

WHAT'S LEFT

by Mike Walker

I initially thought it might be presumptuous of me to write on violence against women, since only women experience it and my sex perpetrates it. Now, after writing this, I am still uneasy about it but it's too late. I hope women readers aren't insulted by what follows.

Jailing the victim perpetuates the crime

Last week, an Ontario woman was jailed for contempt of court after she refused to testify against her lover, who was charged with assaulting her.

Normally police are reluctant to lay charges against men who assault women - they consider "domestic matters" best left alone. In Ontario and Manitoba, however, the provincial governments have instructed police to lay charges against men automatically in these cases. The changes are the result of pressure from women's groups; they are a victory for women. They take the onus to press charges off the woman, who is often intimidated and confused. But what the judge did in this case was clearly no victory for any woman.

The woman in this case had not wanted the man charged in the first place; she had requested a peace bond to keep him away from her for the time being. She intended to marry him. So, she refused to testify against him and is now serving three months in jail. We may think it is unwise for her to protect a man who beat her. It is sad that many women, for one reason or another, are unwilling to prosecute men who beat them. But if a woman has contradictory

feelings about, or is intimidated by, her assailant, intimidation and coercion by the courts will not help. Women who are the victims of male violence need counselling and support from other women, not coercion from a judge.

The recent case of an Ottawa rape victim jailed for refusing to testify may appear some what different in that she refused because she was afraid of reprisal from the rapist. But at the centre is the same issue: the victim was jailed for being unwilling to put away the man who had violated her.

What is happening here? Regardless of the good intentions (sometimes) of those who make the laws, the judicial system seems to be quite able to victimize women. Either their batterers are not charged, or they are and then the women are forced to testify against them. What they need is, first, an acknowledgement of their fear and confusion, and second, a way to fight back. Jailing the victim does neither. If this practice becomes common, many fewer women will call police if they are raped or beaten.

Women need to fight back: that is the only real solution to violence against women. Automatic charges against men who assault women should strengthen women's positions. Counselling by other women for the victims of rape and other violence would strengthen women. Jailing them if they are scared or don't want to hurt men they love does not strengthen women, it weakens them, and thus helps to perpetuate violence against women.

CHOPPING BLOCK

by Jens Andersen

Here is another snippet from the Canadian University Press (CUP) conference held over the Christmas holidays:

At the opening plenary a motion was put on the floor to "take measures" against the distribution of competing papers on campuses where CUP papers are published (CUP has about 53 member papers, including papers on most of the major university campuses in the country).

I spoke against the motion, saying that despite being from a campus where a sleazy competition rag is published, such actions would be dictatorial and against free speech, and would provide devastating ammunition to people who could point out our allegedly idealistic and anti-monopolistic stance (in other areas). I also point out that such rags can be fought decently by printing a better paper, and by pointing out one's superiority to the other paper's advertisers, thus destroying their financial base. Others spoke against the motion's vagueness, and it was tabled.

At the midweek plenary, the motion was again put on the floor, this time amended to "take measures" against the distribution of "profit-motivated, private media ventures, not recognized by legitimate student organizations." Debate was opened.

I had instant reservations about the motion: all newspapers must by their very nature be profit-motivated (staff, supplies, and printing do cost money), and the slippery phrase "legitimate student organizations" opens the door for a thousand abuses. Who is to judge legitimacy? Biased opposition newspapers who have a vested interest in the matter?

I was counting on other people to speak while I gathered my thoughts. Surprisingly, no one did. A few seconds later we were voting on the motion.



Gateway and a few others voted against, but it passed with a fairly solid majority.

I wasn't overly worried, and even a bit pleased, because now I had time to assemble my arguments and polish them, preferably in writing, to get the matter reconsidered at the final plenary. I wrote a note calling for reconsideration, and put it in an article for publication in the conference newsletter, which would come out just prior to the final plenary. For some reason it never appeared, probably due to the chaotic state of newsletter publishing. Or, less likely, it may have been due to the "spinsters" who had take over the xerox machine (see Tuesday's Gateway) and who were making noises about censoring articles they didn't like (paranoia strikes deep!)

At any rate, I could still bring the matter up at the final plenary, if only verbally (God, how I hate the imprecise, ephemeral, transient nature of talk). The final plenary, however, stretched out until the early morning hours. I had been short of sleep all week, so at 4 AM, during some less important business, I recessed for a short nap. I woke up at nine, just as the conference adjourned. No one else brought up the issue.

The upshot is that the policy still sits on the books, waiting for the moment when some shrewd publisher explodes it in our face.

Postscript: As I was writing this column, my biggest objection just occurred to me: what makes CUP think only an accepted newspaper, i.e. a mouthpiece of some interest group like students, has a right to exist? Individuals have some rights of expression too, and they may object to being mouthpieces for anyone, or having to grovel for "recognition".

This "recognition" bullshit, I suspect, has its origin in Marx's theory - now accepted even by many liberals and right-wingers - that social history is merely the result of class antagonisms, that individuals are merely creatures of their class background, and that the opinions they express are merely group opinions.

Just for the record, I would like to present a contrary conservative theory: that all significant social history is the result of salient individuals, that these individuals are rebels from their class background, and that their world-shaking opinions are usually objectionable, not only to their own class, but to all others.

Nietzsche and Marx are prime examples. The former came from a good Christian background, and the latter began life respectably bourgeois. Just look what happened.

Bear Country



by Shane Berg

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