

854 year old women's movement still alive

by Susan Williams

It has been some time since women have chained themselves to lampposts, burned their bras or even sported buttons proclaiming International Women's Year. But that is not to say the women's movement is dead—at least not according to Doris Anderson, past president of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

Anderson told women at a conference last weekend on Public Issues and How to Take Action that they are caught, more than ever, in a social revolution.

"Consider yourself part of this revolution, publically and personally," she said.

Anderson has become "quite notorious"—as she describes herself—since her recent resignation from the Advisory Council over a dispute with Council members and minister responsible Lloyd Axworthy. But she did not appear to mind being in the public eye once again as she addressed a largely female audience on women's problems.

As she sees it, a major problem is that women are not yet a part of Canada's power structure. If they did have influence on the way the country is being run, there would be better day care facilities with hot lunches and after school programs.

"Women do not have the kind of input, the clout into what's being done that they should have," she said. "Women were not even asked for their input in the constitutional talks."

Anderson criticized the Advisory Council for passing up the chance to get involved in the constitutional debate by cancelling their February conference. Although the Council has won its battle for changes in the charter of rights, other constitutional issues affecting women—changes in family laws, the business of overlapping jurisdictions, better representation for women in the courts and the Senate—still need to be discussed.

The Council's dispute over whether or not to hold this conference is one of a number of examples where women have weakened their power by pitting themselves against each other. Anderson said this is one of politicians' favourite ploys. Women have to realize that "half of nothing is nothing." They have to stick together and not get involved in political games.

Politicians and men, in general, have more than one ploy that they use on women, she said. They use the line "don't you worry your pretty little head about that" to discourage women from difficult tasks and challenging professions and the "aren't you cute" paternalistic attitude to try to buy off women.

Anderson made it clear, however, that she is not against men.

"Men are not the enemy. They're only the players that happen to have the puck. It's time we learned some of the plays."

While the purpose of the conference was to teach women some game skills, participants did not agree

about exactly what these skills are. Two members of an afternoon panel stressed patience and persistence.

According to Win Gardner, senior vice-president of the Advisory Council, it is the slow, peaceful process, "the day to day grind" that is most effective in bringing about change. When dealing with politicians, "stick at it until you convince them or wear them down."

Gardner said that women have to be sophisticated, informed and professional. Panel member Edmund Morris carried this idea even further.

Morris, who is minister of fisheries and intergovernmental affairs, said women must keep up the fast-drying tradition of civility. Good manners will have more effect on a politician than antagonism, he said.

Anderson did not agree with this "nice girl" approach. Women have been patient for too long, she said. In politics, they have been running campaigns and "being nice" and the best they have received is a chance at ridings which are not meaningful in an election.

"We should stop believing that by doing all those hand maiden jobs, politicians will get around to doing something."

The slow but steady, persistent approach will not work either, she said. Canadian women have had the vote for more than 60 years but still make up only 4.5 per cent of the House of Commons. "At that rate, it's going to take us another 854 years to achieve equality."

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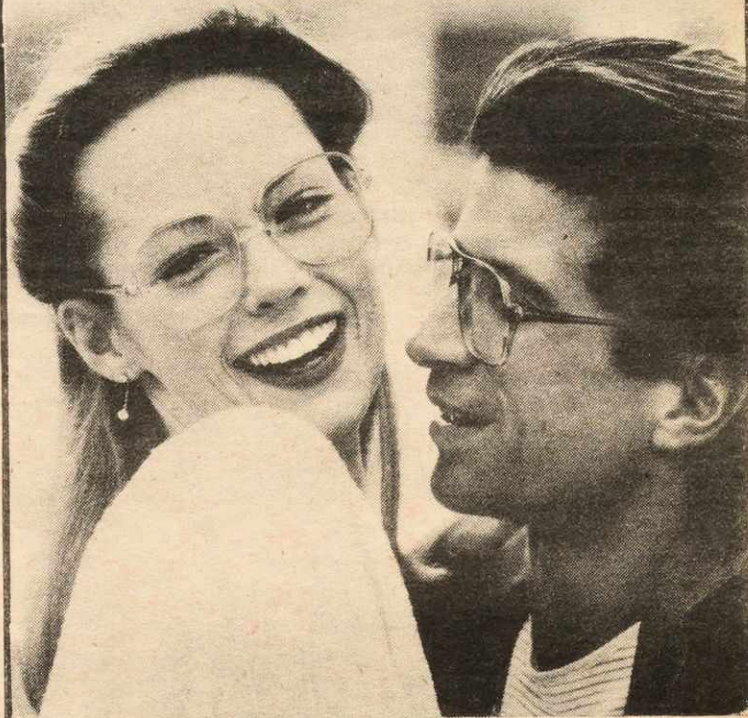
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