degrees? What kinds of legal regulations do we want legislated and how much flexibility should they have? It is on these questions and many more that the conflicts lie.

( continued )

# CHILDCARE . . . CONTINUED . . .

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Some would like childcare administered through the Ministry of Education, others through the Ministry of Human Resources, and still other would like to have a brand new Ministry. Some would like to see childcare centres developed in houses within the child's neighbourhood, others would like to use existing and vacant school rooms and yards, and others would like to see industry provide childcare for its workers. The list of suggestions in all areas concerning childcare is long. The energy we have to develop these ideas is high, and the emotion with which we hold them is explosive.

Consequently, and quite simply (and sadly) this resulted in a real lack of policy resolutions being formulated and passed at the Conference.

As a member of the NDP I am depressed by this situation. It means that at the coming convention we will not be able to give clear and precise policy demands to the Ministers involved.

My feeling is that I shouldn't prolong any discussion on the unfortunate things that happened at the conference (too many good things happened there also). I would rather bring forth my own suggestion on what should be done to prevent those of us who are genuinely concerned about the lives of children from falling into this trap again.

It is clear to me that we must hold a conference on childcare. We need that kind of time and more. We have to argue out some of our concerns and conflicts to find out what kinds of ways there are to accommodate childcare which cares for the child. We must come up

with very specific and clear proposals on how high quality childcare can be provided which accommodates the different lives of the parents. We must form a Childcare Consumers Organization to continue this process which could become a consulting organization with the government, or preferably, part of the decision making boards which administer childcare.

The government is acting fast in childcare. Those of us involved can just barely keep abreast of the changing situation and we are getting tripped by it. We must not let the race to keep informed on the new moves prevent us from being able to direct our energies where it belongs; in the struggle to determine how to provide high-quality care for children. Our dissention does only one thing: leaves the power in the hands of the government, and I don't think that's where we want it.

- Shelly Dillon -

(The policy reports are continued on the next page.)

## NOTICE OF DANCE

The Burrard NDP is holding a New Years Eve dance at BCIT. Costs are \$6.50 each, which includes food, two bands, and many other goodies.

Women who wish to flog tickets and to donate their sales commission !! to Priorities (or to buy them for themselves) should contact Sheilah Perret, 926-6593, for details.