

Maritime women fight for nature in their own way

By LOIS CORBETT

I speak for workers who clean up nuclear garbage

*radiation
contamination*

We soak it up like sponges; they pay us time and a half

No compensation for:

skin cancer

lung cancer

genetic damage

We keep reactors going to make plutonium to make more bombs.

(Excerpt from The Memorial Service)

I speak for uranium miners, dead and dying in:

Czechoslovakia

Australia

New Mexico

Elliot Lake.

Why didn't they tell us?

radon daughters

alpha particles

lung cancer

Why didn't they warn us?

genetic damage

our wives

our children

We spit blood to mine uranium to make the bombs

WE SPIT BLOOD TO MINE URANIUM TO MAKE THE BOMBS



Men build nuclear power plants in women's back yards ● They spray chemicals on forests where women's children play Robin Hood and his merry band of pilferers. ● They dump herbicides into brooks and springs, into waters that flow into women's wells. ● They drop bombs on women and their families. ● And so women have to rebuild and clean up men's mess; sweep up the nuclear power plant's garbage, keep their children out of the forests for weeks after the spraying, drink water and eat vegetables poisoned by chemicals and pull scattered families together out of war rubble. ● But most of all, women protest.

Maritime women protest men's violence to their native environment. Violence manifested in clear-cut forests, oil-gutted harbours, smoke-filled skies and sulphur-fumed air. The Maritime environmental movement is comprised largely of these women, their voices stronger now than ever before, who tirelessly take on men in government and business who debate environmental risk only in economic terms.

"Just take the pesticide issue for example. The professional line is that if we don't spray chemicals, then we'll lose our forests and we'll all be out of work. Well, that is simply a very narrow analysis of our economy and the role of the forest industry in that economy. It's the sledgehammer approach."

Janice Brown is the executive director of the Conservation Council of New Brunswick, a non-profit environmental protection group that has taken on both the federal and provincial governments over such issues as the building of a nuclear power plant at Point Lepreau, the spruce budworm spray program and more recently, the level of ground water contamination in the province. Brown has seen the sledgehammer tactics she talks about, a heavy, "one tool to do the job," approach to the economy that she says is ruining New Brunswick's environment.

"So women have to sit back and say that that approach is not good enough. There's

too much at stake here beyond jobs to allow them to make those easy statements and to take the easy route. I think women understand better the value of a natural ecosystem, the value of being able to safely drink your water or have your cattle graze in a field that is not sprayed with chemicals, or have your children play in a forest

that hasn't been sprayed," says Brown.

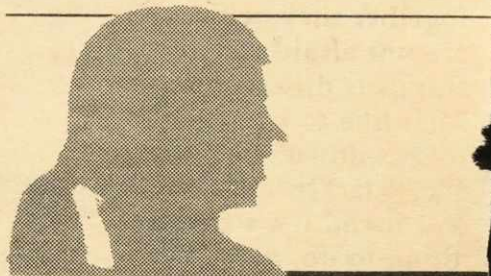
Maritime women like Brown have led community action on environmental issues for years, but the policies that actually shape the future course of the environment are designed, for the most part, without their input.

"At the moment, the power brokers are men, that's no secret. And it's not peculiar to the environmental realm either. I think a lot of the complaints that women have in an area, whether it's social issues, peace issues or human rights, are about who has the power and how decisions are made," says Brown.

Power over the environment, man against Mother Nature — that cruel force that combats regularly with heroes of male folklore — is represented not only in literature but in business and government. They alienate and separate the tree from the forest, and turn it into pulp for their paper. They harness a river's force with little regard for the lives that depend on the original system. They drain man-made chemicals and pollutants into the ground and the waters around their plants, or build higher and higher smokestacks to "diffuse" the environment-killing particles over a wider area of land.

Opposed to men's image as foes with nature is women's perception of themselves as life-creators and preservers. Women have a symbiotic relationship with nature; men want to control and dominate her. Many women parallel men's violence against the earth with violence against women and other groups, and link that violence with man's desire for dominance. And that analysis joins environmentalists with feminists. Both groups are outside the political and social mainstream of society and both want to see change. They also overlap in membership.

Donna Smyth, a Nova Scotia writer, peace activist, and professor at Acadia University in Wolfville, says her exposure to the women's movement in the early 1970s was valuable when she decided to get back into the environmental movement. Smyth has the somewhat unusual claim as one who has taken on the nuclear power industry and won.



After a three-year court battle, a jury said she did not defame the character of Dr. Leo Yaffe, then president of the Chemical Institute of Canada when she said Yaffe's stand on the nuclear issue was political rather than scientific. "It is obvious that he is neither objective nor impartial," her article in the *Halifax Chronicle Herald* read. —"He is only one of many 'experts' the nuclear industry will parade in front of us in their desperate attempt to sell 'nuclear' to Nova Scotia."

Both Brown and Smyth have taken on the issue of nuclear power, with mixed results. The New Brunswick government has already built one nuclear power station in Point Lepreau, and is seriously considering a second one, if it can find a market for the electricity in the United States.