

Bury the Seventies

BY LAURA SABIA

"Will women in the eighties demand and doggedly fight for equal pay for work of equal value...?" The question Laura Sabia asked in the dawn of the 1980s is applicable to the '90s. We are still immersed in that struggle. Even though provincially we have legislation, the national average for a woman worker in 1991 is only 66¢ on the male \$1.00. Laura Sabia is retired from public life now, but she remains an honest, gutsy woman — a woman who continues to speak out on our behalf. She provided leadership for almost three decades, but the vision that she had for women remains elusive. Violence against women escalates; funding for women's shelters and our publications has been cut. It seems we will need even more "guts, determination and super courage" for the 1990s. "Bury the Seventies" was published in The Decade (Vol. 2, No. 2, 1980).

All caution to the winds! A new decade calls for prophetic prognostications, serious crystal gazing and fearless challenges to the incantations of the worshippers of the status quo. Don't tell me "fools rush in where angels fear to tread" — all my life has been a fool's errand.

Bury the Seventies! Bury the decade of lost hopes, new-found guilt and multiple orgasms! Bury the decade of "women libbers," sexual assault, masculine dominance and wife beating!

We entered the Seventies with great expectations. The Royal Commission on the Status of Women had just reported to the nation and fingered the patriarchal system as the culprit. Women applauded, the millennium had arrived, the "force" was with us! Enter the euphoria of International Women's Year and "why not" buttons. Five million dollars and a lot of rhetoric, but when it was over little had changed. Women were still pouring the coffee and equal pay was only a dream.

Where to, women in the Eighties? Back to the kitchen, "wedded deadlock" and a plethora of pregnancies? Or will female marching boots tread all over the land of the benevolent male?

Women in the Seventies represented 42 per cent of the labour force, but most were clustered in clerical, sales and service sectors. Women's incomes were only 56 per cent of their male counterparts. The financial establishment is still root, trunk and branch male-dominated.

Will women shake off the yoke of 4000 years of patriarchal inseminated guilt, self-hate and subservience? Will we win the battle of self-worth, choices, intellectual progression and cut ourselves a slice of the power?

We spent too much time in consciousness-raising in the female-bashing Seventies, when we should have been raising hell.

We accepted half-assed changes in family law, when we should have demanded "equality." We rebelled against "jockocracy" but remained "men junkies." We cleaned up the language and made it gender-free, but we still generated the likes of Maribel "Be-a-Sexual-Object" Morgan and made her a millionaire.

We redefined rape as an act of violence and hatred of women, and called it "sexual assault" — but actual rapes increased and many rapists went free.

Will we continue to be intimidated by the labels "anti-male," "women libbers," "castrators"? Will the medical fraternity of the Eighties still "drug her up" with valium and librium and "put her down" with genocidal gynecology or will they admit that a brain and a womb are not mutually exclusive?

In the Seventies we spawned women's studies, councils, caucuses, credit unions and a political party, but we're still seeking our slot in the hierarchy of power. Will we see a hundred women in Parliament by the end of the Eighties? Or will we again be content with political crumbs, stuffing the envelopes, licking the stamps and passing the sandwiches?

And what about the Church? Does a womb sully the image of God? Will the Roman Catholic Church lumber out of its massive antediluvian morass and ordain women? Will it dust off its cobwebs of "infidelity," "virgin birth" and renounce ownership of women's reproductive organs and at last give women the right to choose? Will women comprise half of the clergy of all denominations? Will the Eighties designate God male and female, leaving all Her/His attributes intact?

We've come from "penis envy" to "womb envy" in one decade. Will the decade of the Eighties ring the death knell of phallocracy and of women as "fruitful vines"? Will the abortion controversy continue to rage?

The Seventies witnessed brutal gang rape, wife beating, overt and subliminal "psychic lobotomizing." We must insist that the Eighties put an end to the hatred and vilification of women and the male fixations of dominance and fetishism.

The great accomplishment of the Seventies was a reaching out of women to each other, our hands clasped in sisterhood. Unity among women took a giant step and battered women came out of the woodwork and were shielded by their sisters in halfway houses and women's places. But this was only a beginning. Will women in the Eighties demand and doggedly fight for equal pay for work of equal value? It will require guts, determination and super courage. Do women have those attributes? You're damn right we do!