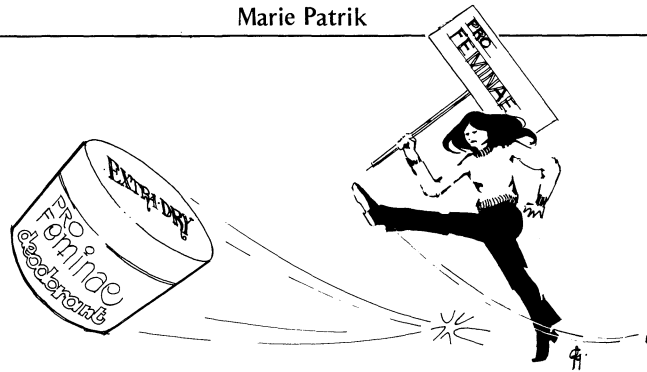


Pro Feminae is Not a Deodorant

Marie Patrik



Nouvelles de *Pro Feminae*, un group de femmes du Nouveau-Brunswick qui aident d'autres femmes à se remettre au travail.

PRO FEMINAE, an awkward but literal title, is an Outreach project of the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission (Manpower), that started in 1974 as a regional project. There were seven Special Assistants and, subsequently, a regional co-ordinator. The responsibility of these women was to extend the services of the department in each of the four Atlantic provinces and assist women in making application for employment. Now, only the New Brunswick project remains, with two workers. One office is based in Fredericton, responsible for the English-speaking communities, and one in Moncton working with the French sector. As the other articles on Outreach programs indicate, the government appears to be cutting back on most special services for women. It seems that in times of economic constraint, women and their specialized educational and professional needs are the first budget items to get the axe.

Although project services are available to women of all ages, the demand for individual client counselling has come primarily from the mature women entering or re-entering the labour force. The most common characteristic of these clients is lack of confidence and a total lack of preparation to enter the labour force. Most of these mature women left school—many before graduating—to marry and raise families. The attitude of those who did work was 'only until I get married'. They believed that they would be taken care of, and never thought they might want to, or have to, work. Pro Feminae proposed and helped to develop an eight-week course for these women called 'Career Orientation'. This program has been offered five times in three centres in the province, and it appears to be an on-going Manpower course. Its flexibility permits adaptation to the varying needs of many women. It is now being translated into French. In future it will involve single parents and will be taught in a low-cost housing area; an abridged version will be given in the local high-school night program.

While working with mature women we discovered that there is a shocking number of people in the province's educational system still encouraging young women to follow traditional career paths because 'they are only going to get married anyway.' Some teachers and counsellors actually discourage young women from exploring or taking an interest in non-traditional fields. It is alarming to hear young women in the large regional (rural) high schools discuss their futures. Because the unemploy-

ment rate is very high in New Brunswick, and because most people often have to leave their communities in order to find work, these students rationalize, with little opposition, that since they don't want to leave home and since there are no jobs, they might as well stay home and get married. (A rocky basis for any marriage!)

During a presentation to a mixed class soon to graduate from one of these rural high schools, I asked for a show of hands of those who would probably marry within a year. When the flurry of hands died down, I started talking about alternatives in living arrangements and material acquisitions such as a car, colour TV, washing machine and dryer. Most of the heads in the audience nodded in agreement that these items were essential. I asked the young men if they would be able to afford all these items. Amid groans from the men, I went on to suggest that the young women might want to help get the items they both presumed they should have. I immediately had the young men on my side. Once male approval had been won, the women were willing to discuss career plans and job-search techniques for themselves. A brief comparison of the difference between wages in clerical, retail, and service jobs and wages in the trades made quite an impression.

From my observations in New Brunswick, I would say that there has been little change in the attitudes of young women toward their futures. In spite of the increased media coverage of women in every conceivable job, and in spite of young women's awareness of the variety of opportunities open to them, they still tend to opt for traditional life-styles and careers. There are still snickers when we talk about women in auto-body repair, welding, and motor mechanics; the women in a group who dare to inquire about heavy-equipment operating or carpentry are often subject to ridicule, and are always embarrassed and apologetic with their peers. Clearly, the old stereotypes die hard.

Pro Feminae has proposed an 'Introduction to the Trades' program to CEIC, and the idea has been accepted for development. This program would involve Pro Feminae with curriculum development in the NB Community College. We will also act as resource people to the college during the presentation of the courses, and the counsellors within CEIC offices, making them familiar with the new program and trying to break down (or at least dilute) some of the rigid stereotypes now existing. We will also organize a general education campaign to sell the program to New Brunswick women—that is, to sell the many advantages of the skill trades.

This new course, which we have been plugging for three years, represents a triumph for Pro Feminae. It will be a good program; a lot of preparation and heart will go into it. We have already received information from women right across Canada which will help when our community college begins curriculum development.

Our chief concerns at present are encouraging women to apply for the course, and finding role models from the Maritimes. Even though the participation of women in the labour force in New Brunswick is up from 38.7 per cent in 1977 to 41 per cent in May of this year, our economic situation, always more difficult than in the larger provinces, is alarming. In order to draw the attention of women to the skilled trades, we plan a media campaign featuring profiles of a variety of women in the trades and covering such topics as how they became interested in their fields, what training was involved, the attitudes of others towards them, and their own feelings about their work. I would welcome brief biographical sketches from women across Canada to encourage Maritime women to enter the skilled trades and benefit from the improved wage scale.

Pro Feminae, as an Outreach project, has a limited life span. We are working closely with the newly appointed Women's Employment Co-ordinator, and our concerns and activities are being supported by her within Manpower. When termination comes, we can take some comfort and pride in the knowledge that New Brunswick now has two programs written specifically for women; that many hundreds of women have developed a more professional approach to the job search; and that many teachers and guidance people have benefited from the presentations and resource materials in career guidance we have prepared for young women. We welcome inquiries and comments and are extremely grateful for the network of interested and interesting women across Canada who are supporting our efforts.

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sachant si bien souffrir
saurez-vous enfin vivre?
FEMMES mes soeurs de recherche,
j'ai encore lu l'impossible dans vos yeux,
FEMMES mes amies de solitude
je NOUS aime
et nous veut MIEUX

Francvne Guilbault-Fortier