

"Oh may the pw'r the gifties gie us

French Women Fighting Ever Since the Revolution

"French women have been involved in politics for some two hundred years," says Ms. Nicole Guillemet-More, producer of the CBC radio French public affairs program "Implosion" in Vancouver.

"Many women fought in the 1789 revolution," she says, "and they have been fighting for their rights ever since." In France women did not secure the vote until 1945. Abortion was illegal until last year. French women earn an average of 30 per cent less than men.

But Ms. Guillemet-More thinks French women may have some advantages over those in Canada. They enjoy some of the same right as Canadian women, and then some.

"The day care system in France is unlike any other in the world," she notes. "For children under a year old there is 'creche' and 'maternelle' which is a kind of kindergarten with teachers and health care, for children up to school age."

Mothers, "les femmes au foyer" get substantial allowances if they stay at home with their children. "It's not just a baby bonus either," says Ms. Guillemet-More. "It's enough to support themselves on."

Because French women lost their husbands, fathers and brothers heavily in the last war, they make sure their daughters are educated so they can get jobs and support themselves. France has an excellent training program for middle-aged women who are entering the labour market for the first time.

"Women have always worked outside the home in France, Nicole Guillemet-More notes. "They work out of necessity. It is not questioned like it is here in Canada."

In 1971, some 36,000 francophone women lived in B.C. Unlike many other immigrant women, French-speaking women are not employed as much in manual labour. Teaching French and nursing as popular occupations for them in Canada.

Numerous French women in B.C. come from Quebec where women gained their rights much later than other Canadian women. This is due in part to the strong influence of the Church on the role of women in the home.

"There is a sort of mysticism that persists about motherhood," says Ms. Guillemet-More. "Le Devoir magazine reported recently that 55 per cent of French Canadian men feel women are happier if they stay at home with kids."

What is the difference between the English-speaking and the Francophone women's movement?

"The Quebecois see themselves as French-Canadian first and as women second," she says. "There is a belief that women there will not be liberated until Quebec is independent of Canada."

But Nicole Guillemet-More is optimistic about this. "Beyond separatism and the language barrier, I think we all have a feeling of solidarity with other women's struggles," she says.

Japanese Women Suffer From Isolation

Ms. Michiko Sakato entered Canada from Japan as a tourist in 1970 before the immigration laws were tightened. In 1972 she obtained her landed immigrant status. Ms. Sakato knows the difficulties Japanese women experience integrating into Canadian society. Learning the language is the first problem, she says. Canada Manpower runs an English training program for immigrants but only one member of a family, usually the male, is allowed to take the course.

Even if the female spouse has more training or is more likely to find work, Michiko Sakato finds that the male, defined as the head of the household, is awarded the opportunity to take the language course.

Besides language, she says the main problem of women she encounters is employment and housing. The current economic situation is largely to blame, she says, but she also cites active discrimination by landlords and employers.

Young women are still groomed in Japanese schools and homes for a successful marriage, where they learn crafts, flower arranging, the tea ceremony and sewing.

Canadian Women's News has recently released a series of articles dealing with the acceptance, or rejection, of Canadian "customs" by British Columbia women of various cultural backgrounds. What follows is a compilation of those articles.

Michiko Sakato regrets that Japanese women shy away from working with these skills in Canada because they feel they "are not good enough" and "it is only a home thing."

From Sakato's point of view, Canadian women enjoy a much more liberated status than Japanese women. Arranged marriages occur even in her generation and many Japanese women in Canada suffer from isolation because their husbands still want their wives to maintain traditional values.

Divorce is easy to obtain in Japan and is popular among Japanese males who pay little or no support for ex-wives. However, social stigma is attached to divorced women.

Michiko Sakato points to a women's weekly magazine where all the articles are written by Japanese men. She says most of the Japanese press is critical of the women's movement, small as it is in Japan.

Coming from a background which emphasizes the "home" for women, Ms. Sakato expresses the need for some form of consciousness-raising about the women's movement, before the majority of Japanese women can begin to emerge from their isolation and integrate into the Canadian community.

Chinese Feminists are Exceptions

"Chinese women are not very excited by International Women's Year," says Maggie Ip, vice-chairwoman with the United Chinese Enrichment Services Society of British Columbia.

She says this is generally true of Chinese women whether they come from mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan or Malaysia, although their roles as women may differ somewhat according to their country and age.

Immigrant Chinese are too busy learning the language and integrating into the Canadian Society to question the system and be involved with feminism. "It's too early for them to be thinking beyond survival."

Maggie Ip is realistic about channelling immigrant women into low status jobs. "Let's be realistic," she advises. "You can't train a 45 year old Chinese woman who has her grade five education and who doesn't speak English, to be an executive secretary, in three months."

The training classes they take result in more than job opportunity for these women. "Many of the graduates told me later they are now included in the family decision-making and their sons no longer look down on them."

Most Oriental people immigrated to Canada under the "family reunification" program. The Chinese family is a close knit one. Although working women are

accepted, marriage and children are considered a "must".

According to Ms. Ip the major problem of Chinese immigrant women in Canada is, "They are caught between their family and job responsibilities." In this regard, they may not be much different than other Canadian women.

Middle-class families in Hong Kong can afford maids or 24 hour child care services. In Canada, low income families can not often afford day care, even if there were enough centres to go around.

"I know of a number of cases in which the women did not want to stay at home and clean floors," says Maggie Ip. "She was not willing to give up her way of life or job for lack of day care so the family went back to Hong Kong."

"In Hong Kong," she notes, "everything is business. Women work out of necessity. In the past five years, the development of secondary industry has provided more jobs for women but the women's movement itself is in its 'infancy'."

Chinese women are not very active politically. Ms. Ip herself is reluctant to enter municipal politics but she says this is the case with Chinese men too. Until 1911 Chinese tradition or monarchy precluded democratic involvement. "Of course the political activity of women in mainland China is intense."

"The middle-age Chinese woman believes in the quiet revolution," she says. "Many of them still wait to express things to me in private they would never say in public. Their solution to women's rights is to convince their own families, especially their sons."

But the younger generation of Chinese women born in Canada are different," she says. "They are undergoing a cultural identity crisis. They do not belong to the old China or the new."

"The Chinese have integrated successfully into Canadian society but they are a highly visible minority. The young Chinese women are very concerned with racism and going back to their roots," but she says, "Chinese feminists are an exception."

Greek Women Think Canada Bears Gifts

To some Greek women Canada offers opportunities undreamed of in Greece, making the need for a women's movement at least momentarily unreal to them.

In spite of it being a global phenomenon, International Women's Year is a 'foreign' concept to both Frieda and Christina, two women who immigrated to Canada a number of years ago.

Christina worked hard upon her arrival in 1961. She was eighteen then and with the help of her friends found a factory job and began learning English.

She received a lot of support from other Greek women including companionship, English lessons and job leads. Greek women have a 'sorority' attitude towards one another.

Christina's view of factory work is that it's "not so bad, now that you can make \$2.50 per hour. She sees Canada as a land of opportunity, a place where one can make money even save money and buy property.

Frieda, who came to Canada in 1965, also sees the chance to work and escape poverty as the key to freedom in Canada.

With her third grade education she has a job assembling telephones and makes \$3.84 per hour. She finds this salary "not bad for me, for a woman." Her husband makes \$2.75 per hour in a Greek restaurant.

As Frieda sees it, most women don't work in Greece because "the men don't like it." Yet in Canada "everybody works. So it's all right for women too."