



Vancouver Rape Relief & Women's Shelter



## Women's Liberation and Human Rights: Compatibility and Contradiction

# Vision of Women's Liberation Held by Early Feminist Organizers at Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter

- Bodily integrity for women
- Our rightful share of the responsibility for and benefits from society, culture, and economy



## To Achieve This Vision We:

- Opened an anti-rape center in 1973. We continue to operate it today.
- In 1981 we opened our transition house.
- We have continued to provide advocacy as a primary component of our service delivery.

# We Made Several Important Structural Decisions:

- Operate as a collective
- Establish a Basis of Unity between collective members
- Maintain volunteer membership including in decision making and daily work
- Share all resources
- Fundraise
- Maintain independence from government

# And We Made Several Important Political Agreements Between Us:

- To fight classism and racism as part of our work of achieving women's liberation.
- To work as much as possible on a democratic model.
- To practice the relationships and values we are struggling to achieve in the world.



J. Brisee

# The Women's Movement Has Changed the World!



The public now believes women have the right to refuse and to leave violent men.

# The Women's Movement Has Changed the World!



The pressure of women united has forced change at all levels of society.

Take Back the Night

# The Women's Movement Has Changed the World!



We have proposed a vision for a world in which everyone is respected and cared for.

Feminist Day of Dialogue, CASAC 2005

# However Our Struggle Is Not Over:

- 1 women in 4 will be raped at some time in her life. Most often by a man she knows  
CASAC
- 1 in 8 girls is sexually assaulted before she's 18, most often by a man she knows  
United Way
- 54 % of women living with men will be struck by their partner at some time during the relationship  
CIDA



## Some More Statistics:

- More than 60 women are killed by their male partners each year in Canada.
- 64 prostituted women are missing or murdered in Vancouver.
- Across Canada more than 1000 Aboriginal women are missing.

# And Women's Poverty:

- Women still earn one third less than men per unit of pay, and two thirds less than men when a period of work years are considered (Stark, *Coercive Control*, 189)
- The majority of the poor of the world are women
- Women coming to our transition house mostly rely on welfare
- In British Columbia, welfare rates are far below the poverty line while our government is boasting a surplus of over 4 billion dollars (2007)

# Two Most Important Human Rights Documents for Canadian Women

- Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 1979
- Optional Protocol to CEDAW, entered into force 2000

# Neoliberal Policy Instead of Human Rights:

- Inadequate welfare
- Inadequate legal aid
- Refusal to implement a national childcare program
- Elimination of services for mental illness, drug addiction

# Neoliberal Policy Instead of Human Rights:

- Inadequate policing of male violence against women
- De-funded women's movement
- De-funded court challenges fund
- Promotion of prostitution as work

# CASAC LINKS Study 1998-2003:

- 100 cases of male violence against women
- 92 merited conviction by law
- 34 resulted in conviction
- Results published in

*Obsession, With Intent: Violence Against Women*

By Lee Lakeman

# When Bonnie Reported Roland's Threats, Prince George RCMP Replied:

---

“I’m sorry there is nothing we can do”

“Retain a lawyer and obtain a civil restraining order”

“Stay in public places in the future”

# Intervener Arguments:

“When police respond to complaints of male violence with mere advice, for example, responsibility, without power, is shifted to women and their complaints are treated as being outside the public realm” (Intervener Submission, point 12).

# Intervener Arguments:

“Women are overwhelmingly the victims of male violence and are thus disproportionately affected, in negative ways, by the results of inadequate police investigation,” and therefore police failure to treat violence against women as a serious matter of criminal (public) concern, is a violation of women’s Charter rights to equality and security of the person (Intervener Submission, point 25).

# Positive Lessons of Intervening:

- Intervening is possible.
- Arguments become a matter of public record, whether the case is won or not.
- We might succeed at convincing the government to apply Charter principles in practice.

# Not So Positive Lessons of Intervening:

- Intervening can be expensive, especially now that our government has eliminated the Charter Challenges fund.
- It is demanding and diverts considerable resources from other work.
- Government failed to live up to its own equality measures and also fought against implementing the needed changes.

# Women's Global Charter for Humanity, World March of Women 2005



# Pictou Statement

“Women demand an indexed guaranteed living income for all individual residents set at a level to enable comfortable living.”

**by Lee Lakeman, Angela Miles  
and Linda Christiansen–Ruffman**

# To Contact Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter

- 604.872.8212
- kathleenp@rapereliefshelter.bc.ca
- [www.rapereliefshelter.bc.ca](http://www.rapereliefshelter.bc.ca)



Vancouver Rape Relief & Women's Shelter

