

HILLEL SCHWARTZ

Chaste Tree

mule's heart, sicklewort, vinegar:  
you will not bear though love  
take us, like eclipse, unaware.  
drugs for spastics, honey and alum  
killers, in our safe lust we hide  
them behind mirror cabinets —  
whose face is it clear as skull  
and crossbones on our willow bed?  
what child's tooth, mint, agate  
to ward off unkind months, still  
life? you jum, jumping  
backwards does it, for both's sake,  
seed spent and spilled,  
nothing left to chance, nothing  
begun, we have touched and finished  
touching, are free: a clean break.



DEBORAH EIBEL

The White Keys

The player plays on and on —  
The white keys only —  
Then he tries F#.

But the man  
Who has just made his way  
Into the music room  
Says "Keep on in C major!  
There is so much talent  
Behind closed doors."

But how much longer  
Can this go on?  
Behind closed doors  
A bit player  
Says "Leave things  
As they are.  
No sharps and flats."

A bit player —  
Not a star —  
Would say things like that.  
And the pianist  
Has to answer him.  
"This is my room.  
You have no right  
To be here."

# The World Congress of Women

by Milnor Alexander



The theme of the World Congress of Women in Moscow from 23-27 June 1987 was "Toward 2000 — Without Nuclear Weapons: For Peace, Equality, Development." There were 2800 women delegates from 154 countries; and 800 national and 73 international, non-governmental organizations (NGOs); and 15 UN organizations. The Congress was sponsored by the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF), with headquarters in Berlin, German Democratic Republic. There were 103 delegates from Canada, including 17 from B.C., representing a wide range of organizations.

Mikhail Gorbachev addressed the opening session, stressing his *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring) policies, and seemed to be sympathetic to women's concerns. Freda Brown, the President of WIDF, chaired the session, and gave the opening address.

The session closed with an enthusiastic performance by young people.

There were eight Commissions which functioned daily at the Congress: Women for Peace and Disarmament; Women in Society; Women and Work; Women, Children and Families; Women's Involvement in the Struggle for National Liberation, Independence and Self-Determination; Problems of Development and Women; Mass Media and Women; The Role and Cooperation of NGOs in Implementing the Forward-looking Strategies Adopted in Nairobi in the Summer of 1985.

Three discussion Centres functioned parallel to the Commissions. In one there were Hearings on violations of women's rights. The Centre on "Women and Socialism" provided information on the life of women in socialist countries, and an opportunity to talk with some of them. The third Centre functioned as a topic

centre where discussions took place on various problems of particular interest to specific groups of participants — such as trade union women, young women and religious women.

There were also opportunities to hold informal discussions, solidarity meetings, meetings of special interest groups, etc. At one of the most interesting sessions in the entire Congress Dr. Helen Caldicott spoke. Because there were no facilities for translation in that particular hall, everyone spoke English, thereby facilitating the best dialogue and real sharing of any session.

As a representative of Voice of Women, I attended the Commission on Women for Peace and Disarmament most of the time, and was interested to hear of all the efforts to end the arms race in all the participating countries. A Japanese group gave out peace cranes and little knitted bells with signs attached indicating their earnest desire for the extinction of nuclear arms.

The Commission on the Role and Cooperation of NGOs in implementing the forward-looking strategies adopted at Nairobi also interested me, since I had been at the Mid-Decade Conference of Women in Copenhagen in 1980. Unfortunately, the facts reported at that Conference are still true seven years later: women make up 50% of the world's population, do 2/3 of the world's work, earn 10% of the world's income, and own 1% of the world's wealth. We still have a long way to go!

Hearing directly from women in the socialist countries at the Centre on Women and Socialism was informative; I

have been working for democratic socialism here in Canada for the last two decades. Since my visit to the Soviet Union twenty years ago, I have been interested in the changes that have occurred over the years, especially under Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika* policies. The informal meetings we had with Soviet women did seem to indicate more openness than I had previously found. The women admitted that, although much progress had been made (for example, equal pay and equal opportunity), the problems of the double load on women who work both outside the home and in the home, and the attitudes of male domination, persist — as do alcoholism and wife-beating.

There are many women in local soviets and republic soviets, and many in the Supreme Soviet — but not in the Central Committee or Politburo. But then, the same situation prevails in the western "liberal" democracies: sites of power remain male bastions.

The three evening "Solidarity" sessions concerned South Africa, Central and Latin America, and the Middle East. Personally, I was somewhat uncomfortable in the one on the Middle East, because it was presented entirely from the PLO point of view. There were women from Israel at the Congress.

I was also unhappy at the closing session, when Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe spoke, because he obviously does not understand the feminist point of view. He spoke several times about how wonderful women were because, after all, men are born from their wombs, and love their mothers! All the women from his country

wore colorful dresses (all alike) with his picture on them, front and back!

One day of the Congress was named "Moscow Day," and participants were taken to visit industrial enterprises, pre-school and medical institutions, and social, cultural and service facilities in various districts of Moscow. I also was in a small group who visited a woman doctor and her engineer husband in their flat in one of the thousands of high-rise buildings in Moscow. During our lovely visit we were given tea and all kinds of goodies, and asked them questions about their work and their lives. Then we attended a huge Peace Rally in Gorky Park.

There is no doubt in my mind, after all this, that the Soviet people sincerely desire peace. There is also no doubt in my mind that women must change the patriarchal system in order to achieve peace and economic development.

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*Since her retirement in 1982, she has been active in Victoria in peace, women's movements, and politics (she was the NDP candidate for Oak Bay-Gordon Head in fall of 1986). In 1983 she received the Muriel Duckworth CRIAW Award for working for feminism and peace.*

## SYLVIA—by Nicole Hollander



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