

# Editorial

*Marion Colby, Patricia Stamp and Shelagh Wilkinson*

The end of the United Nations Decade for Women was in many respects a beginning. We believe the content of this issue of *CWS/cf* reflects this continuing process of international cooperation for change in the lives of women.

Because the United Nations located its 1985 World Conference in Nairobi, Kenya – and Forum '85 took place there as well – what we have is a Third World-centred publication, with a particularly strong emphasis on Africa. The number of African women who attended the Forum was a political statement in itself.

For many 'Western' feminists who went to Nairobi, it was a watershed: we have integrated a much more global perspective into our feminism. The poverty that exists in the world has given women's struggle a special edge. Women produce most of the food in many societies, which gives them a powerful commitment, not only to social and economic justice at the governmental level, but to the day-to-day survival of their families.

This issue took shape around the material in a way that was self-evidently right, and the articles we have chosen reflect the spirit of Nairobi. Non-Western women have indicated their dissatisfaction with the "international division of intellectual labour," whereby they are "the providers of 'raw data' and the recipients of finished products in the form of 'theories' and development programmes" (AAWORD). The mistake made in the past by Western women was to assume that their problems were universal. In Nairobi, we learned differently. Third World women offer us exemplary models for translating scholarly research into energetic action for social change, as our contributions from Zimbabwe, Sri Lanka and many others show.

The African contributions were particularly compelling, in their quality and scope. African feminism focusses on food production and property rights as keys to women's full equality. The continent's colonially-created poverty and its loss of food self-sufficiency have shaped an urgent feminist concern with economic issues and with empowering women to perform their traditional tasks – with requisite rights and freedom – through grassroots social change.

Asia is more complex as a region, comprising a number of cultural areas: East Asia, South East Asia, and South Asia. (Also included here is Oceania, a culture area of its own). In spite of the anomalies of this classification – not the least of which is the fact that Japan and Korea are often treated as 'Western' societies – common themes in the concerns of Asian women can be discerned. They are the victims of the sex tourism industry, and Asian women have organized to combat it. Cheap female labour provides the basis for the massive light industrial complex of

textiles and electronics that stretches from Sri Lanka to Malaysia and the Philippines to Taiwan. This exploitation has provided the impetus for a powerful, politically-conscious pan-Asian women's movement, as well as vigorous women's labour movements within some Asian countries.

With the Latin American papers, we were at a disadvantage since many of the articles were submitted in Spanish. This is an indication of language as a barrier to the free flow of ideas among feminists from many countries. The prohibitive cost of translation for a feminist publication denies us access to their writing. The articles we do include reflect how rigorous scholarship combines with political activism in the work of Latin American feminists. The Women's Studies articles speak clearly to this.

Recognizing the cultural diversity of 'the West,' as well as the geographical anomaly of a 'Western' Australia down under, we nevertheless found the commonalities more telling than the differences between 'Western' feminists in the light of our reading of Third World feminisms. Amongst the papers we received, the most inspiring were those that turned outward, reflecting on the connections between Western feminists and our Third World sisters. Several were connected even more intimately, analysing the special problems of, and charting a course of action for, Third World immigrant women in the West.

What is *not* in this issue is as telling as what is, in some respects. The little material received from the Mediterranean and Arab worlds was inadequate to do justice to the vital feminist concerns of these regions. Fortunately, we shall be able to rectify this in our Spring 1987 issue, where we shall draw upon the presentations made at the Mediterranean Women's Studies Institute conference in Greece, June 1986, for a special issue on Mediterranean women, including immigrant women in Canada.

Finally, Europe, both Eastern and Western, the Soviet Union and China, are largely absent from these pages. The low profile of the Eastern bloc countries at the Forum contributed to this gap in our offerings. In some cases, we chose not to include material where we felt that women were touting a 'party line,' acting simply as apologists for their governments. As well, with its one hundred panels a day and thirteen thousand participants, the Forum was simply too large to cover in any truly comprehensive way.

Waiting for the opening ceremonies to start, packed into the conference hall in Nairobi, the Forum women borrowed a leaf from Famine Rock and sang: "We are the world/We are the women/We are the ones who do the work/So let's start living . . ." As the Nairobi experience recedes into feminist history, this issue is a contribution to ensuring that women do create a world we want to live in.

*We wish to thank Nikita Crook for her special contribution to this issue.*

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