

Callwood on civil rights

Ingrid Matson

"When a case is pending, all civil rights activists are involved," said June Callwood, speaking at the York Women's Centre last Thursday. "We're so few that we're like a family and we react to disputes as if we were a family."

Callwood, a journalist, author and civil rights activist, is lobbying currently for support for author Ian Adams whose novel *S Portrait of a Spy* has been held up due to a libel suit. "Authors are given no protection by the law; there is only protection of confidence between a lawyer and his client," said Callwood.

While journalists are shielded by the law in regard to sources authors are not.

"A journalist's right is presumptive. Another right must exceed a journalist's in order to obtain a conviction," said Callwood.

She believes the Bill of Rights is our best safeguard for the protection of civil rights. "It is better than being governed by precedents, because when a precedent is used you encounter a situation where the whole field is controlled by the outcome of one decision."

Aside from civil rights, Callwood is an activist for many underprivileged groups. One of these is Nellie's Hostel, which was named after Nellie McLung. "It's a place for women in a crisis situation. Many of the women

who come here have been physically abused or raped. Over three thousand women go through this house in a year, and they stay for an average of two weeks. We have ten women working, and it's basically a feminist organization. While we have a capacity for twenty eight women, forty four were staying there last week," said Callwood.

An outgrowth of Nellie's is a teenage crisis centre being planned now. The centre will offer prenatal, family, father, and parent-child counselling. "We want to provide this service as an alternative to social workers whom new mothers often come to resent. We have found a malnutrition problem in the babies due to the mothers' lack of money," said Callwood.

The teenage crisis centre is one of many agencies Callwood has helped to organize. "I'm just crazy about this project; I can't wait. If there is one thing I know how to do well now it's start new agencies. I'm wonderful at it," she said.

Callwood is very concerned about underprivileged children in Canada. "Twenty per cent of all children in this country are living below the poverty level, and most of them live downtown or in the Jane-Finch corridor."

"Currently we are distributing a handbook, which outlines

rights, to every child in custody. We are interested in justice for children," said Callwood.

She is also interested in the feminist movement. The co-author of *The Law is Not For Women* says she believes the movement towards equality of the sexes has bonded women together but feels that these bonds are not always kept as a woman moves into the upper

echelons of society. "It seems more and more as women move up in the world they are co-opted and I think this is wrong," said Callwood.

As for herself, the fifty six year old author says, "I'm at a crossroads. I'm not sure what I want to do now. I've been a columnist and a ghost writer; I don't know if I want to do these things again."



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