

EDITORIAL

Towards representative feminism

by Lynne Wanyeki

This year, no single issue has raised as much debate in this newspaper as feminism, evidenced by the almost weekly response in Blood and Thunder to the column The Wimmin's Room. Last week, I was approached by two men who professed their interest in beginning an alternate column to The Wimmin's Room. Their feeling was that The Wimmin's Room portrayed men in a stereotypical and false manner, and that it was not representative of all women. They have set for themselves then the rather curious task of striving to represent both men and the women who they claim hold alternative views to the feminism posited by the rotating group of writers for The Wimmin's Room. It will be really quite interesting to see how their column develops throughout the rest of the term - whether or not it remains reactive to the opinions they disagree with, or whether it will inevitably come to reflect a moderate feminist stance based on their own perceptions and thoughts of what would better the position of women and the relations between the sexes.

The question of whether or not feminism is capable of reflecting the concerns and goals of all women is certainly a valid one to raise - especially during this upcoming week. For International Women's Week begins this Sunday, March 1, 1992 and runs through to Sunday March 8, 1992. International Women's Week is a time to weigh the relevance of feminism not only to our own lives, but to the lives of women around the world. For if we are to celebrate International Women's Week at all, we should do so with a real consideration for what the words used to designate March 1 - 8 imply. The significance of the week becomes then grounded in a definition of feminism that is far larger than that which feminism is commonly assumed to denote.

During a lecture given in February here at UNB by the Canadian lesbian-feminist writer Daphne Marlatt, somebody remarked on the distinction to be made between the anti-sexist woman and the feminist woman. Certainly what propels many women to feminism are the personal feelings of being at complete odds with the social values and institutions that work in obvious and more subtle ways to devalue women and to detract from their own sense of well-being. The feminism that develops from an awareness of the functioning of such values and institutions in society and the will to deconstruct them could indeed be termed at the very least anti-sexist and at the very most, anti-patriarchal.

The problem with such a feminist politic is that it has a tendency, by its very definition, to be essentially reactive in nature. While no-one could deny that there is a hell of a lot to be reactive about, during International Women's Week perhaps we should look to a broader feminist politic which is not reactive, but proactive in nature. Proactive in that it seeks to genuinely understand what fragments women as individuals and divides women as a group *among ourselves as women*. A couple of lines from Daphne Marlatt's poetry collection *Salvaging* come to mind: "women are moving out of solitaire/into a clearer sense of what relates us". This will for solidarity among women is perhaps what transforms anti-sexism to feminism.

And this is where the question of whether or not feminism is capable of remaining accountable to all women comes into play. The granting of legislated status of women's groups within the existing system has worked in a curiously co-optive way, that has greatly narrowed our conception of "feminist" concerns. Women of colour have been talking for a long time now about the need to deal with race not just as an offshoot of patriarchy that will resolve itself when patriarchy no longer exists, but as a specific problem that women who term themselves feminist have to deal with among themselves. They question the notion of obtaining gender equality within a system from which they will continue to be excluded on the basis of race. Similarly, lesbian women are demanding that they no longer be pushed to the fringes of feminism so as to give feminism a respectable front that will not be resisted by society at large. And what of feminist professors who treat their female secretaries as being simply means to their personal and academic ends?

When we are talking about building upon the commonalities of women worldwide, the issue becomes even more complex. How is feminism relevant to women in the developing world, whose lives are consumed by very real and pressing economic and political concerns? And yet, how can we not call those concerns feminist when they certainly affect the lives of women? It is simply too easy to throw one's hands up in the air and say that there is only so much that one can deal with, that we must prioritize these concerns. Prioritization is too much akin to the traditional divide and conquer routine, and in doing so, we tend to lose sight of the larger vision.

In celebration of International Women's Week, the Brunswickan is publishing its second Women's Supplement, found on pages 17 - 24 of this issue.

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