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FEMINIST SYMPOSIUM
"A change is about to come"

June 1, 2, 3 — 1973
McGill University
Montreal, Quebec

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BACKGROUND

In January 1973, at a meeting of Montreal's various Women's Groups and other interested individuals, an "outreach committee" was formed to initiate an activity which would bring together those persons interested in furthering the discussion of women in society.

This small group came together and discussed the various means of achieving contact with other women in the community, and it was decided to have a weekend-long conference. As our membership came from many areas of the community, and had diverse political and cultural backgrounds, we realised we might possibly run into difficulty regarding the content of the Symposium. However, after much discussion, and with tolerance shown by all, panels were put together keeping these ideological differences in mind.

It was generally agreed that this Symposium would reflect a feminist view of society, and we felt it most important that these panelists, whatever their ideological position, should be known to have a "woman's consciousness". This approach would, we hoped show that the Women's Movement is capable of discussion outside the sphere of society's usual conception of Women's Liberation.

A budget and tentative program was sent out to approximately 500 companies in the Montreal area asking for financial help. We received \$2,041. The Faculty of Management at McGill University offered rooms and office equipment for meetings and mailings. The committee worked, for the most part, as a committee-of-the-whole, dividing into subgroups for specific tasks. These tasks were varied: publicity, contacting panelists, researching local women for the purpose of tributes, organizing an art display, accommodation arrangements for out of town women, printing and layout of a program, posters, organizing a Saturday evening social, a first night reception, obtaining facilities and organizing for Cable TV coverage. All these activities were new to most members of the committee, and strengthened confidence and ability to organize, which women rarely have the opportunity to develop.

Contact was made with the French community, and a moderate number of Quebecoise participated during the weekend. We had hoped for a larger number of French women, however, our Simultaneous Translation grant from the Secretary of State, came through only two weeks before the Symposium, and we had felt it unethical to advertise translation services before we knew definitely that this money had been granted.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

The role of the average woman - the housewife - was much in everyone's mind, and being an outreach committee, we were anxious to provide a theme which would attract the average woman. In other words, housewives, nurses, secretaries, factory workers, etc., who in the opinion of the committee, had been ignored by the Women's Movement in the past.

For this reason we invited Selma James, who is a strong advocate of wages for housework. This idea also being a recommendation of the Royal Commission of the Status of Women and the Parti Quebecois, it seemed a relevant topic and of current interest to all women, and a good theme for our Symposium. We felt it of paramount importance that before liberation for women is complete economic independence must be attained, or liberation becomes meaningless.

Selma James, co-author with Mariarosa Dalla Costa of *THE POWER OF WOMEN AND THE SUBVERSION OF THE COMMUNITY*, knew women's liberation as a consuming interest long before the movement had a name. Born in Brooklyn in 1930, she first appeared publicly in 1949 at UCLA, when she was asked to represent the housewife on a panel about women. From 1950, when her son was two years old, she did the double job of house-

wife and factory worker.

A WOMAN'S PLACE, her first publication, written in 1952 came out of this experience. Its title later supplied the heading for a column which Selma wrote in 1953 and 1954 for the fortnightly paper Correspondence, and which reported the daily struggles of women both inside and outside the home.

In January 1955 she remarried, and went to live in England followed by four years in the West Indies. In Trinidad she worked for a newspaper and continued to write and speak about women. On her return to England in 1962 her commitment took an entirely different form, concentrating on defending the rights of Black people in Britain.

The founding conference of Women's Liberation as a national movement at Oxford in February 1970, gave her another framework for organizing, but this time specifically with women. Selma is a founding member of the International Feminist Collective, and a member of the Notting Hill Group of the London Women's Liberation Workshop.

As keynote speaker, Selma attracted an audience of 800 people the first evening. In her talk she explained the need for an autonomous movement---that women were exploited in a specific way, that women in male dominated groups had discovered that thinking change did not make change, that in order to fight oppression particular to women, women had to organize by and for themselves.

She said all women were essentially housewives, houseworkers - that even those of us who worked outside the home, even at prestigious jobs (and there are precious few of those) have our wages and our social relations determined by the fact that we have, from time immemorial, been wageless and therefore relatively powerless workers in the home. And the fact that we have been working in the home does not mean, as so many people have been trying to tell us, that we have not been productive. We have, on the contrary, been producing a very important product; the workers.

Selma continued that the very nature of women's work is hidden

by her wagelessness; her place of work is isolated; her rhythm of work is completely individual---she can take all day to do her work, because she is not paid by the hour---she is not paid directly at all. And she must receive a wage in order that she be recognised as a worker. So here was a perspective around which to organize; Wages for Housework.

PANELS AND WORKSHOPS

On Saturday and Sunday we had arranged panels and workshops. Each panel I had agreed to have women who would reflect the ideological differences of the committee broadly, but within a certain range. The various groups of women formerly referred to as "The Women's Liberation" group in Montreal and Canada. Panels had workshops directly pertaining to their content. Spontaneous workshops were set up by women interested in discussing other issues together. This flexibility was necessary in order to allow the needs of women throughout the weekend to be met. In order to allow the needs of women throughout the weekend to be met, working on the committee, to be accomplished. A Saturday of the session on Saturday and Sunday was approximately 40.

"WOMEN IN THE FIRST PERSON" - THE 1st was the panel which started the Saturday session, by focusing attention on the identity of women. As the panel progressed with the focus of identification and traditional roles, historical differences and personal experiences began to evolve a contrast for some of the weekend's discussion. The second half of the panel shifted to the future with stress on the woman's concept of self and identity.

At the same time a special workshop had been arranged by a number of women who felt the need to have an extended workshop with Selma James on the topic of housework.

PANELS AND WORKSHOPS

Saturday and Sunday we had arranged panels and workshops. On each panel it was agreed to have women who would reflect the ideological differences of the committee thereby initiating discussion between the various groups of women loosely referred to as "The Women's Liberation" groups in Montreal and Canada. Panels had workshops directly pertaining to their content, spontaneous workshops were set up by women interested in discussing other issues together. This flexibility was deliberately built in to allow the needs of women attending the conference, but not working on the committee, to be accommodated. Attendance at the sessions on Saturday and Sunday was approximately 400.

"WOMEN IN THE FIRST PERSON - THE "I" was the panel which started the Saturday session, by focussing attention on the identity of women. As the panel progressed with the topics of stultification and traditional roles, historical glimpses mixed with personal experiences began to provide a context for some of the weekend's discussion. The second half of the panel shifted to the future with stress on the woman's concept of self and identity.

At the same time a special workshop had been assembled by a number of women who felt the need to have an extended workshop with Selma James on the Wages for Housework issue.

The medical panel aptly named "MEDICINE - A SOCIAL ISSUE" introduced the day's first controversial topics. Bonnie Mass* who was flown in especially for the afternoon session, gave an excellent and well documented presentation on the methods of population control in Latin America and amongst the minority groups in the United States. These programs financed by the Rockefeller Foundation, and administered by A.I.D., and various other groups are committing genocide, virtually wiping out minority groups among the poor of Latin America. For example, 34% of women of childbearing age in Puerto Rico have been sterilized. Rather a frightening revelation, especially if one were to imagine the same programs being initiated in Canada. Bonnie Mass asked that women everywhere make themselves aware of these atrocities against their Latin American sisters, and to protest against these programs.

This theme was picked up by Selma James, who spoke on the right to have abortions. Unless women have the economic independence to choose either having a child or to have an abortion, then free abortion on demand would only be a free choice for those of us who were financially able to raise a child. Women should have the right to control their own reproductive functions, to have or not to have a child based on human, not financial reasons, to own our bodies and let our children own themselves, and not both be owned by the boss.

Herda Gutman spoke on the advances being made by Psychologists since the advent of the Women's Movement. She felt that Psychologists were questioning the reudian concepts of woman's role in society, and were not so eager to push women into their traditional roles.

Donna Cherniak spoke on the attitudes of doctors toward women, which she felt, left much to be desired. Women were often treated as though their bodies did not belong to them, and their illnesses were discussed with colleagues and

* Bonnie Mass is the author of The Political Economy of Population Control in Latin America, Editions Latin America, P. O. Box 218, Station N, Montreal, P.Q.

not with the woman concerned. Methods of abortion are available which are safe and quick, but with all the red tape to go through for a legal abortion in Canada it is often too late for the woman to avail herself of these methods. She must go through the more uncomfortable methods in hospital.

Following this segment of the panel, a nurse from the Catherine Booth Hospital in Montreal spoke on the nurses' struggle there to keep the hospital open. The hospital is being closed as part of the drive to centralize medical care in the province. The nurses who had worked to make this hospital a human place to have a child were struggling to prevent this happening. A resolution to support these nurses was passed unanimously. (See Appendix A)

During the workshops following this panel Selma James gave a special workshop on "How woman's labour in the home produces Capital".

The panel on "THE EDUCATIONAL IMPASSE" reiterated the problems of today's educational systems and focused on the role and status of women as student, teacher and parent within the structure. The panelists were able to provide specific examples of discrimination depending on their personal experiences but few solutions or suggested courses of action, other than further study, were mentioned. One question that was raised, but left unresolved, what do we as women want of the educational system.

The second day of panels began with "Women in the Labour Force", and the gathering was ready to tackle the central issue head on. Selma James, supported by another panelist, Marlene Dixon, made the point strongly of how exploited is women's work outside the home. Women, she said, are a cheap reserve labour force -- used when men are fighting wars, or to act as a pressure on men when the man's wage demands are too high; women are used in the most boring jobs; paid discriminating wages at any level, and sent home, when they are no longer needed, to the powerless unwaged condition they came out of. Their wagelessness at home results in their low wages in the factory. While in the waged labour force women are subject to the pressure that

they have another job waiting at home, and often there are children unattended somewhere.

Selma claimed that the interests of women were given no recognition by the trade unions. Following this a plea for support of trade unions was issued by panelist Beatrice Fernyhough, a former union organizer. To support the case Beatrice took an extensive look at the history of the trade union movement in Canada. She said it is a common sphere of liberation that we are all seeking, and the trade union movement is our ally.

The split in the Women's Movement along class lines was presented by Marlene Dixon. She felt that the assumption by the Women's Movement that all women had the same interest regardless of class was wrong. It was naive to assume that middle class women would have the same interest as that of a working class woman. The Women's Movement had never developed a political perspective, but had worked around isolated issues such as abortion and day care, rather than political awareness and social change. The solutions to many women's problems had been reformist in nature, due to the influence of the middle class women in the movement, who saw advancement for women through social reform within the system rather than through revolutionary political action. This had forced the political women of the left out of the movement into isolation. She saw the same problem throughout the Student Movement in the sixties, which ended up being a paint and poster revolution, with no political perspective to carry it forward. It was naive to feel that a middle class woman would further the interests of the working class, unless that woman was able to de-class herself.

This prompted Monica Townsend, chairwoman of this panel, to announce that she objected to the Marxist view being presented on this panel, since she felt this was not what Woman's Liberation was about. She pointed out that since 1969 managerial positions for women had increased from 3.7% to 3.9%, surely advancement.

It was at this point that a resolution was presented from the

floor on Wages for Housework.

The next three hours (the session had already been going on for two), were a rigorous, organized debate on the resolution. Of the women and men who spoke, only two or three opposed it. Those who spoke for it expressed an overwhelming sense of joy and anticipation at having in their hands something they could work with. It made sense to them, and the audience supported their speeches. One woman spoke, fighting back tears, of her mother who had struggled for many years because she had no money, because in order to clothe and feed her children she had had to beg and to submit to an alcoholic husband. When her voice broke one woman said "go on". That was the feeling-- a solidarity, a unity with understanding which is rare. Each speaker related from her own experience, but the overpowering response to the resolution was YES.

The next panel "LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS" was of necessity kept short. Anne Cools defined Human Rights and put forth the question: if all of us are equal, "how come some of us have rights over others of us? Two other panelists went into the discriminatory nature of the law. Marriage laws, divorce, child custody, immigration -- are laws which systematically keep women in an inferior and powerless position. Another panelist went on at length to define her concept of the institution of marriage.

There was an intervention at this point by Indian women who had been invited to address the Symposium. They spoke on the problem faced by Indian women who lose their status on the reservation because they have married a non-Indian -- needless to say this fate does not befall Indian men. The conference unanimously passed a resolution in support of Indian women which was presented by Mrs. Two-Axe-Early.

At this point a call was made for other resolutions from the floor which had not yet been discussed. Presented and passed were resolutions on Child Care, Gay Liberation, and support of Anne Cools and Roosevelt Douglas. These can be found in the Appendix.

RESOLUTIONS PASSED AT THE FEMINIST SYMPOSIUM

WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK

Whereas the work of production and reproduction of the labour force rests mainly with women;
Whereas the work of bearing and rearing children (often performed in addition to a job outside the home) is a social function;
Whereas the work done in the home is unpaid;
BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE State pay wages to houseworkers.

WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT CENTRE

The symposium voted to support the efforts of the Women's Involvement Centre in Toronto.

CATHERINE BOOTH HOSPITAL

The symposium voted to support the nurses in their struggle to maintain maternity services at the Catherine Booth Hospital.

CHILD CARE

Since child care is considered the responsibility of women;
Since women are isolated in individual homes to bear and raise children without a wage;
Since children are also isolated, both women and children are thereby denied a social existence.
Since fathers and mothers who must work long hours for wages do not have the time and energy to enjoy their children;
WE DEMAND free 24 hour child care centres for children, controlled and managed by the community where women and men of all ages can be together and receive wages for this service to society.

GAY WOMEN

Whereas the present Canadian laws discriminate against Gays by:

1. Preventing the immigration of known Gays,
2. Not including sexual orientation in the human rights code.
3. Restricting homosexual acts to adults (over 21) in private.
4. Refusing child custody to Gay mothers:

BE IT RESOLVED THAT this Symposium demand the end of all discrimination against and oppression of Gays under the law.

ON ANNE COOLS AND ROSIE DOUGLAS

BE IT RESOLVED that this body give its collective support to Anne Cools, a black woman involved in the struggle for justice, who was convicted of obstruction by an all-white male jury.

In February 1969, 97 (ninety-seven) people (black and white), were arrested for a sit-in at Sir George Williams University, protesting against racism. At her trial in April 1971, Anne Cools was sentenced to six months in prison, plus a \$1,500 fine OR an additional three months in jail. She was convicted by a court system that officially denied the right of women to sit on juries, and refused a proposal to include any members of the black community on the jury. Roosevelt Douglas, also was convicted on obstruction and faces a sentence of two years. They are now making an appeal to the Supreme Court. We feel it is vital for all people opposed to the continued racism, sexism, and gross injustice that this society perpetuates, to actively voice their support for Anne Cools and Roosevelt Douglas.

II Whereas it is contrary to the Bill of Rights in this country to deny any person his or her right to due process of law, and; Whereas the Minister of Immigration and Manpower, Robert Andras, and the Solicitor General have seen fit to issue a certificate declaring that based on intelligence information (which they do not need to show) Roosevelt Douglas, a black landed immigrant, is a risk to national security and thereby they eliminate the discretionary power of the Immigration Appeal Board to decide on humanitarian grounds, and;

Whereas this type of arbitrary racist treatment has always been and is continually being meted out to black immigrants in Canada;
BE IT RESOLVED that this body demand that the certificate be rescinded and that the Federal Government allow the final decision on Douglas' deportation order to return to the Immigration Appeal Board after the Supreme Court has made a final ruling on the conviction appeal (re the Sir George Williams case).

ON THE INDIAN ACT

BE IT RESOLVED that the Feminist Symposium demand that Indian women be given equal rights with male members of the band with regard to the following: inheritance, voting equality, since non-Indian women vote on all major issues, burial rights, and education benefits.

Women of Caughnawaga and throughout Canada seek amendment of the Status of Indian Act whereby Indian women marrying non-Indian men be reinstated, thereby restoring all rights and titles of Canadian Indian women and Indians to which we have full rights. The Indian women of Canada do not demand to be given the rights or titles of others, nor is it our wish to deprive others of their rights or titles, WE MERELY DEMAND THE RIGHTS WE ARE ENTITLED TO, THAT IS OUR NATURAL BIRTHRIGHT AS INDIANS

DAY, JUNE 1, 1973

Macock 132
Registration

Chair's welcome
Keynote speaker
Selma James
Reception

17.30

19.30

20.00

22.00

SATURDAY — JUNE 2, 1973 — PANELS
BRONFMAN BUILDING 151

10.00—**WOMAN IN THE FIRST PERSON — the "I"**
JEAN DEPPISCH • CERISE MORRIS •
IRENE KON • MARLENE GREEN

CHAIR: DONYA PEROFF
13.00—**MEDICINE — A SOCIAL ISSUE**
DONNA CHERNIAK • SELMA JAMES •
HERDA GUTMAN • BONNIE MASS

CHAIR: NEVA PANDOS
WORKSHOPS

15.30—**THE EDUCATIONAL IMPASSE**
MARY PORTER • FRANCINE GALANDIS •
CAROLINE FICK • ESTHER GREENGLASS •
EMILY GIRDLE

CHAIR: GWEN LORD
WORKSHOPS

SUNDAY, JUNE 3, 1973
BRONFMAN BUILDING 151

10.00—**THE LABOUR FORCE**
BEATRICE FERNYHOUGH • SELMA JAMES •
VERA JACKSON • MARLENE DIXON

CHAIR: MONICA TOWNSEND
WORKSHOPS

14.00—**LAW & HUMAN RIGHTS**
ANNE COOLS • JUANITA WESTMORELAND •
DIONYSUS ZERBIOSIS • MARYON KANTAROFF

CHAIR: CERISE MORRIS
WORKSHOPS

17.00—**SUMMARY & CONCLUSION**