

## Broadside

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## The Long, Hard Road

*Item:* At Bishop's, an English-language University in Quebec, students held a book burning recently. Up in smoke went their Annual Student Handbook, while its gay editor lay in hospital badly beaten. He had come-out as a homosexual and the Handbook contained some local tips for gays, such as "Lennoxville has no gay bars." (Source: *The Body Politic*, November 1980)

*Item:* At the same time in Toronto, the country's most 'progressive' Board of Education was holding a public meeting to discuss the possibility of liaison with the gay community. The Toronto board has a number of such liaison committees with various segments of the public. A liaison committee with gays would have merely acknowledged the existence of homosexual students, teachers and parents and their special problems in a heterosexist society.

With full collaboration from a number of Board members, including the Chair, the meeting was taken over by right-wing bigots, many clutching bibles. In this spirit of Christian charity it became a hate-fest. As one woman expressed it afterwards: "If they'd had guns we would all be dead,"

Another commented: "Now I know how the Jews felt surrounded by Nazis."

At a subsequent meeting the idea of the liaison committee died a quick death as Board members vied with each other to assure the public that Toronto would not 'promote' homosexuality in its school system. As a sop to liberal consciences the Board added that neither will it practice discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Having made sure that homosexual students, teachers and other employees would stay safely in the closet and thus that its anti-discrimination rhetoric would not be put to the test, the board proceeded to more important matters involved in the education of our young — lessons in book-burning, perhaps?

Too bad that the Board meeting had not been full of civil libertarians, as it should have been. It would have been a revelation to them, an education and a consciousness-raising event of some impact. Too many of them like to believe that things have changed, that with higher profile gays have acquired 'rights' which are now protected. It is easy to believe that only weirdos trash and only weirdos get trashed, then the mat-

ter becomes of no consequence, not a 'good issue.' Civil libertarians may want to avoid making the obvious connection between what happened at the board, the book-burning at Bishop's, and the everyday life of a large section of the population. But feminists must make the connection. The oppression of lesbians is part and parcel of women's oppression. Intellectually, feminists accept that the control of our sexuality underpins patriarchy. We understand that the issue of lesbianism, along with abortion and access to better birth-control methods, is at the centre of our struggle against domination at the most basic level. That is what makes it a feminist issue par excellence. But there is a long, hard road between political awareness and practical application, which may produce personal discomfort and risk. Like other progressives, some feminists do not want to walk that road. They prefer to concentrate on other 'important' issues.

If combatting the viciousness of rampant homophobia is *not* on their list of priorities then there is something wrong with our liberal educators, civil libertarians and feminist activists.

— E.Z. for the Collective

## Necessary Abstraction

To a great extent, theory has been a thorn in the side of feminism. This may be a good sign rather than a bad one. Our difficulties in developing a complete theory exist simply because feminism covers so much ground; sexuality and reproduction, political institutions, social institutions like the family, economic structures — in a word, life. And, while some of us may have mused with mock seriousness over the meaning of life, it has been the feminist imperative to come up with just that — a definition, a rational approach that places all the issues feminism touches under a single umbrella.

Those explorers who have ventured onto theoretical terrain, particularly early in this so-called second wave, never really covered all the ground. Kate Millett, after incisively analyzing selected literary texts, meandered in the last pages of *Sexual Politics* through some vague notions of socialism and pacifism; the promise of a more substantial theory was never kept by Germaine Greer in her genitally fixated *Female Eunuch*; Shulamith Firestone in *The Dialectic of Sex* and Juliette Mitchell in *Women's Estate* could not have accomplished what they did without Karl Marx's methodology. These valiant attempts were followed by the never-ending series of 'Women and Anything'

books, and except for Mary Daly's *Gyn-Ecology*, which was gloriously descriptive but weak when it came to the tougher prescriptive elements, we have made only limited progress. We enter the eighties still without a theory.

Three articles published in this issue of *Broadside* give an indication of how wide our range must be if we are ever to emerge with a complete feminist theory. *The Sexism of Social and Political Theory*, reviewed here, is a collection of essays, academic in tone, which remind us that there is a substantial body of political thought, elements of which have to be examined from a feminist perspective and accepted and/or rejected before we can start again on our own. The fact is that the fathers (a word used advisedly here) of social theory did address the fundamental question of oppression. Our abilities to do the same can be enhanced if we understand the approaches of philosophers from Plato to Nietzsche and where they failed.

The editors of this collection, Lorene Clark and Lynda Lange, have also given us some fundamental guidelines for a complete social theory, the most important being the recognition of reproduction as a basic element of political life. Artemis March

comes to the same conclusion independently and has developed a paradigm for feminist theory, complete with matrices and definitions, that *Broadside* has the good fortune to publish this month.

And if that were not enough, Judith Quinlan, in the first of a two part article, tells us that before we can understand patriarchy, we have to understand what it replaced. Quinlan gives us another viewpoint. She fashions an argument for the existence of a matriarchal social order that preceded the political and social culture which Plato and his successors represent and which Artemis March analyzes. And so we must not only have a historical perspective and a grounding in difficult texts. It is not enough even to have the methodology Artemis March is able to devise. We must have a pre-historical perspective as well. In the next issue of *Broadside*, we will publish the second part of Quinlan's article and will continue to examine other larger and complex issues in our centre spread. The subject will be socio-biology.

If we've shown that there are a number of women who are thinking clearly it is to illustrate that the intellectual content of the women's movement is strong. It has to be if we want the movement to be taken seriously.

—S.G.C. for the Collective

## Broadside

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The Broadside Collective does not necessarily share the views contained in any article, even if the by-line belongs to a collective member. Views of the Collective are expressed **only** in editorials, and essays signed by the Collective.

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## This is Broadside

No, you're right. There hasn't been an issue of *Broadside* since mid-September. This month we are publishing a double issue: October and November combined. Next month it's business as usual. Our reasons for not printing in October relate to the Public Service Alliance strike, which affected mail delivery. September's *Broadside* sat in mail bags in our office for a week while the postal service shut down. We decided not to take a chance on the same thing happening to the October issue.

Now that *Broadside* is over a year old, the question of subscription renewals arises. For most of our charter subscribers, subscriptions will be expiring in the next month or two. Sending individual reminders to subscribers is an expensive proposition, so we hope this announcement, and other subtle notices splashed about the pages of this month's paper, will galvanize you to action. The date on your address label indicates the expiry date of your sub.

You might also want to take advantage of the special holiday gift subscription rates to send *Broadside* to some of your more

deserving friends. Fill out the renewal and/or gift sub forms on the back page. You won't be disappointed in the results.

For those of you who have been clamouring for a chance to join the *Broadside* work force (and add to the country's unemployment statistics) your chance will be coming up in December. Come to our OPEN FORUM — Monday, December 8th at 7:30 pm, YWCA Resource Centre, 15 Birch Avenue, Toronto — and sign on the dotted line. Or...just come to talk. All women are welcome.

And finally, in our ever-changing attempts to improve *Broadside's* office operations, we are pleased to announce: (a) a "work-day" every Tuesday morning, when collective members will be in attendance and all are welcome to drop in (phone the office for directions); and (b) we have had an answering service hooked up, so you will be able to call the office any time of the week and your requests will not go unheeded.



Remembrance Day cenotaph

Sarah MacKenzie