



New York, 1976 is the first we've been able to trace of the night marches about street violence against women in this "2nd wave" of feminism of the last two decades. But the women of Leeds, England say they were inspired, not from New York, but by reading of similar actions in Germany.

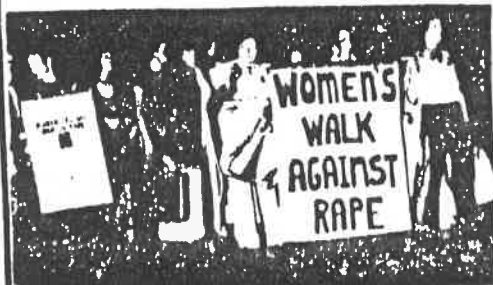
Two years ago, a woman moved from Germany to Vancouver and taught us women at Rape Relief about WALPURGIS, "The Night of the Witches", which is celebrated throughout Northern Europe.

April 30th was an important date throughout Europe in pre-Christian times. It is still celebrated traditionally by a few, but the main event has been "modernised" as a night for bonfires and kids (similar to the Christianisation of our Halloween).

Modern feminists have revived the witchiness of the original tradition by staging their version of "Take Back the Night" marches on this date.

We take inspiration from what has gone before us -- often transforming tradition into something totally new -- sometimes discovering an amazing continuity of female resistance that is centuries old!

*Drena*



**DATELINE: NEW YORK 1976**

Since women began actively organising against rape in the early '70's, our battles have been hard fought and our victories have been few and far between. For those who have been involved in anti-rape organising for several years, morale has often been low in spite of these victories. This is due, in part, to the necessity of facing a continuing onslaught of victims, diminishing financial resources, cooptation, and other negative forces. Even after a self-defense class or a speech with a responsive audience, the phones at rape crisis centres keep ringing, as though all our work were powerless to stop the agony of the women on the other end of the line.

At times we desperately need actions which show our collective strength and commitment to each other, and our determination to drive the threat and fear of rape out of our lives. The New York Women's Walk Against Rape, which took place on the night of August 4, 1976 in Central Park, was the kind of action/event we need to lift our spirits and renew our strength for continuing struggle. A coalition of over 20 women's groups, led by the Rape Prevention Committee of New York N.O.W., organised the march. Close to 1,000 women sang, shouted and marched their way through an area usually avoided like the plague by women during the day, as well as after dark. Yolanda Baker, of the Rape Prevention Committee, stated afterward:

"When we entered the park at the Women's Gate you should have seen how strong we looked and sounded chanting 'Women United Will Never be Defeated', 'Rape is Violence, Not Sex', 'Enter the Park After Dark', 'Fight for the Right to Walk at Night', 'Women Fight Back at Men Who Attack'. You should have seen the looks on the faces of the night-life/subculture men who regularly roam the park. They could not stand the fact that we were invading their space."

Support for the march was widespread and media coverage was good. Articles in the Times, The Post, The Daily News, and Newsday described the action, usually in supportive terms. In addition to lifting the spirits, the Women's Walk Against Rape allowed women to escape for a short time from the rape-modified behaviour we usually exhibit and take control over our bodies long enough to enjoy a moonlight walk in the park. It was a visible demonstration to the denizens of New York City's Central Park that women have the right to that control, and that we will continue to extend that right to all women and children.

(Source: F.A.A.R. (Feminist Alliance Against Rape), Washington, D.C. 1976).

**DATELINE: LEEDS, ENGLAND 1977**

The first 'Reclaim the Night' demonstrations in Britain were held in eleven different towns simultaneously, in November, 1977. The original impetus came from women in Leeds, who were angry at the Ripper murders and had read of such demonstrations by feminists in Germany. 'Reclaim the Night' was innovative because it was also a celebration; a night when, as the name indicates, women for once took over the streets for themselves, singing, dancing, and brandishing torches.

The Leeds organisers were, however, criticised for their choice of route. Erika Dwek explained that "it was decided to march from Chapeltown because it was the very place where a 16 year-old girl had been found dead earlier in that year -- to make a commemoration for that young girl; to say: we have not forgotten you, and we will try to make a safer space for women, for the future."

Chapeltown, however, has a mainly black population. The only time many white men care about sexual violence is where they can use it against black people, by portraying black men as all being out to rape 'their' women. Some Asian feminists, therefore, were angry because a march through the area, by (mainly) white women, could be misinterpreted, "and anything that plays into the hands of racists certainly doesn't help black women; it just means we face more violence as blacks, on top of what we also get as women."

A second Leeds 'Reclaim the Night' was held a year later, with another route. Erika does not feel that "a great change will happen, on its own, because women take to the streets and reclaim the night -- I see it as a consciousness raising action, to show that women can be safe if we are together. As a night for throwing off our powerlessness. A night for confidence. But Reclaim the Night is not the be-all and end-all. It is a beginning, and from it there will be off-shoots -- like in Leeds it evolved into the Rape Crisis group being set up. We need to find new methods, different methods, all the time."

(Source: SPARE RIB, a women's liberation magazine, June 1979).

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If you're keen on finding out more you may want to look at a few more broadsheets in our "Rape Relief Files":

- see file:
- \*\* TAKE BACK THE NIGHT - American History
  - \*\* TAKE BACK THE NIGHT - Traditions
  - \*\* TAKE BACK THE NIGHT - March Checklist
  - \*\* TAKE BACK THE NIGHT - Canadian History
  - \*\* TAKE BACK THE NIGHT - Vancouver History
  - \*\* TAKE BACK THE NIGHT - Agit-Prop
  - \*\* WHO IS THIS MAN, PATTISON?
  - \*\* SONGS OF RESISTANCE

And, for further information on the international movement and traditions of "Taking Back the Night" or "Reclaiming the Night" in other countries, you may want to find some of these books:

- RAPE: THE PRICE OF COERCIVE SEXUALITY, Lorene Clark & Debra Lewis (Canadian)
- FIGHT BACK! Feminist Resistance to Male Violence, ed. by Delacoste & Newman (U.S.)
- TAKE BACK THE NIGHT: Women on Pornography, ed. by Laura Lederer (U.S.)
- WOMEN, RACE & CLASS, Angela Y. Davis (U.S.)
- WOMEN & MALE VIOLENCE: The Visions and Struggles of the Battered Women's Movement, Susan Schechter (U.S.)
- WOMEN AT W.A.R., Women Against Rape (London, England)
- The Proceedings of the International Tribunal on CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN, compiled and edited by Russell & Van de Ven, (U.S.) \*\* Brussels, 1976 \*\*
- NEWSLETTER OF C.A.S.A.C. (The Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centres). Past issues available from our library.

**DATELINE: VANCOUVER, CANADA 1978**

An ad-hoc group calling themselves the 'Fly-by-Night' Collective organised the first Take Back the Night in Vancouver. They marched in the rain through the West End to the beach, carrying an effigy which they set alight. En route, they were interfered with by a police car, but refused to allow individual women to be isolated. They surrounded the police car, covered it with stickers, and chanted, "Take one, take all." They had come in witch costumes to protect violence against women on the streets of this city, and the fact that women are never safe from sexist attacks.

(Source: the library of Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter).

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DATELINE: VANCOUVER, CANADA 1980

The August 2nd action, Women Take Back the Night, developed as a result of a mandate given members of the Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centres at their recent national conference.

Women Take Back the Night actions are being coordinated across Canada on the evening of August 2nd. In each region, the marches begin at 10:00 p.m. In Vancouver, the march will move through the working-class neighbourhood of the east end around Britannia Community Centre.

(Source: KINESIS, August 1980).

### 300 WOMEN MARCH IN RAPE PROTEST

About 300 women marched for an hour and a half Saturday night in the neighbourhood around the Britannia Community Centre in a symbolic gesture to "take" back the night from rapists.

But, said a member of Rape Relief, which helped organise the event, marches are not enough to solve the problem.

"We need men to stop raping," said Lee Lakeman. "I don't think I'll see an end to rape in my lifetime. This is just another move in a long struggle."

Unlike a 1978 march downtown which ended in a melee with women spraypainting slogans on walls and harassing motorists, Saturday's protest was peaceful. Motorcycle policemen stood guard on either end of the line of women but the women stopped the traffic themselves.

A pair of youths in a car attempted to break through the marchers at one point but quickly left the area after the women refused to give way, instead joining forces in front of the car.

Women waved flashlights and chanted slogans -- "Yes means yes, no means no, whatever we wear, wherever we go" and "Women unite, take back the night" -- in several languages in an attempt to draw neighbourhood women from their homes and were rewarded when a few housewives joined the march.

Men were excluded from joining the march. Reporters were barred from speeches by women's groups after the march.

(Source: The Vancouver Sun, Monday, August 4, 1980).

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DATELINE: MONTREAL, QUEBEC 1982

Over 3,500 women, many of them accompanied by their children, gathered in Parc Laurier Friday, September 17, at 7:30 p.m. for the beginning of the march "la rue, la nuit, femmes sans peur".

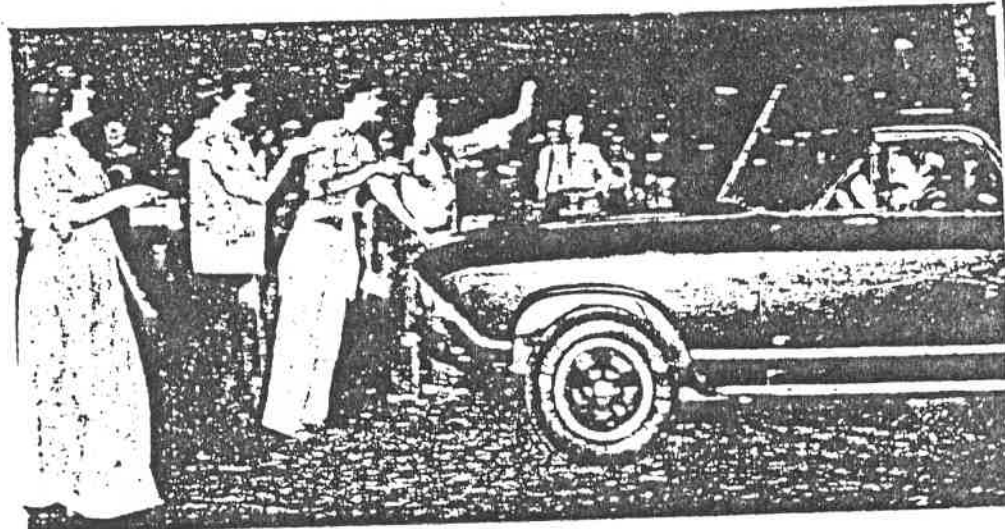
Coordinated in Montreal by the Comité ad hoc du Mouvement Contre le Viol, similar demonstrations were held on the same day in many other cities in Quebec, Canada, the United States and Europe, organised by local rape crisis centres and associations.

Women participated in the demonstration in order to show their refusal to accept the violence and harassment with which they live on a daily basis, to support each other and to celebrate their solidarity. There were many banners and placards and slogans which communicated the demonstrations' message:

la rue, la nuit, c'est a nous, femmes de nuit a l'affut, liberte de prendre la rue, nous fetons notre appui, prenons la rue et la nuit and les ruelles, la nuit, c'est a nous.

This last slogan will no doubt remind women of the dangers awaiting for them in lanes, places where we as women are 'forbidden'. We chanted it loudly every time we passed a lane. This aggressive attitude on the part of the marchers was spontaneous. Unfortunately, our feelings that night did not have the power to change our lives for once and for all so that we could live in peace and without fear.

(Source: COMMUNIQUELLES, Montreal, Nov./Dec. 1982).



DATELINE: LONDON, ENGLAND 1979

On October 31st, Halloween, about 200 women met at Leicester Square to reclaim the night and protest about rape and other forms of violence against women. Many women were dressed as witches and carrying torches--giving out leaflets as they walked to explain why they were marching through Soho. The joyful atmosphere of women chanting and feeling good together didn't last long. The march reached the New Swedish Cinema Club and, according to many women present, a man came out of the club carrying a stool with which he hit one of the women over the head. At this point, the police arrived and started grabbing women and dragging them away. Over thirty women were injured in some way: three had to be taken to hospital with head injuries and many were badly bruised. There was apparently no warning: the police just piled out of vans and began striking out with their truncheons, viciously hitting women on all parts of their bodies.

Sixteen women were arrested and charged with offences including obstruction, threatening and insulting behaviour, assault and actual bodily harm. A police spokesperson said that, "injuries to more than thirty women were fairly slight, mainly blows on the head and that sort of thing." (Time Out, Nov. 10-16). There is to be no internal inquiry about the use of police violence.

The Guardian was the only one of the national dailies that gave any coverage of Reclaiming the Night; London's Time Out magazine devoted an article to it -- so yet again the use of police violence remains invisible to most people in this country.

On the two previous Reclaim the Nights the role of the police was noticeably different; their presence was more as on-lookers attempting to keep us from too much mischief. Presumably orders were given to keep a low profile, yet this time it is obvious that the police arrived with very different intentions. It is also noteworthy that the women who were most badly injured were not arrested.

The tactics used against us must be related to the growing right-wing backlash (determination to control society) taking place; whilst the police openly escort the National Front marches through the streets. There is an obvious use of violence against any left-wing supporters as in the Grunwick picket. A local law-centre in Hillingdon has had its funds stopped for being too political by displaying contentious posters (Anti-Nazi League). On October 28th, the police raided a National Abortion Campaign benefit disco and arrested five organisers for selling drink illegally. It cannot be coincidental that the growing interest of the police in the women's movement follows the arrest of Aspid Proff -- now a convinced feminist.

These events throw up many questions for us as a political movement. Tolerated until we step across the invisible line and become a serious force. We are now being taken seriously in some respects and it is important that in future we know the law and take precautions to minimise our vulnerability. How do we deal with male violence in a situation like Reclaiming the Night? We must not be unprepared again.

(Source: Women's Report, London, Jan. 1979).

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ANDREA DWORKIN  
from "Pornography and Grief"

Tonight we are going to walk together, all of us, to take back the night, as women have in cities all over the world, because in every sense none of us can walk alone. Every woman walking alone is a target. Every woman walking alone is hunted, harassed, time after time harmed by psychic or physical violence. Only by walking together can we walk at all with any sense of safety, dignity, or freedom. Tonight, walking together, we will proclaim to the rapists and pornographers and woman-batterers that their days are numbered and our time has come. And tomorrow, what will we do tomorrow? Because, sisters, the truth is that we have to take back the night every night, or the night will never be ours. And once we have conquered the dark, we have to reach for the light, to take the day and make it ours. This is our choice, and this is our necessity. It is a revolutionary choice, and it is a revolutionary necessity. For us, the two are indivisible, as we must be indivisible in our fight for freedom. Many of us have walked many miles already—brave, hard miles—but we have not gone far enough. Tonight, with every breath and every step, we must commit ourselves to going the distance: to transforming this earth on which we walk from prison and tomb into our rightful and joyous home. This we must do and this we will do, for our own sakes and for the sake of every woman who has ever lived.

PRANO 00, 1981

### Underlying Principles for Take Back the Night March

#### Principle One: Self-determination for women

All people have the right to control our own bodies and sexuality. WE should not have to restrict our freedom of movement, our bodies or our activities and behaviour in order to be safe. WE have the right to freedom from violation of our personal autonomy and our physical integrity on the street, in the home and at the work place.

#### Principle Two: Power for women

To stop violence against women and to exercise the right to control our own bodies, women need power.

Women can become powerful by organizing together to express our will. Women need to see that an act of violence against one woman is an act of violence against us all.

#### Principle Three: Self-defense for women

Women have the right to self-defense. Self-defense is the ability, both physically and psychologically, to defend oneself against violence. WE must understand how an individual woman perceives the threat of violence against her, and her ability to fight back (her size, training, self-concept) when we judge a situation involving self-defense.

#### Principle Four: Community censure of violence against women

People must speak out and condemn violence against women as it happens. This means no more complicity: we are asking for a public expression of disapproval — that we will not tolerate violence against women.



Vancouver, 1984

## MALE VIOLENCE FEMALE DILEMMA

Halowe'en was Reclaim the Night International. In Edinburgh for instance women 'Reclaimed the Meadows' - notorious for sexual assault. Dressed as witches they swarmed across the park and down to the city centre, singing and shouting. But in London the march was disastrous. Anny Brackx raises some questions.

- Taken from Spare Rib, November 1978

The words women's liberation movement seem to make a little red light flash these days at Scotland Yard. Every so often they must mark out an area as subversive, which they then keep an eye on and try to wear down by frightening people into passivity. But maybe the police raid on a London National Abortion Campaign benefit is not connected with the police brutality a few days later against women trying to reclaim the night from male domination and violence. I wouldn't be surprised though if Astrid Proll's feminism had set them sniffing around.

What happened made me think about our politics and practice, and specifically the way we confront male violence, with or without blue helmets. I started re-reading some early feminist writings; Carol Hanisch's 'Critique of the Miss America Protest' (Nov. '68) was especially useful but also depressing. It seems we haven't learnt much in ten years.

Here are some questions all this threw up for me, which some of us are beginning to discuss:

\*\* We definitely need better pre-action planning. The problem is how to be organised, without falling into the rigid party discipline trap, which stifles individual imagination and diminishes personal responsibility. Is it ever worth getting arrested? What happens if we get split up? How do we deal with each other's reactions to violence?

\*\* What was inspiring about Reclaim the Night - for women watching as well as those taking part - was that our presence itself was a political act - women making the night safe by their togetherness. Before, we had got away with acting spontaneously - we took everybody by surprise. This time we d-dn't, and we won't next time if we don't sit down and do some thinking about male violence: how we can subvert, counter or avoid it.

\*\* We need to clarify whether our actions are designed to reach as many women as possible, or whether they are mainly confrontations with male power. Sometimes they cancel each other out; we might have to choose or separate them out - mass propaganda events, and zap-guerrilla actions.

\*\* We shouldn't get stuck in a rut (Reclaim the Night can become a ritual too) We must continue to devise different ways of operating as our feminist consciousness grows and changes. There's a lot we can learn from the non-violent tactics of the '60s, and from the suffragettes... There are also many ways of exposing rapists and consumers of pornography. They often operate in the dark, and that's no accident. Let's expose them; photograph them going into pornshops, identify rapists, paint the word over their houses and workplaces....

\* Voices from Women's Liberation - Mentor Press



Calgary, 1983

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# Saskatchewan Working Women Ask ...

January, 1983.

Dear Sister:

Saskatchewan Working Women is developing a policy paper regarding violence against women. We are particularly interested in examining the question within the context of a class analysis. We would like to see policy papers from other organisations. Would you please send us a copy of your group's statement of philosophy or policy paper on the issue? If there are books or other sources that were particularly useful to your group in developing an analysis and historical perspective on violence against women, we would appreciate knowing what they are.

SWW is a women's labour organisation. Our objectives are: To provide a network of solidarity specifically with

women workers in Saskatchewan and on a broader basis with men and women in the labour force; to unite women in the organised labour movement; to encourage and assist unorganised women to organise; and to work for the improvement of working conditions, wages, hours of work, job security, daycare, and other conditions of importance to working women.

In the last few years, we have been asked to cosponsor Take Back the Night Marches. This has raised a number of questions about actions on the issue of violence against women in terms of racism and discrimination on the basis of class. Hence the wish to develop a position paper.

Some of the questions that were raised in an initial committee meeting about the policy development are:

- how do we define violence?
- what are the causes of violence generally?
- what is the cause of violence against women?
- what is the effect of violence against women?
- what other groups or classes of people suffer violence?
- Who benefits from violence against women and in what way? Especially,
- what class?
- From what socio-economic class and race are convicted rapists?
- For what purpose do women use violence?

Our discussions are in the preliminary stage. If you have any pearls of wisdom, please pass them on to us.

In Sisterhood.

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# Vancouver Rape Relief Replies ...

Dear Sisters:

Your letter is a treat. There is, of course, too much to share in any one letter. But we hope that some of our experience can be of use to you. You will find enclosed reading lists. This Rape Relief Centre has operated for ten years. We have been a collective throughout that time. Two members have worked here for over four years, and several for more than three. We also have new members. Every one of us deals with two or three women attacked by men every week -- so the evidence is abundant.

We can only extrapolate from our experience to answer your questions and we consider our theories to be just that. We start with the observation that women, poor people and wage labourers and people of colour have very little control over our lives. And that a poor woman of colour has least of all -- in Canada, this year. And that white, middle and upper class men have most of all.

We can see that this pyramid of power is constantly reconstructed by lies, institutions, economic pressure and brute force. We define violence as the brute force used to harm or threaten harm. When violence is applied, we believe that all the people above the person harmed gain or maintain privilege and/or power. We believe that is useful for the people on the bottom to group against our common bosses to protect ourselves, and to take power for ourselves. We can also see poor people recognise a reason to join forces with each other, as do people of colour and women. In each case we think that the leadership should be in the hands of the oppressed. We think that women may be in all three groups and that women must support people of colour and working class people and each reversed.

We also think that there are complicated chains of control designed to pit us against each other and prevent our alliances against rich, white men.

In 1983, the violence done to women in Canada is largely done by the men we know -- teachers, husbands, fathers, grandfathers, doctors, friends of brothers, landlords, bosses, sons, neighbours, dates, friends of husbands. We are also attacked by strangers, but much less often. The social service machinery hides these facts by referring to the sexual terrorism of these men by different names: incest, child abuse, wife abuse, sexual harassment, sexual assault, rape -- and by prescribing a different solution to each situation: (usually one which requires the woman to assume at least some, if not all, the blame; and usually which requires the woman to accept some state prescribed control) pills, counselling, assertiveness training, group home care, etc. Another usual state response is to require the women to accept confinement in the form of curfews, dress codes, no hitching, abstinence from verbal rebellion, 'self-imposed' sexual taboos.

Not all women are raped, although we estimate at least one in four of us is attacked sometime over our lifetime. The rest of us certainly get the message.

We know that a woman who is attacked will be marked as rebellious and suffer exclusion from any hope of being 'chosen' to escape class and race oppression by the men who have the power to select a few tokens from each generation of young women. We also know that rebel women are considered fair game for any man who can overpower us. We lose the 'protection' of the chivalrous and suffer the punishment of the 'righteous'. And, while it does not improve the status of a man to marry, rape, incestuously assault a woman 'above his station', it does lower her status.

Women are afraid to live alone, avoid marriage, drink alone, walk late at night, work in a male job preserve, be verbally abusive, refuse sexual advances from men. We think all men benefit. To some extent, men must be considered to benefit from the oppression of women as a class.

Of course, men at the top gain even more wealth and power by keeping poor men pitted against us and men of colour even more isolated from the alliances that could serve us all. And, while it is still fashionable to accuse the women's movement, as we are organised, of a failure to fight the burden of the working class and people of colour, it is still rare to find an anti-sexist man in any political group in Canada. And we are only beginning to see alliances initiated by men for the benefit of women as a group.

There are tricks played on us all to prevent our understanding. From four or five years of age we are warned against strangers -- the least of our worries. In court, all pretend that only one man is to blame. Sociologists and criminologists study the incarcerated as the typical rapist, ignoring not only the 2% conviction rate, but also the racist and classist nature of the courts and their decisions.

Sociologists, in studying the abuse of women by their husbands ask themselves how much is O.K? How much can be considered discipline? How much is provoked? They legitimate the excusing questions. Men buy young women as sexual slaves on Canadian streets and then pretend a simple business transaction, as though between equals. And the officials respond by arresting the women or proposing to limit their freedom of movement to some part of the city or licensing this act so that more men can profit. And this response passes for tolerance.

In our experience Canadian women and the other women who reside here use violence much less often than men. When we do it is usually to protect our children and/or ourselves.

In your letter it sounds as though you do not include the vast majority of poor women in your "class analysis". We consider the working class to be composed of many women who are not paid at all.

There are many issues that you could be debating -- it's hard to read between the lines. Are you questioning the use of the courts by women against attackers? Are you questioning the class composition of the organised women's movement? Of our branch? How we carry out our specific alliance?

It's hard to know how much you already know. Hope you will question us further.

Ours is a collective with a large working class caucus, in alliance with an East Indian women's group against sexist violence and the B.C. Organisation to Fight Racism and the Canadian Farmworkers Union. We have been participants in the major coalitions against welfare cuts, regularly support strikers with our names and bodies. We participated last year on the steering committee of May Day with the Communist Party among others, have worked fairly closely with In Struggle members and are presently being supported by members of Socialist Challenge (all Canadian communist groups). We received money from union local every year or two. We are also very active members of the B.C. Federation of Women, and through that coalition support the work of Women Against Imperialism. We are also active members of the Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centres and have helped to create working class, lesbian and third world women's caucuses at that level.

Please call or write for more information.

1986: In hindsight, I would add only a couple of things.

1. Canadian sexual assault centre states confirm Angela Davis' theory that men rape within their own class and race group and down. That is to say that white men rape black and native women as well as white women fare more often than brown or black men rape white women (except in pornographic images).
2. No matter what happens to men afterwards at the hands of the patriarchy, rape of women of any class is still a horribly common fact and with other things marks women out as a less powerful class than men.
3. Why is all this discussion necessary in order for you to get out in the street and defend your right to be there?