

Rosemary Brown Speaks to Delegates at the Clara Brett Martin Dinner

Discours prononcé par Rosemary Brown au dîner des femmes avocats en l'honneur de Clara Brett Martin.

After years of having to listen to women in politics claim publicly over and over that they were politicians first and women afterwards, that they represented and worked for all people and owed no special allegiance to women, I began to feel more and more that I wanted to be represented in politics by a woman who was not ashamed to speak out publicly on my behalf as a woman (rather than as a person), who was proud that being a woman prepared her in a unique way to understand my needs and the needs of other women, and who was willing and proud to speak out on our behalf.

I was happy to see men who were concerned enough about our situation to speak up for us, and I certainly hoped that more of them would do so. But I recognized that with the best intentions in the world, they could not take the place of women committed to us as women, speaking out on behalf of us — women.

My dissatisfaction was heightened by the consciousness-raising experience of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada and by the subsequent report, which revealed that our situation as a constituency was even worse than we had imagined. Fortunately, this coincided with the growth of the women's movement, the establishment of the Status of Women Council in Vancouver, and the willingness of more and more women to come together to work on our behalf. The rest is history (or herstory).

I was elected to the Provincial Legisla-

ture in 1972, and re-elected in 1975 and 1979. Tonight, instead of dwelling on autobiographical details, I would like to speak with you about the role and responsibility of women who, like you and like me, through one means or another find ourselves in a position of status, power, or authority in our society.

Carolyn Heilbrun in a recent book, *Re-Inventing Womanhood*, examines at great length the failure of women as a constituency down through the years to benefit from the presence of women in corridors of power and authority. It is easy to excuse this on the grounds that their numbers were too few for them to have any impact, but to accept that explanation would be simplistic. Moreover, it fails to recognize the history of the behaviour of those women who, given the opportunity, failed to improve the status or lot of women when they could.

Heilbrun talks about the experience of women in the past who — like some women today — have hastened to protest publicly and loudly that they were not

indebted in any way to the women's movement for their success, of those women who on achieving a promotion or some other form of success have hastened to protest publicly that they were not part of the women's movement, nor did they even approve of the women's movement, of those women in positions of power and authority who have conspired with their male colleagues and the male establishment to limit the number of women allowed through any doors that lead to 'the top.' She raises the basic question of why each cycle of progress for women seems to end after a decade or two with little real advance towards equality.

These are questions which you and I, as women with potential for leadership and power, need to raise continually in a personal way. Once we know the answers to these questions, we have to guard against behaviour which could perpetuate this situation. We have to be committed to doing everything we can in a personal and public way to ensure that our success acts as a catalyst rather than a hindrance to the goals and struggles of other women and to ensure, in a broader sense, that our lives and our efforts bring us nearer to the goal of equality for all women.

The theory often advanced is that our failure is really the result of our inability to bond with each other, that our socialization makes us more eager to establish bonding with males than with other women, that our socialization makes us believe that women are inferior to men (we have internalized



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Rosemary Brown

The Clara Brett Martin Dinner held in honour of Canada's pioneer woman lawyer by The National Association of Women and the Law on March 28, 1980 in Vancouver.

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the myth), and that we who achieve are the exception — hence our contempt for women other than those who, like ourselves, are 'achievers' in the traditional sense of the word. It is said that our experiences and observations lead us to accept that women can not help us 'up the ladder' and that if we want to get to the top in business, or politics, or law, or whatever, the thing to do is to attach ourselves to a 'godfather' at the top or on his way to the top, or to try and go it alone, slamming doors shut behind us as we climb determinedly upward and onward. Some of us even try to kid ourselves that once we arrive at the top we'll turn around and extend a helping hand to other women struggling up the ladder. (It's never worked out quite that way, of course, but the rationalization lingers on.)

My personal philosophy of life grew out of my understanding of some of the reasons surrounding the answers to some of these questions, and my recognition of the insecurity, fear, and self-contempt socialized into us by every institution, custom, and attitude that we as women come in contact with from the cradle to the grave.

I recognize the sacrifice that we are sometimes called upon to make if we are to remain true to women — not sell them out, deny them, or turn our backs on them — and if we are to hold firm to our commitment to true equality for all women. I know that we have not always, either as individuals or in groups, accepted the challenge of some of those sacrifices when we were confronted with them, and I know that the longer one postpones making a commitment to the women's movement the more difficult it becomes. Indeed, on some occasions we never get around to making it.

Heilbrun suspects that 'womanhood should be re-invented.' We must turn away, she tells us, from the past when 'those women who have made their way successfully into the male dominated worlds of business, the arts, the professions, or politics have done so as honorary men, neither admiring nor bonding with other women, offering no encouragement to those who might come after them, preserving the socially required "femininity" but sacrificing their womanhood.'

The only reason I raise this matter tonight is because I believe that in these tough economic times, women are under the gun. The attempts to drive us out of the work force, the political arena, the professions, and back into the home, the attempt to scapegoat and blame us for high unemployment and high inflation, means that now more than ever we as women need women to speak out on behalf of women.

Now more than ever we need to have our big guns working to protect us from this onslaught, this attempt to stymie our revolution and wipe out the small gains we have been able to secure in the past decade. We have to bond, we have to develop support services, we have to be openly and publicly committed to the struggle to prevent the erosion of these gains. We have been told that the time has come for a new feminism, that it's time to think of 'we' rather than 'me.' We have been told that the nuclear family needs us now! And I would like to use this opportunity to raise the alarm now as I did in Ottawa two weeks ago. 'The corn is on!'

Today, the rudiments of the 'welfare state' are being dismantled and we are seeing in Canada all levels of government as the protectors and facilitators of private profit become more visible while 'social justice' is relegated to the position of being an unaffordable luxury. While the political mood becomes more reactionary and conservative the technological revolution in industry increases at an even more frantic rate, and women are being caught in the middle of this pincer movement.

As governments cut back on their commitment to education and health services, as equal pay, re-entry programs, women's studies, social assistance, day care, guaranteed income programs, transition houses, and other support services are restricted, the most important pathways for female social mobility will be closed off and, as Mary Corky points out, our disadvantaged position in Canada's economy will be consolidated. Technological innovation continues to make deep incursions into traditionally female occupations and, at the same time, the entry of women into non-traditional jobs is brought to a virtual standstill. Standardization of products not only eliminates job opportunities but also entrenches the ghettos. Simplification of work skills leads to their reduction to mere machine tending. Clerical workers soon become assembly line workers who simply process words, or stuff data into computer systems. 'Correctable' typewriters have almost eliminated the need for highly skilled typists and as electronic gadgets absorb skills, the position of the female worker becomes vulnerable to discipline and layoffs. In addition, as the introduction of technology requiring specialized training outstrips the educational system, education loses its importance as a ticket to self-improvement.

The national result of all these factors is that productivity is maximized and wage labour costs are minimized. The number of new jobs created does not keep up with the growth of the labour force. Hence, there is high unemployment all 'round, and the

stage is set for the universal demand that women go 'back to the home, the kitchen and the obstetrical ward.' If you doubt me, look at what the masters of the media have to say about this. They recognize and encourage this philosophy. A glance at today's women's magazines or at advertisements in the media immediately reveals a sharp emphasis on narcissistic consumption, on private solutions to essentially public problems.

A headline in the March 10, 1980 issue of the *Victoria Times* read, 'Welcome to the We Decade.' In the eyes of Toronto's advertising industry, the 'Me Generation' of the 1970s has been supplanted in the 1980s by the 'We Generation.' The advertisers say the new trends, and therefore the new marketing weapons, will be togetherness and emotion. 'In a sense, what we're doing is wrapping up your emotions and selling them back to you and making you think it's a bargain,' said one Toronto advertising executive. 'We went as far as we could with self-centred me decade advertising in the 1970s; now we are moving into the we decade. The '80s will be an era of emotions, sharing, relationships and, above all, the family,' says Norman Sylvester, Vice-President of Advertising, Pepsico, in Purchase, N.Y. 'Back to the family feeling is the message this advertising season,' says Jerry Goodis, a Toronto advertising executive.

This advertising message makes its appeal through universal and immediately identifiable emotional symbols such as babies, puppies, and grandmothers, surrounded by warmly approving friends and neighbours. It is the exact opposite of the 1970s' advertising that stressed independence, assertiveness and self-indulgence.

Some people in the advertising business believe these attitudes were always present in society, only to be pushed into the background, during the past 25 years. 'For more than 100 years, North Americans stressed values like sharing, family and self-denial,' says Arthur Shapiro, Senior Vice-President of a New York marketing firm. 'It's only in the last 25 years they have focused on the self.'

The *Christian Science Monitor* recently carried an article by Marilyn Hoffman entitled 'New Housewife Emerging.'

'If anyone doubts there are still housewives around, surveys in the U.S. show that most North American advertisers apparently think so, since they continue blithely to beam commercials out to that vast target group known as "housewives aged 18-49" based on market surveys that label 36 per cent of women in North America as "housewives."'

For many women, this means pressure to seek solace in dependency. In our

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society coercion is often disguised as consent. In a period of economic contraction, when women will have a hard time finding work, many will consider the option of marriage as the desirable option because in fact it is the only option — and so the stampede back to the home and childbearing proceeds.

Nancy Horsman, University of British Columbia Students Office Recipient of the 1970 Persons' Award, was recently asked in an interview, 'How do you perceive the future of feminism and the struggle for equality for women on this campus, in light of the strong resurgence of conservatism?' Nancy's response was as follows:

'I think it will be in retreat. There will be a resurgence of sororities and women will return to the clothing of the feminine stereotype. It's happening already — high heels, seam stockings. I could have wept when I read that seam stockings were coming back. The little anklets, butterfly patterns, all those male decreed feminine fashions — women are going back to them. I can weep because my daughters are going for it; women are — in their need for sororities, and their need to be bonded with men instead of women — retreating from the women's movement. The women's movement will still be there. It is a revolutionary movement and it can't be changed — were we to be successful, the whole fabric of society would change. But in times of reaction, there is a retreat.'

This is the challenge that faces us as Canadian women today. If we are to meet this challenge and press on towards equality, economic independence and the option to leave the homemaker role if this is our wish or necessity, then it is imperative that we understand more clearly the forces that shape our society, and it is imperative that we maximize our capacity to consciously intervene and change those forces. Our liberation depends on it and your role in this process is crucial.

This is where you, as women who operate in the arena of justice, come in. You are women of courage. It took courage to take the plunge into a profession which for years has been considered the sole prerogative of men. You had the courage to take the plunge, to challenge the order of things and to have survived.

Today you are part of the community of justice. A community which in the past has used and even today uses its power and its laws to oppress women in the guise of protecting them. A community with the power to oppress, although it remains the main channel through which our freedom and equality can be protected and assured. The constituency of women has been and continues to be at the mercy of the 'law' and if, as W.H. Auden tells us, 'Law is

neither wrong nor right, law is only crimes punished by places and by times,' then with your privilege goes a major responsibility. You have to work to ensure that 'laws' exist equally and with fairness to all.

We are witnessing in this province today a threat to the fair and evenhanded dispensation of justice. We are getting a hint of the existence of an old boys' network powerful enough to unbalance the dispensation of justice. Who gets hurt first when justice is unfair and uneven?

Who is penalized when justice is deferred? It is the section of society that lacks the protection of the power structure — . . . the poor, the aged, minority groups, women and children.

We as women have a vested interest in the even and fair dispensation of justice. We know that any tipping of the scales one way or another hurts us as well as other people like us who are vulnerable and unprotected in our society.

Hence we appeal to you, as women who work in the arena of justice. Your first responsibility must be to ensure that justice in this country is free from partisan influence and tampering.

It makes little sense to fight for changes in the laws concerning abortion, family relations or equal pay if those laws are open to partisan influence and tampering. We can work together: you in law, I in politics. This could be the beginning of our bonding — first working for women openly and proudly, then acting to ensure that the sinister forces of networks and old school ties never succeed in intervening in the dispensation of justice or interfering with its even and fair relationship to all people.

When I speak of bonding I want to be clear that I am not speaking of networking. I believe that there is a clear difference between the two concepts. The one is all-inclusive, the other is exclusive

Webster tells us that to bond is to cause to adhere firmly. Bonding is based on the principle that I am my sister's keeper, that I like my sister, that I identify with her needs and she with mine, that between us there is an interdependence, and — most importantly — that all women are my sisters.

Webster's definition of a network is 'an interconnected or interrelated chain.' Networking, I believe, is a coming together of people of similar economic status who share certain specific economic goals, and is confined to their helping each other, as members of this common group, to achieve their shared specific goals. Networking is a two-edged sword which works for good but which also is so open to abuse (as we are witnessing in the justice system today and

maybe to an even greater extent in the medical and corporate structure), that one has to be cautious of it.

It is good, if one is working one's way up the corporate structure or similar structures, to have an ally who will give a helping hand, who will aid and assist one as a novice in avoiding pitfalls and mistakes. (Iona Campagnolo talks of this happening when she was appointed to Cabinet; the 'godfathers' looked after her, and she in turn helped Flora MacDonald.) It is good to have people to open doors and hold them open for you, to discriminate on your behalf, to be loyal to you and protective of you.

However, it is because networking limits itself to these parameters that it fails to change the lives of women in any significant or intrinsic way. This is also why it is so vulnerable to abuse.

Networking, I believe, will be very beneficial to those women interested in a hierarchical power structure based on vertical mobility, in the pyramid based on 'the few' at the top held up by and resting on 'the majority' at the bottom.

The reality is, of course, that the pyramid structure is the very structure that consolidates and perpetuates the disadvantaged economic position of women. Networking does not work for most men either. It really only benefits those few who are part of an 'old boys' or 'in' group. It is a position of privilege that really works to the benefit of its members and to no one else.

If we accept the networking concept as one of the foundations for our feminism, we are accepting that we have a greater commitment to 'our slice of the pie' than we have to ensuring the fair and even distribution of the pie between all people. The end result is that we will have a handful of women in the top economic bracket, while most women remain where we are today — the largest segment of our population living in poverty.

This is not the proposition which I am placing before you tonight. My proposition is that we bond — adhere, come together — as sisters, working openly and proudly for all of us.

Second, if as W.H. Auden said, 'The law is neither wrong nor right, law is only crimes punished by places and by times,' then it is even more imperative that you guard jealously its 'fairness' and 'evenhandedness.'

If you succeed in achieving these two goals, we will all be strengthened and better able to deal with changing the specific codes which hamper our progress. But even more important, we will be able to stem the tide of conservatism struggling to erode our gains and once again shackle us with the weakness of dependency.◎

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