

affected was the woman raped.

None of these programs deal positively with the systemic nature or impact of sexist violence. They all undermine the rights of the accused since normally how they function is that a man is bullied into pleading guilty with the promise of a diversion from court or baited into an add on in hopes of being seen as a good prisoner. He accepts it rather than face the possibility of a record or of jail time. Of course these risks are greater for the man of colour or the poor man so this refusal to deal with the inequality between men and women also compounds racism and class differentials.

Alternate Dispute Resolution, circle sentencing (the invention of a white judge who has been passing it off as an ancient Aboriginal method), family group counselling in which the RCMP gets to be community convenor, judge defence lawyer and jury, and victim offender reconciliations all suffer from a new element: privatization of law. In each of these cases the government propaganda tells us we will be moving to a new "victim-centred" model in which the harm to the victim will be undone as much as possible. But, in fact, they are models in which the government drops responsibility for the crime. It says this is a matter between the one accused and the one victim. No one has legal aid or legal defence, no one has an advocate protecting their equality rights. The whole body of rights legislation that has been accumulated is unavailable. No *Charter* reading judge or prosecutor or defence bar will be present. You can always appeal it to a higher court, but that will only be true if you bear the cost of your own legal team and have the where-with-all to fight it in the courts. Usually one woman or child is left to negotiate for what they can get from each attacking man. The imbalance would be corrupt even if there was no violence involved.

We know that unless our social policies are shaped clearly and unequivocally toward establishing equality and peace, that we continue to head toward more and more hierarchy and destruction. I am afraid we have every reason to believe that unless the provinces put resources to the supervision of conditional sentences and unless the federal government protects the equality interests at stake, that conditional sentencing will bring longer and harsher sentences for the poor and men of colour and make more and more dangerous men loose to attack women with impunity.

We must join forces as peoples of conscience to demand change. Governments at the provincial and federal level must invest in equality-seeking women's groups. They must investigate arrest and prosecute to conviction those men who use sexist violence against women. They must do so in such numbers that a critical mass of men interested in change forms. They can experiment with sentencing as long as both the safety and the freedom of the women is assured.

It is entirely possible to do that. It simply means guarding less property. They must settle the pay equity

struggle and back pay the thousands of women that have been cheated. They must reinvent some social welfare net that improves on what welfare used to be. There must be no bullying women into workfare. Women deserve assurance that no-one in Canada will go without the basics.

We must get on with the humanitarian project of eliminating the classed, raced and gendered futures we are facing. Our governments must hear and feel an informed demand for the development of citizens as equals. They must hear that we know our well being depends on it and we will not be fooled by crass offerings in which we are expected to believe that we are all right when others are not.

*This article was excerpted from an address made by the author to those celebrating 25 years of transition house work at Women's Emergency Shelter, June 22, 1999.*

*Lee Lakeman opened one of the first transition houses: The Woodstock Women's Emergency Shelter. After some five years there she moved west to join the collective at Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter where she has worked since 1978.*

## RUTH LATTA

Two aloe plants at the window  
are insufficient.  
Their fleshy smooth touch,  
their sticky tears  
can't kiss the spot  
and make it well.

This disenfranchised grief  
only God sees.

*Ruth Latta is an Ottawa writer. Her four books are available in Ottawa libraries.*