

# WEEK OF REFLECTION

## Women unite to fight the right

On December 6, 1989, fourteen women were murdered by self-proclaimed anti-feminist, Marc Lepine in Montreal. The tragic deaths of these engineering students were, for many Canadians, a brutal awakening to the incidence of violence and hostility towards women in our society.

Of course, violence against women is not only a matter of a shooting by a madman or violent rapes carried out by strangers in back alleys. The majority of violence against women occurs in the home. Most often, women are raped and /or beaten by husbands, ex-lovers or other men they know and trust.

But violence against women goes beyond rape, battering and less frequently, murder. Hunger and poverty, for example are forms of violence. Women make up the majority of those living below the poverty line in Canada and around the world.

Women, along with immigrants and other minorities, fill many of the most menial, low paying and often dangerous jobs. Many women factory workers, for example, are exposed to hazardous chemicals detrimental to their health. Assembly-line computer terminal workers suffer back problems from poor working conditions, as well as deteriorating eyesight and headaches. In places like El Salvador and the Philippines, women are hired to do the tedious work involved in producing computer chips, work that inevitably destroys eyesight.

Some women with few options turn to prostitution as an alternative. Many suffer police harassment and violence at the hands of pimps.

Even those women who don't face poverty often suffer pain and violence as a result of society's sexist expectations. There are countries where women are beaten, burned and even killed for "crimes" like infidelity or getting a job. In the West, women undergo painful, and often dangerous surgery like liposuction and breast alterations in order to mould their bodies to current sexual stereotypes.

Violence against women will continue as long as we live in a society where women's oppression is institutionalized and as long as efforts to slash wages, cut back on day-care and limit access to abortion goes unchallenged.

As the government cuts social services and employers attack on wages, benefits and union organization, poverty and unemployment deepens. And, as study after study has shown, as poverty levels rise, so too does the alienation and hopelessness which all too often leads to violence against women. Although most men do not become rapists or murderers, what we know of Marc Lepine's background tells us something about how conditions in our society affect people's lives.

### Women are rightly angered by the degree of violence and sexism in our society

Government attempts to "recriminalize" abortion, the recent scuttling of the National Day-care Program and the continuing efforts to undermine the principle of universality of health care and benefits, all serve to "delegitimize" demands for women's rights and create an atmosphere in which anti-feminist propaganda can flourish.

It is very important, particularly in this period of backlash against women (as well as gays and lesbians, immigrants and so on), that we remember the many women (and men) who have struggled and fought for gains that improve women's lives.

For example, in the past 2-3 years, many young pro-choice activists have begun to use the militant tactics which initially won the fundamental right to choose in the early 70's. The success of union efforts and large demonstrations during this time show that the way forward in

the fight for abortion rights is to maintain a consistent and high profile struggle for women's rights, and to let the anti-choicers know that whenever these rights are threatened, their anti-woman agenda will be opposed in the streets.

We are beginning to see such actions again - large rallies in support of a clinic for Ottawa, marches in defence of the Morgantaler clinic in Toronto, and recently in Halifax (Oct. 4th), a lively demonstration of 40 pro-choice activists (armed with placards and chants) which disrupted "Campaign Life" anti-choicers efforts to form a "life chain" across the bridge.

**Whenever the right-wing attempts to mobilize, they must be confronted. Whenever clinics are attacked, they must be defended.**

Social programs and benefits like maternity leave, subsidized day-care, medicare, etc. have been won through union activity and the mass mobilization of working people, the poor and the disadvantaged. Current access to abortion, limited as it is, was fought for by the movements for women's liberation and gay and lesbian rights. We need to defend and extend these gains so that we are not driven back into the closet, back into the kitchen and back to the backstreet abortionist.

Women are rightly angered by the degree of violence and sexism in our society. But we need to work from points of strength, not weakness; as activists, rather than "victims". A fightback on issues like abortion access, pay and employment equity, universal day-care, and against cuts to social services is crucial.

**So while we remember the victims of the Montreal shooting, let's work to change the society which gives rise to sexism and violence against women. DON'T JUST MOURN, ORGANIZE!**

KIM CUMMINGS, INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST CLUB

### In Memoriam

We remember the women who died in violence in Nova Scotia in the past year.

**Marilyn Rose Sabeau, 44**  
Halifax

**Mary Anne Lamrock, 26**  
East Pubnico

**Marie Lorraine Dupe, 47**  
Sydney

**Margaret Lorraine Mills Hahnuck, 24**  
Sydney

**Donna Warren, 22**  
North Sydney

**Deborah June Harvey, 38**  
Windsor

**Unnamed Woman, 39**  
Belle Cote

**Daisy Jean Jefferson, 50**  
Digby

**Beatrice Marie Wright, 41**  
Stellarton

We also remember

**Jane Hurshman-Corkum, 43**  
Dartmouth

for the witness she bore on violence against women

Nova Scotia  
Advisory Council  
on the Status of  
Women



Conseil consultatif  
sur la condition  
feminine de la  
Nouvelle-Ecosse

TAMARA THIEBAUX



WOMYN  
+  
ART

### INVASION

I lay there, as  
He presses probes penetrates with his  
white gloved hands  
I feel the sharp cramped pain in my stomach  
and cry out  
In the recess of my mind I hear his tired angry voice  
his hand pain-fully slides out, wet but  
satisfied.

She presses for answers, probes with question and  
penetrates with her needle.  
Her voice is precise but understanding.  
Confused thoughts curse through my mind  
en masse.  
The needle slides out containing blood.  
She has her answer.

Grace Ternani

### Escaping violence

An acquaintance of mine was recently beaten by her lover. The perpetrator is being kicked out of his university residence for his actions.

A high school friend left her partner who physically and verbally abused her. My mother used to babysit the abuser after school when he was a cute little seven-year-old who tried to entice his friends to eat worms.

A relative of mine verbally abuses his wife. He pushed her around, once (that I am aware of). She called the police. She knew what to do. It had happened before in a previous marriage.

Violence - physical, verbal, and sexual - against women is still prevalent in our society even with public awareness of the issue. It is not a new phenomenon, but it certainly is more recognized and less tolerated. More and more women refuse to put up with violence from men.

They refuse to put up with the fists, the taunts, and the being treated like whores. There are alternatives and women are learning that there is support for them and where to find it. There are support groups, there are sexual harassment committees, there are women's shelters (such as Adsum House and Bryony House), and there are programs for abusive men.

Women are learning that they do not have to put up with our patriarchal society's shit.

There are many "excuses" as to why men abuse women. Among these are issues of: power, cultural norms, economy, sexual insecurity, jealousy and mistrust, lack of effective communication, and stress. But can we really understand that someone beats his lover because he feels insecure? Can we really say, "That's okay. I know you were stressed out." I will never understand how someone can hurt someone they "love".

Of course, it is a combination of these underlying factors which cause violence that allow men to abuse, and women to be abused. But it is hard to understand and comfort the abuser - even if it is a friend or relative of mine.

M J HAMILTON