

four pages single-spaced—explanation and defence of the policy we are criticizing. Never once has there been a whisper of a suggestion that a particular government policy might be ill-advised or harmful, or that proposals we make seem reasonable and might be considered, let alone acted upon. When the trade disagreement arose between Canada and the United States over the interpretation of United States content in Nissan cars assembled or manufactured in Canada, Simon Reisman, Canada's chief negotiator of the Free Trade Agreement, referred to the Americans as "thugs." Brian Mulroney used the term "tin pot dictator," presumably referring to his friend George Bush. These two references appeared publicly in the newspapers at the time. Yet in a four-page letter to our Environment Group at that time from the Minister of Trade and Industry, the Free Trade Agreement and the proposed NAFTA which he was then negotiating are spoken of as unadulterated blessings for Canada—no reference to thugs or tin pot dictators. The four page letter does contain a brief ten-word statement—"of course Canada-U.S trade is not without its friction," but on the whole everything is for the best.

We have spoken to other environmental workers who have met with similar unsatisfactory replies, which either totally defend government policy, or hedge when a direct answer might be detrimental to the government.

As mentioned earlier, we network with other environmental organizations. In Toronto in October 1992, two of our members were delegates to a two day pre-conference of women who were here to attend a full scale international Eco-Environmental conference in the city. We heard from a wonderful woman who was Chief of her tribe in Nigeria and who talked about the initiatives of women (who make up at least 90 per cent of Nigeria's agricultural workers) and their attempts to be an active part of the decision making of their country. We heard a woman, originally from Peru, tell of the tragedy of structural adjustment with its resulting crushing poverty and reduced health and education provisions. We heard that in Central and South America there are 40 million homeless street children, 14 million of them in Brazil. We heard from a western Canadian farm woman of the terrible struggle for farmers to retain their farms. We heard repeatedly that the wealth of the rich countries is predicated on the poverty of the poor or developing countries. To be at such a conference is saddening, but it creates warm bonds, necessary bonds, with women all over the world, and increases our energy and resolve.

In our own Environmental Group, we work well together. As we exchange ideas at our meetings, and action is planned, we renew our energy and enthusiasm. This is not to say that we do not have ongoing feelings of anger, frustration, fear, and fluctuating confidence. But we know there is no alternative but to keep working. And we hope that the efforts of the small groups and the large, and the networking at local, national, and international levels will be in time.

Rivka Phillips is the founder of the Environment Group, and has been a member of the Older Women's Network from its beginning. She is also active as a member of a seven woman Board of Directors overseeing OWN's subsidized, cooperative apartment building project for women of age 45 and older. She was a high school teacher of French and English until her retirement in 1977.

NATHALIE STEPHENS

un nuage noir traverse ton ciel
femme
en toi rage déferle
femme

tu portes dans ton coeur
un miroir habité de fissures
reflétant les mensonges
d'un passé dévorant

femme

femme qui pleure un passé
ne t'appartenant pas
femme qui parle un langage
étranger
femme qui crie l'injustice
réalité dont on t'a tant
gavée

femme en lambeaux

moi
tié de femme

tente de rassembler les morceaux
d'une histoire inconsistante

femme
habitée par ciel mer et terre
femme
dont les yeux disent la lune
enveloppée par la nuit

silence
femme

femme
emmurée par l'oubli

Nathalie Stephens a déjà publié de la poésie dans LittéRéalité et elle attend la parution d'un travail de recherche aux Éditions du GREF au sujet des femmes antillaises.