

In for the Long Haul

Women's Organizations in Manitoba

By Joan Grace

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CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES - MB

309-323 Portage Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R3B 2C1

PHONE (204) 927-3200 FAX (204) 927-3201

EMAIL ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca

www.policyalternatives.ca/mb

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IN FOR THE LONG HAUL

Women's Organizations in Manitoba

By Joan Grace, Department of Politics, University of Winnipeg

Introduction

Women's organizations in Manitoba rest on a rich legacy of feminist activism. That legacy was built in part by women who participated in the Manitoba Action Committee on the Status of Women (MACSW) during the second wave women's movement. MACSW was founded by a group of like-minded feminists before the reporting of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in 1970.¹ With funding from Status of Women Canada, MACSW eventually had offices in Brandon, Dauphin (Parkland Branch), Thompson, and Winnipeg. During its operation, from 1971 to about 1999, many issues were tackled by MACSW. These ranged from child care, reproductive freedom and access to therapeutic abortions (especially when anti-choice forces restricted access in Dauphin and Brandon in the early 1990s), to equal pay, pension and family law reform, violence against women, and women's poverty.² MACSW often formed coalitions with other women's groups around particular issues, gave presentations to legislative committees, provided spokespersons

to the media on women's issues, and coordinated the "women's movement" response to the province, and sometimes the federal government, on issues of importance to women.

Since the founding of MACSW, feminists have continued to organize in Manitoba to face the same challenges they did during the second wave era. These include the disturbing persistence of the feminization of poverty, continued limitations regarding access to abortion and a healthcare system sensitive to the needs of women, and the experience of women, particularly Aboriginal women, within the justice system.³

And the challenges do not end there. Women's organizations across Canada, Manitoba being no exception, have confronted a cold reality. Economic restructuring has profoundly influenced changes in state structures and governing practices. Janine Brodie argues that, by abandoning the tenets of the Keynesian welfare state, successive Canadian governments have, over the last two decades or so, supplanted notions of the social safety net in favour of programs, policies, and practices wedded to the

ideals of efficiency, cost containment, competitiveness, and individualism. The outcomes of this restructuring have had stark consequences for women. Indeed, as Janine Brodie sees it, what has emerged is a politics of marginalization, "...revealing in stark relief the uncertain and contested political space we are now occupying."⁴ Caught up in the politics of marginalization, women's organizations have had their government funding slashed and programs of importance to women have been downsized or downloaded from the federal government to cash-strapped provinces and municipalities.

However, even when confronted with funding and other resource challenges, women continue to act politically, either by running for elected office, lobbying government for policy change, or seeking redress through the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.⁵ In Manitoba, we cannot fully appreciate the way in which women are organizing for social, political, or economic change because there has not been a systematic analysis of the women's movement in the province since Ustun Reinart's work, published over 10 years ago.⁶ Her study aptly demonstrated that various strands of women's activism once comprised the women's movement in Manitoba, largely organized around three feminist political camps: liberal, socialist, and radical. She also reported that women activists were, to varying degrees, associated with women's movement organizations such as the Manitoba Action Committee on the Status of Women, the Winnipeg Women's Liberation Movement, the Socialist Women's Collective, and the Winnipeg Lesbian Society, to name a few.

This story of women's organizing is even less clear given MACSW's eventual demise in 1999, as the result of federal program funding cuts. With MACSW's disappearance from the political landscape, we are left with a number

of interconnected questions: what happened to these women's movement activists? How, and why, are women continuing to organize? Is there still a definable movement and what are its characteristics? Even though MACSW has closed its doors, is women's feminist activism still alive?⁷

This report is a preliminary discussion of some of the questions that emerge from the demise of MACSW. It is the first part of a much larger study of women's organizing and activism in Manitoba. This report and the larger study build on previous work to paint a picture of current women's organizing. The current study identifies the many diverse organizations that comprise the women's movement in Manitoba, and how these organizations and groups express their feminist ideas and how they undertake their political action strategies. Specifically, this paper argues that given the number and diversity of women's organizations present in the province, the goal of women's equality continues to animate the social and political landscape of Manitoba. Women continue to go the distance in their struggle to better the lives of women and by all accounts, they are in it for the long haul.

Yet women's organizing has changed. That is, although political ideology and various feminisms motivate many women's organizations, they do not appear to be clearly divided into the ideological groups of the 1960s and 1970s. Instead, women's organizations advocate on behalf of a particular identity, advance a particular issue, provide certain services and a safe space and further the progress of women's equality. This diversity, however, may also indicate that the women's movement is somewhat fragmented and therefore not well positioned to present a unified or strong feminist voice.

The findings of this study are presented in four sections. Part I presents the framework

for analysis and the methodology. The second part discusses the dynamics of feminism in Manitoba as expressed by the particular individuals, groups, and organizations studied. An overview of a representative selection of women's groups and organizations comprises Part III. These selected case studies analyze various organizations in Manitoba, such as the Manitoba Women's Institute, the Provincial Council of Women of Manitoba, Mothers of Red Nations, New WAVES, Rainbow Resource Centre, Sage House, and the UN Platform for

Action Committee (MB). The fourth and final section offers some reflections on women's organizing in Manitoba. This report is not a definitive or exhaustive description and analysis of women's and feminist organizing in Manitoba. Being a preliminary report it can be neither — such a detailed analysis will come later. It can, and does however, address a modest but important issue: did the end of MACSW sound a death knell for women's organizations in Manitoba?

Part I Framework for Analysis: Why Study Organizations?

To locate and understand women's feminist activism, this study focuses on women's organizations that promote the women's equality agenda. Concentrating on women's organizations makes sense for several reasons. First, women activists of various feminist persuasions have long seen the benefit of mobilizing themselves into groups and organizations: to build solidarity, to empower themselves, and to nurture their feminist consciousness. Moreover, this focus is critical because organizations have been important to the overall development of the women's movement.

Jill Vickers, Pauline Rankin, and Christine Appelle have argued that the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) was an important organizational framework because it provided a structure for women from various feminist perspectives "to act collectively," and an important vehicle to articulate women's views to the Canadian public and to governments.⁸ As well, they have argued that a women's organization such as NAC provided a space where women could focus on tactics and strategies for change, where women could develop feminist approaches to political issues, and where women had a measure of influence in setting the policy agenda. These reasons are as important today for women's organizations as they were when NAC was established. Indeed, as Myra Marx Ferree and Patricia Yancey Martin see it, the women's movement's impact can largely be attributed to the presence of feminist organizations. They argue that the movement itself exists "...because feminists have founded and staffed these organizations to do the movement's work."⁹ It is, therefore,

not surprising that the women's movement in Canada and in Manitoba has typically been comprised of an array of groups, some loosely organized or networked, others formally institutionalized with hierarchical reporting and decision-making processes.¹⁰

It is also important to focus on organizations to begin to uncover how important state funding has been. After almost 20 years of welfare state retrenchment, the state of women's organizations can tell us much about the overall health of the women's movement.

Linda Briskin reminds us that the choice of approach to an issue determines "what is revealed and what is concealed."¹¹ Focusing on women's organizations necessarily meant that many less visible expressions of feminism and women's organizing were not captured in this study. Myra Marx Ferree and Patricia Yancey Martin are quite right in pointing out the dire need to document and uncover that hidden work, without which it can be easy to claim that the women's movement is in decline, or is already dead.¹² This hidden work, some of which this paper details, includes on-going meetings of women's organizations, presentations to government committees, meetings with government officials, and education programs, all of which are often not consistently reported by the mainstream media. While a focus on organizations cannot completely uncover invisible activism, the health of women's organizations is surely one clear and important indicator of the overall health of the movement.

Methodology and Data Collection

A qualitative approach was employed to identify potential interviewees and to uncover the motivations of women associated with women's organizations. Each group or organization was initially selected on the basis of being either a

feminist organization or part of the Manitoba women's movement. During the interviews, the women identified their organizations as being one or the other or both.

Organizations and groups were identified for interview in a number of ways. Several organizations were initially chosen because of a personal association with them by the author or her Research Assistant. These groups included New WAVES, the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF), UNIFEM, and UNPAC. Other organizations were identified using the *Community Resource Guide for Manitoba*.¹³ These groups included the Congress of Black Women, the Immigrant Women's Association, Réseau action femmes, the Elizabeth Fry Society of Manitoba, the Manitoba Women's Institute, and the Provincial Council of Women of Manitoba. Still others were selected on the recommendations of the initial interviewees. This third set of groups was recommended because they represented women of particular identities or communities, such as Mothers of Red Nations (MORN). Others were recommended because they were organizations advocating for women in particular policy sectors, including the Manitoba Child Care Association, the

Child Care Coalition of Manitoba, and the Women's Health Clinic. Finally, some service-based organizations were recommended, such as the Fort Garry Women's Resource Centre, The Women's Centre in Brandon, the Rainbow Resource Centre, and Sage House. In order to capture a sense of feminist activism outside of established groups and organizations, the author spoke to a few anti-war and social justice advocates because feminism is arguably being expressed in other movements, such as the anti-globalization and peace movements.

The groups chosen were contacted to identify a potential interviewee or interviewees.¹⁴ For the most part, information was collected using a standardized, open-ended questionnaire. Questions were designed to engender discussion on particular themes, such as the organization's goals and how often they meet, their action strategies, whether they adhere to a particular feminist perspective, and whether they consider their group or organization to be part of the women's movement. However, as is the intent of open-endedness, discussions often explored issues or themes that emerged during an interview session.

Part II Findings: Diverse Issues, Diverse Structures, Diverse Strategies

The organizations included in this study differ in their structure, their access to resources, the type and extent of government funding, their membership base, and the level of government on which they focus their advocacy and lobbying efforts. Some of the organizations discussed have formalized organizational structures and decision-making processes linked to national and/or international bodies (Elizabeth Fry Society of Manitoba, LEAF, Provincial Council of Women of Manitoba, Manitoba Women's Institute, and UNIFEM, Winnipeg branch). Other groups also have structured reporting systems, often in the form of a Board of Directors responsible for overseeing the activities of the organization. Some of the groups and organizations interviewed offer a range of programs or services to women (Elizabeth Fry Society, Fort Garry Women's Resource Centre, Immigrant Women's Association, Rainbow Resource Centre, The Women's Centre, Sage House, and Women's Health Clinic). Almost all engage in policy advocacy, discuss and analyze policy issues within their group or organization, occasionally present briefs to government committees, and undertake an educative role for the benefit of their members, clients, or the public (by way of web sites, holding public forums or internal workshops, and producing printed or video materials). A few of the groups are much smaller grassroots collectives (Child Care Coalition, New WAVES, and Mothers of Red Nations).

Stevi Jackson and Jackie Jones have argued that feminism and feminist theory analyses the

conditions which shape women's lives and the cultural understanding of what it means to be a woman.¹⁵ Expressed by the second wave women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s, feminism has pushed us to reveal sexist ideas, structures, and institutional practices that establish and perpetuate women's subordination and exclusion from social, cultural, political, and economic arenas. Some of the organizations examined in this study were established during the second wave (Congress of Black Women, Fort Garry's Women's Resource Centre, the Immigrant Women's Association, Manitoba Child Care Association, Rainbow Resource Centre, Réseau action femme, Women's Health Clinic, and the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund) while a few others have been in existence since the first half of the 20th Century (Elizabeth Fry Society, Manitoba Women's Institute, and Provincial Council of Women). Mothers of Red Nations and UNPAC were established in the 1990s, while New WAVES and UNIFEM, Winnipeg branch, were established in 2002.

All of the organizations that were part of this study argue, in their own particular way, that something needs to be done in order to improve women's social, economic, and cultural lives. All of the groups recognize that women confront unique barriers in their quest for self-determination and economic independence. Some groups frame their goals and objectives within an equality discourse (LEAF, Manitoba Child Care Association, Manitoba Women's Institute, Provincial Council of Women, and Réseau action femme). Other groups articulate a much more pronounced feminist agenda (Child Care Coalition, Elizabeth Fry Society, Grassroots Women, New WAVES, Rainbow Resource Centre, Sage House, and University of Winnipeg Women's Centre). Still, other groups, including some of those just mentioned, also

operate as feminist organizations: women-centered and participatory (New WAVES and the Women's Health Clinic), or, like the Fort Garry Women's Resource Centre, consider their activities to be a "...concrete embodiment of feminism...supporting women to be full and autonomous human beings."¹⁶ Put another way, some women's groups promote women's equality and help women remedy their particular issues, but they attempt to do so within institutional structures as they now exist. However, the more feminist groups support women's equality goals, the more likely they are to articulate their agenda from a critical perspective. Overtly feminist organizations seek systemic change in societal and institutional practices.¹⁷ As Debbie Blunderfield put it, "we know it is a very patriarchal, capitalist system."¹⁸

Three groups — Manitoba Women's Institute (MWI), Mothers of Red Nations (MORN), and Réseau action femme — preferred to think of their organizations as being part of the broader "people's movement" in Manitoba, rather than as expressions of a feminist agenda. According to Leslie Spillett of MORN, feminism does not fit culturally or historically with aboriginal women's experiences. Yet MORN, as well as MWI and Réseau, do support gender analysis and identify their organizations as being part of the women's movement supporting the overall agenda of women's equality.¹⁹

Also animating the landscape in Manitoba is third wave feminism. This latest articulation of feminism refers to the ideas and activism of feminist women who grew up during or after the second wave women's movement, as well as a politics that "...embraces a strong belief in the multiplicity of identity, reflecting the difficulty many women feel about categorizing themselves into unique and singular identities based on gender, race, sexuality or ability."²⁰ For young women, such as Sarah Amyot and

Mandy Fraser of New WAVES, feminism and feminist activism is just part of what their collective stands for. In Sarah Amyot's words, it's "just understood" as being important to keeping the issues on the table, for consciousness raising and empowerment.²¹ Jen Faulder, a young woman who participated in the No War Against Iraq Coalition in Winnipeg, feels that her feminism is expressed through anti-war or peace movement activities, through direct actions such as demonstrations and petition campaigns, because "it's the same struggle."²² In her mind, feminism and the ideas and activities of the anti-war/social justice movement are about "making the connections between different types of oppressions and abuses of power and exploitation." In an immediate, and obvious, sense, the lives of Iraqi women and children were at grave risk during the war.

Jennifer deGroot, member of the No Sweat Manitoba campaign, is another example of how feminism and feminist activity is expressed through a social justice coalition.²³ The No Sweat Manitoba campaign, a coalition of student, union, church, and community activists, has been advocating that the City of Winnipeg and Province of Manitoba adopt 'no sweat' procurement policies (meaning any goods bought by the city or province will not be purchased from identified 'sweatshop' suppliers or manufacturers). They have also lobbied the federal government to change the *Labeling Act* to require all clothing labels to identify the name and location of where the garment is produced. Jennifer's participation in this pro-worker/anti-globalization group is a feminist activity she argues, because garment workers, in Canada and abroad, are most often women. Moreover, campaigning on behalf of better working conditions for women in countries such as Thailand for example is an act of solidarity among women. Viewed in this way, there is a

clear link between women's lives in Taiwan and women's lives in Manitoba: women in Thailand make the clothing; women in Manitoba sell, purchase, or wear the clothing.²⁴

Like the young women of New WAVES, Jen Faulder does not have a specific attachment to any particular "wave" of feminism since it puts her into a categorical box that is ambiguous and undefined. What Jen is sure about, however, is that although she believes that on the whole women are more oppressed than men, she also believes that gender oppression exists for men as well. Just as society pressures women to take on certain (traditional) roles, men are also pressured into gendered roles and identities, which have consequences for women. For example, men are socialized to be aggressive which may contribute to violence against women.

The Women's Centre, like New WAVES and activists like Jen Faulder, argue that their femi-

nism is one that includes men. As Gina McKay put it, "our feminism is everyone's feminism." She views feminism as a:

movement for womyn and men to validate and empower their experiences, create and sustain a sense of community locally on campus and globally, eliminate oppression based on such things as gender, race, age, sexual orientation, class and ability, with a goal of recognizing, valuing and celebrating human differences.²⁵

The women's movement, then, is certainly not homogeneous. Arguably, though, part of the movement's strength is that it is "politically, ideologically, and strategically diverse,"²⁶ reflecting the myriad experiences, needs, and demands of women.

Part III Case Studies: Women Organizing for Change

The diverse groups that comprise the women's movement in Manitoba demonstrate that there is no universal "woman's experience." In Manitoba, women have come together to confront the particular socio-economic challenges and colonialism experienced by the aboriginal community, and the racist attitudes and practices directed towards immigrant and black women, to promote and defend the linguistic and cultural reality of Franco-Manitoban women and the specific situation of rural women, to advocate on behalf of lesbians, and to give voice to the perspectives of young women. Manitoba women have also responded to the plight of their sisters in developing and war-torn countries. And just as feminism and the women's movement re-orient to respond to changes in the social and political context, some women are harnessing the use of technology, notably the internet and email, as tools for organizing and empowerment. We now turn to brief overviews of a few women's groups and organizations and their activities, each representing the four categories identified above.

Four categories were developed to highlight particular features of each group or organization: identity-based, issue-oriented, services/safe space providers, and equality advocates (see Appendix 1). Organizations with formal, institutionalized structures who advocate a range of women's issues are identified as equality advocates, understanding that all of the groups studied advance a women's equality agenda. The other organizations and groups were categorized based on their primary reason for organizing: to act collectively as aboriginal, immigrant, lesbian, or black women, for

example; or because they organized around a particular issue (child care or violence against women are prime examples); or because they offer a range of services to women. This categorization, like any classification system, however, cannot account for the multiple dimensions of an organization, nor for the fact that some of the women in a certain identity group, for example, participate in groups in other categories.

Equality Advocates

The Manitoba Women's Institute (MWI)

The MWI was established in Morris in 1910 and is associated with both an international and national body.²⁷ A rural women's organization dedicated to women's personal development, family, agriculture, and rural development, the motto of MWI is "For Home and Country."²⁸ The organization receives a grant from Manitoba Agriculture through a yearly application process, and operates under the auspices of provincial legislation, *The Women's Institute Act*, enacted in 1930. Membership currently stands at approximately 720, down from 1,500 in 1972.

In one of its two meetings a year, representatives of MWI meet with ministers of the provincial government to relate their ideas and concerns. The MWI has a long history of lobbying government for policy change and in educating its members and the public on social issues, notably in the sector of health care reform. MWI has also been involved in family law reform during the 1970s, and in the 1980s they advocated for midwifery services. In the 1990s, along with other women's groups, they supported the establishment of the Transitional Council of the College of Midwifery. More recently, MWI has engaged in an education program on women's and child

poverty and have studied the issue of rural child care.²⁹ Of course, farm issues have also been of deep concern to MWI which have included, among other issues, advocating for crop insurance adjustments and tax exemption for wages paid to domestic workers on farms.

Provincial Council of Women of Manitoba (PCWM)

The PCWM was established in 1949 and like the MWI, is part of a pyramid of Councils located at the international, national, and local (Winnipeg) levels. The vision of PCWM is to be “a vibrant, pro-active, council of women, reflective of the diversity of society, influencing political decision-making and public attitudes.”³⁰ PCWM represents a constituency of about 40,000 women in Manitoba by way of federates (group and organization members of PCWM). The PCWM has regular contact with the provincial government, meeting with cabinet and opposition every two years and specific cabinet ministers on an on-going basis. Often presenting briefs to parliamentary and legislative committees, the PCWM has advocated for policy change on a vast array of issues including employment and pay equity, new reproductive technology, poverty, prostitution, health, education, and illiteracy. The PCWM also organized candidates’ debates for the 1999 provincial election and the 2003 Winnipeg city council election.³¹ Recently, the PCWM became a member of the Just Income Coalition, an ad hoc collective addressing inadequate wage levels.³² PCWM is clearly an organization that advocates for a women’s equality agenda. Past President Arlene Jones related that PCWM is feminist-oriented, explaining that even though the more conservative member groups may not consider themselves to be feminists, when the values and policy goals of feminism are discussed they support those values and goals.³³

Identity-Based

Mothers of Red Nations Women’s Council of Manitoba, Inc. (MORN)

MORN was officially established in 1999 “to promote, protect and support the spiritual, emotional, physical and mental well being of all Aboriginal women and children in Manitoba; and, to provide voice, representation and advocacy for Aboriginal women through spiritual, cultural, social, economic, political, educational, and recreational development.”³⁴ MORN has a membership base of approximately 600 women. Although a Winnipeg based group, they have contact with women in northern Manitoba. MORN has a number of goals, two of which are to “promote awareness and understanding of Aboriginal women to counter the stereotypes in public and private institutions” and to “unite Aboriginal women in Manitoba to work together to find effective solutions and remedies to the myriad and complex concerns and issues facing Aboriginal women and children.”³⁵

Like the Congress of Black Women and the Immigrant Women’s Association of Manitoba,³⁶ MORN has a specific interest in revealing the sexist and racist attitudes and practices experienced by women in Manitoba within a broader critique of how colonialism has subjugated Aboriginal peoples. MORN advocates for policy change on a number of fronts. One particular issue is reforming the education system and the concomitant establishment of an Aboriginal school division. For MORN, a separate school system is considered necessary because the current system has failed to meet the needs of Aboriginal children and their families.

MORN is affiliated with the Native Women’s Association of Canada, the Métis Women’s Council of Canada and the Inuit

women's group, Uk Tu Teet. MORN's coalition politics also extends to occasionally working with the Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg and the Women's Council of the Manitoba Chiefs. In April 2004, MORN, the Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg, and the Southern Chiefs Organization held a forum on women's issues. Topics discussed included identifying gaps in services, women's access to services, and certain policy concerns of Aboriginal women. One of MORN's most recent activities has been the "Sisters in Spirit" campaign. Spearheaded by the Native Women's Association of Canada, the campaign has called on the federal government to establish a \$10 million fund for research and education on violence against women. "Sisters in Spirit" was launched to bring specific attention to the approximately 500 Aboriginal women who have gone missing over the past 20 years.

Rainbow Resource Centre (RRC)

RRC was originally established at the University of Manitoba as Campus Gay Club. The name changed in 1973 to Gays for Equality and again in 1999 to the Rainbow Resource Centre "in recognition of the growing diversity and increasing breadth of our communities... in order to best serve Manitoba's gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and two-spirited communities."³⁷ Three key priorities of RRC are: to maintain a facility that maximizes resources; to develop partnerships, networking structures, and offer consultative services and curriculum development; and to engage in advocacy to increase the visibility of RRC, and represent communities of the Centre to the media, government, and the general public.³⁸

The RRC offers drop-in counseling, support groups, and a number of services and programs for the Winnipeg area, as well as for northern and rural Manitoba. The Centre is also a safe

space for discussion and information sharing. There is a Lesbian Services Committee and a social/discussion group for lesbians held twice monthly. The Centre also houses and maintains the Manitoba Gay/Lesbian Archive, a valuable permanent collection of correspondence, posters, organizational records, first-person accounts, pamphlets, clippings, photographs, and audio-visual recordings.³⁹

In an effort to educate the public on the harm of homophobia, the Centre has also, for the past two years, held a conference for teachers, guidance counselors, school administrators, parents and students who are interested in "making schools and communities safer" for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and queer people.

Issue-Oriented

New WAVES — Women's Action Against Violence and for Equal Status (NW)

The goal of NW is to "focus on young women and students as a source of new ideas and energy for facing old problems" designed to "revive the public debate about issues relating to violence against women and women's rights."⁴⁰ Established in September 2002, NW was initiated by the Canadian Federation of Students and the University of Winnipeg Women's Centre. There is little group structure. Members of NW prefer, instead, to keep their operation flexible and inviting to young women and young men who may otherwise be intimidated or hesitant to join a formal organization.

NW's central project is to "...promote general public awareness, amongst both men and women, of feminism and feminist issues."⁴¹ NW is keenly interested in reaching young Manitobans to educate them about violence against women and women's rights and, hopefully, to positively affect their consequent

action. To do so, NW has been developing a resource kit for distribution to high schools and post-secondary institutions, which would be accompanied by a presentation on the purpose and aim of NW. They have already held a public forum — on March 6, 2003, on the issue of violence against women — and were invited by the Manitoba Women's Advisory Council to take part in a roundtable on violence prevention held in June 2003.

The UN Platform for Action Committee (UNPAC-MB)

UNPAC-MB was formed in 1995 after the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, China. The group, originally comprised of 30 women who attended the Beijing conference, advocate to the provincial and federal governments for the implementation of the Platform for Action. This document, the product of the Beijing meeting and other United Nations agreements, outlines measures to advance women's equality.⁴² Critical themes of the Platform for Action, such as poverty, health, and violence, became part of the annual work plan of UNPAC. As well, an Outreach group supported rural Manitoba community projects.⁴³

UNPAC women know that electronic communication is a critical means for organizing. An internet workshop, called "Alice in Cyberland," was held in 1999. Attended by approximately 100 women, the workshop focused on e-powerment and how the internet could be used for connecting to and informing women at any location in the province and many points beyond. Another workshop, funded by the Manitoba government, was held a few weeks later. As well, *Snippets*, UNPAC's electronic newsletter, is another important tool for women's cyber-organizing. Established about three years ago, it was initially received

by only 10 individuals and is now received by over 100 people.⁴⁴

From 1996 to 1999, UNPAC held a yearly conference on a special theme. Past conferences were held on such topics as: "Girls Today, Women Tomorrow;" "Striving for Women's Economic Equality and Independence;" and "Beyond Beijing." A more recent endeavour, the "Women and the Economy" project, was in the development process for some time and was launched in June, 2003. This project was developed by UNPAC because "...women's contributions to the economy have been ignored and diminished...women are in many ways excluded from economic decision-making, and women's exploitation in the economy is increasing due to globalization."⁴⁵ The project's end product is multifaceted. It contains detailed data and analysis of women's relationships to the economy and is available on UNPAC's web page, as well as in two printed volumes and as a video entitled "Banging the Door Down: Women and the Economy." Most recently, UNPAC began a project to gender the budget process in Manitoba.

Service and Safe Space Provider

Sage House

Sage House, like so many other women's organizations in Manitoba, has its roots in the second wave feminist movement. It was established initially as P.O.W.E.R., an acronym for Prostitutes and Other Women for Equal Rights, created through the MACSW in the 1980s, and taken over by Mount Carmel Clinic in the 1990s. The goal of Sage House is to "...reduce the risks and harms of women and transgenders living as women associated with street-involved life," be it about health and safety, violent assaults, unwanted pregnancies and STDs, or frostbite and malnutrition.⁴⁶ Sage House is under the

management of Mount Carmel Clinic and receives its main funding from the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. It has also received project funds from the Winnipeg Foundation for programs like “Hotel Outreach” in which outreach workers visit all downtown hotels and

bars for health education. Sage House also had a crime prevention program called “West End Women’s Safety” in which outreach workers provided condoms and safety information to sex-trade workers, as well as referrals to treatment programs.

Part IV Women's Organizing in Manitoba

This study demonstrates that the women's movement in Manitoba is diverse and may be fragmented due to the absence of a coordinating structure, or umbrella organization, such as MACSW. What accounts for this diversity? First, the second wave feminist/women's movement in Canada underwent a tortuous self-examination in years past due to criticisms that it was only responsive to the issues of heterosexual, middle-class, white women.⁴⁷ Identity feminism challenged the movement to assess universalistic conceptions of women and their experiences so as to think about the way in which a lesbian, native, or immigrant woman's life is different from, say, a disabled women's life. We see the end result of this process in some of the groups and organizations formed in Manitoba. Second, for some women, feminism and the women's equality agenda have become part of normal political thinking and practice, as is the case with young "third wave" feminists and many of the women interviewed for this study. Third, women have always held ideas from various strands of feminism which, taken together, construct a personal philosophy that is multi-dimensional.⁴⁸ Consequently, many women are not thinking about issues in terms of a liberal, socialist, or radical feminist response. Young feminists with radical feminist ideas, for example, also support some liberal feminist strategies such as electing women to political office. Finally, it was evident that there is a strong desire on the part of women, either novice or seasoned, liberal, radical or otherwise, to work on a variety of issues that matter to women.

Do women's organizations feel there is a women's movement here? Virtually all of the interviewees agreed that there is some sort

of a women's movement in the province, and that their group or organization is part of that movement. A few of the women, however, felt that since the MACSW disbanded, there is no unified, strong feminist voice in the province to generate and feed an on-going and cohesive women's movement.

Liz Sarin, a former member of MACSW in Dauphin, feels that there is something missing in Manitoba now that the MACSW no longer functions. Her concern is that since the closure of the Brandon, Dauphin, and Thompson offices of MACSW, rural women now have far fewer venues to choose from to either facilitate mobilization or to meet to discuss issues of salience to them. This is in comparison to women in Winnipeg who have a plethora of coalitions, groups, or institutionalized feminist/women's organizations to join. This lack of attention and understanding of rural women's issues and needs was echoed by Paula Mallea and Gladys Worthington at The Women's Centre in Brandon.⁴⁹

Jennifer Howard, another former member of MACSW, reiterated Liz Sarin's concerns, stating that no group or organization has developed to take the place of MACSW as the "community voice of women" with a presence throughout the province. Nor, she further related, is there a core women's organization for the provincial government to identify as the "authority of women's issues."⁵⁰ Jennifer deGroot, of UNPAC and the No Sweat Coalition, echoes these sentiments. Jennifer found that during her research for the "Women and the Economy" project when she held focus groups outside of Winnipeg, rural women were clearly looking for ways to have their voices heard. To an extent, then, there is an urban-rural divide in the women's movement that is evident but not irreparable, consistently challenging groups and organizations in Winnipeg

to keep “in touch” with women and issues beyond the perimeter.

Yet there have been opportunities for some groups to work in an integrated manner. The Women’s Centre at the University of Winnipeg, for example, has become the “contact” group for Status of Women Canada. As such, the Women’s Centre has become one of key organizers of events held for International Women’s Day and Take Back the Night (an international rally, march, and vigil protesting domestic and sexual violence against women). This role has linked young activists from the Women’s Centre with feminists in established groups and organizations, and expanded their presence in the women’s movement community overall.

And many of the groups and organizations interviewed are sensitive to the need to reach young people. Specific groups, such as the Women’s Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF) and Rainbow Resource Centre, have annual events organized for high school participation, and New WAVES has a high school program in the planning stage. For the past eight years, LEAF has held a Youth Forum around Equality Day.⁵¹ The event held in April, 2003, was titled “The Many Faces of Equality: Celebrating Diversity,” and provided a venue for young high school students to become informed about equality issues from speakers representing the disability community, Rainbow Resource Centre, and Aboriginal peoples.⁵² In March 2002, The Immigrant Women’s Association (IWAM) also held a Youth Forum, called “Challenges and Choices,” which provided first- and second-generation immigrant students and young professionals an opportunity to share their experiences of growing up in Winnipeg with other young people. IWAM also just completed their Mentorship in Winnipeg Schools program wherein mentors gave thirty-two presentations, addressing approximately 800 students, on issues such as discrimination,

parental expectations, and “cultural baggage.”⁵³

Ultimately, the women’s movement in Manitoba provides a measure of solidarity both among members and between groups. As Arlene Draffin Jones of PCWM sees it, organizing is in and of itself an important activity since “part of our strength is in the struggle.”⁵⁴ This is evident in the types of groups and organizations formed and the linkages that have been built between the groups, with some women being members or active participants in a number of different groups and organizations either at the same time or during different time periods. This has certainly contributed to issue learning and coalition building.

A few women, however, felt that it is time for women to come together at a “women’s conference” to connect, discuss issues, and celebrate their achievements. Such a conference of women would be like the “See Jane Run” event held in September 2002 in Winnipeg, organized to educate women about the importance of seeking political office and how to go about running a successful campaign.⁵⁵ Even without such a coming together, Manitoba’s women’s groups and organizations have shown that they have a clear and united purpose. They have organized to give recognition to their particular issues and needs and to address specific policy, social, or political concerns — all in an effort to better the lives of women. However, it also may be the case that the movement in Manitoba is in need of rejuvenation. In spite of the common goal of bettering women’s lives, Manitoba women could come together to redefine and sharpen their collective purposes and goals and to inject a feminist agenda into the political landscape. Otherwise, there is a danger that women’s organizations may become just some of the many groups vying for government attention and action, while structures of power and sexist attitudes towards women persist unchallenged.

Conclusion

Just as women in Manitoba have done for decades past, feminist and women's organizing for cultural, economic, political, and social change continues unabated. Indeed, many of the issues remain the same as during the second wave women's movement. Although there may not be a province-wide group mobilizing women under one banner, this study has demonstrated that there is a substantial amount of activity taking place across a wide range of issues emanating from diverse perspectives and experiences.

A number of issues, however, remain outstanding. Future research considerations include assessing the political opportunity structure in Manitoba in order to identify

and evaluate opportunities and constraints on women's organizing, as well as analyzing the success of women's movement activism with respect to specific political and policy goals. It would also be very interesting and useful to probe more deeply the knowledge of the history of feminism among young women in the 'third wave' and the level of their 'feminist consciousness.' Dialogue with the upcoming leadership of the movement is essential, since the future of the movement to advance women's equality rests, at least in part, on their consciousness of the need to pursue a distinctly women's agenda. Related to this issue would be an examination of high school social studies and history curricula to probe what, if anything, young people in Manitoba are being taught about feminism and the history of the women's movement.

Appendix 1

Interviewees (by Category, Name and Group/Organization Affiliation)

Identity-Based Advocates

Marlene Cormier, Réseau action femmes
Norma Walker, Congress of Black Women
Beatrice Watson, Immigrant Women's Association of Manitoba
Donna Huen, Rainbow Resource Centre
Leslie Spillett, Mothers of Red Nations

Issue-Oriented Advocates

Sarah Amyot, Women's Action Against Violence and for Equal Status (New WAVES)
Madeline Boscoe, Women's Health Clinic
Debbie Blunderfield, Elizabeth Fry Society of Manitoba
Cecile Cassista, Child Care Coalition of Manitoba
Jennifer deGroot, UN Platform for Action Committee (MB), (UNPAC-MB) and No Sweat Manitoba
Jen Faulder, Anti-war and social justice activist (No War with Iraq Coalition)
Mandy Fraser, Women's Action Against Violence and for Equal Status (New WAVES)
Mary Scott, UN Platform for Action Committee (MB), (UNPAC-MB), United Nations Development Fund for Women, (UNIFEM, Winnipeg branch) and a former member of MACSW
Muriel Smith, UNPAC-MB, UNIFEM, Winnipeg and former President of MACSW
Pat Wege, Manitoba Child Care Association

Service and Safe Space Providers/Advocates

Gloria Enns, Sage House
Marla Gilmour, The Women's Centre (Brandon)
Paula Mallea, The Women's Centre (Brandon)
Sherry McConnell, Fort Garry Women's Resource Centre
Gina McKay, University of Winnipeg Women's Centre
Punam Mehta, former Director, University of Winnipeg Women's Centre
Sabina Musik, Fort Garry Women's Resource Centre
Gladys Worthington, The Women's Centre (Brandon)

Equality Advocates

Diane Hall, Manitoba Women's Institute (Gimli)
Betty Hopkins, Women's Legal Education and Action Fund, Manitoba
Jennifer Howard, former member of Manitoba Action Committee on the Status of Women (MACSW), Brandon
Arlene Jones, Provincial Council of Women
Liz Sarin, former member of Manitoba Action Committee on the Status of Women (MACSW), Dauphin

Notes

- 1 Personal interview with Liz Sarin, former member of MACSW, Dauphin, July 30, 2003. See also Berenice B. Sisler. *Partnership of Equals: The Struggle for the Reform of Family Law in Manitoba*. (Watson & Dwyer Publishing, 1995) pp. 26-28.
- 2 Personal interview with Liz Sarin; Personal interview with Jennifer Howard, former staff member of MACSW, Brandon, August 6, 2003.
- 3 For details on the situation of Manitoba women see: Lissa Donner, *Women, Income and Health in Manitoba: An Overview and Ideas for Action*. (Winnipeg: Women's Health Clinic, July 2000); Social Planning Council of Winnipeg. "Children, An Overlooked Investment." *Media Release*. November 22, 2002; Darren Lezubski, Jim Silver and Errol Black. "High and Rising: The Growth of Poverty in Winnipeg." in Jim Silver (ed.) *Solutions that Work: Fighting Poverty in Winnipeg*. (Winnipeg & Halifax: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Manitoba and Fernwood Publishing, 2000) p. 39; UN Platform for Action Committee (MB). *Women and the Economy: A Resource Book - Book One and A Resource Book - Book Two* and companion video *Banging the Door Down: Women and the Economy*. (Winnipeg: UN Platform for Action Committee, 2003); Child Care Coalition of Manitoba. *Blueprint for Action: A Five Year Plan for Manitoba Child Care Policy Redesign*. (Winnipeg: Child Care Coalition of Manitoba, February 2001).
- 4 Janine Brodie. "Restructuring and the Politics of Marginalization." in Manon Tremblay and Caroline Andrews (eds.). *Women and Political Representation in Canada*. (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1998) p. 21.
- 5 L. Pauline Rankin and Jill Vickers. "Locating Women's Politics." in Manon Tremblay and Caroline Andrews (eds.). *Women and Political Representation in Canada*. (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1998) pp. 341-367.
- 6 Ustun Reinart. "Three Major Strands in the Women's Movement in Manitoba, 1965-1985." in Jim Silver and Jeremy Hull (eds.). *The Political Economy of Manitoba*. (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, University of Regina, 1990) pp. 151-167. For other treatments of women's organizing in Manitoba, see Berenice B. Sisler. *Partnership of Equals: The Struggle for the Reform of Family Law in Manitoba*. (Watson & Dwyer Publishing, 1995); and M. Jean Graveline, Katherine A. Fitzpatrick and Barbara E. Mark. "Networking in Northern Manitoba." in Jeri Dawn Wine and Janice L. Ristock (eds.). *Women and Social Change: Feminist Activism in Canada*. (James Lorimer, 1991).
- 7 This last question was inspired by a recent reflection on the issue of the viability of the women's movement. See Myrna Wood, Dorothy E. Smith and Tammy Findlay. "Whatever Happened to the Women's Movement." *Canadian Dimension*, 37, 5, September/October 2003, pp. 23-25.
- 8 Jill Vickers, Pauline Rankin and Christine Appelle. *Politics As If Women Mattered: A Political Analysis of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993) pp. 11-12. Emphasis added.
- 9 Myra Marx Ferree and Patricia Yancey Martin. "Doing the Work of the Movement: Feminist Organizations." in Myra Marx Ferree and Patricia Yancey Martin (eds.). *Feminist Organizations: Harvest of the New Women's Movement*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995) p. 4.
- 10 Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin and Margaret McPhail. *Feminists Organizing for Change: The Contemporary Women's Movement in Canada*. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988) p. 8.
- 11 Linda Briskin. "Mapping Women's Organizing in Sweden and Canada: Some Thematic Considerations." in Linda Briskin and Mona Eliasson (eds.). *Women's Organizing and Public Policy in Canada and Sweden*. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999) p. 5.

- 12 Myra Marx Ferree and Patricia Yancey Martin. *Feminist Organizations*. pp. 15-16.
- 13 The Volunteer Centre of Winnipeg. *The Community Resource Guide for Manitoba*. (The Volunteer Centre of Winnipeg, June 2002) p. xxii.
- 14 Interviews took place between March and September 2003. Some interviews were conducted by the Research Assistant; others by the author. Due to logistical constraints, the author was unable to speak with individuals in many groups and organizations who presumably would include themselves in the women's movement, such as the Coalition for Reproductive Choice, the Manitoba Association of Women's Shelters, and the Manitoba Association of Women and the Law, as well as groups and networks in rural and Northern communities.
- 15 Stevi Jackson and Jackie Jones. "Thinking for Ourselves: An Introduction to Feminist Theorising" in Stevi Jackson and Jackie Jones (eds.). *Contemporary Feminist Theories*. (New York, New York University Press, 1998).
- 16 Personal interview with Sherri McConnell and Sabina Music, Fort Garry Women's Resource Centre, May 2, 2003.
- 17 Equality, or rights groups, generally think in terms of being effective, preferring to work through the established political system, while radical or feminist groups, sometimes referred to as liberation groups, fear being co-opted by government, viewing the institutions of the state as barriers to women's liberation. For this discussion, see Jo Freeman. *The Politics of Women's Liberation*. (New York, Longman, 1983).
- 18 Personal interview with Debbie Blunderfield, Elizabeth Fry Society, April 24, 2003
- 19 Personal interview with Leslie Spillett, Speaker, Mother of Red Nations, April 10, 2003
- 20 Krista Scott-Dawn. "Turbo Chicks: Talkin' 'bout My Generation." *Herizons*. 16, 2. Fall 2002, p. 16; and Brenda O'Neill. "What Do Women Think?" *Herizons*. 16, 2. Fall 2002, p. 21.
- 21 Personal interview with Sarah Amyot and Mandy Fraser, New WAVES, April 9, 2003.
- 22 Personal interview with Jen Faulder, an anti-war and social justice activist, July 25, 2003
- 23 According to Jennifer deGroot, a sweat shop is a work place that pays very low wages, where employees experience physical, verbal, or sexual abuse and harassment, are in danger due to poor health and safety standards, are forced to work overtime, or are also sometimes forced to undergo pregnancy testing prior to employment.
- 24 Personal interview with Jennifer deGroot, No Sweat Manitoba, July 29, 2003. The No Sweat Manitoba campaign is connected to the Maquila Solidarity Network (located in Toronto).
- 25 Retrieved from the University of Winnipeg Women's Centre web page <<http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/~uwsawc/>>.
- 26 Nancy Adamson, Linda Brisikin and Margaret McPhail. *Feminists Organizing for Change*. p. 7
- 27 Which are respectively, The Federated Women's Institute of Canada, established in 1919, and the Associated Country Women of the World, officially created in 1933.
- 28 Personal interview with Diane Hall, President, Manitoba Women's Institute, July 22, 2003; and the MWI web site <<http://www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture/organizations/wi/mwio1so4.html>>.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Provincial Council of Women of Manitoba Inc., Pamphlet. The International Council of Women was founded in 1888; in 1893 the National Council of Women was established.
- 31 The All-Candidates Mayoralty Forum was co-sponsored by the Council of Women of Winnipeg.
- 32 The Women's Health Clinic and UNPAC are also partners in the Just Income Coalition.
- 33 Personal interview with Arlene Draffin Jones, Provincial Council of Women, April 1, 2003.
- 34 Mother of Red Nations Women's Council of Manitoba, Inc., Pamphlet.

- 35 Ibid.
- 36 The Congress of Black Women, created in 1981 as the provincial chapter of the Congress of Black Women of Canada, is a non-profit organization "...planned and developed to enhance the consciousness, education and rights of and for Black Women in Manitoba." (Congress of Black Women of Manitoba. "Congress of Black Women of Canada, Manitoba Chapter, Inc." leaflet). The Immigrant Women's Association of Manitoba was established in 1983 to "...address the needs of immigrant women and their families and to facilitate the smooth integration of immigrant women into Canadian society." (Immigrant Women's Association of Manitoba, *Challenges & Choices*).
- 37 Rainbow Resource Centre. *Fact Sheet*.
- 38 Rainbow Resource Centre. *Annual Report 2001-2002*, p. 3.
- 39 Ibid., p. 24 and 26.
- 40 New WAVES. "Campaign Proposal, 2002-2003." n.d.
- 41 Ibid., and Personal interview with Mandy Fraser and Sarah Amyot, New WAVES, April 9, 2003.
- 42 Retrieved from the UNPAC-MB website on July 16, 2003 <<http://www.unpac.ca/who.html>>.
- 43 Mary Scott, *The Networking Organization: Working with Information Technology*, unpublished paper.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 UNPAC. *Annual Report 2001-2002*. retrieved from the UNPAC-MB website on July 3, 2003 <http://www.unpac.ca/about_reports.html>.
- 46 Personal interview with Gloria Enns, Sage House, May 5, 2003.
- 47 Jacinthe Michaud. "On Counterhegemonic Formation in the Women's Movement and the Difficult Integration of Collective Identities." in William K. Carroll (ed.). *Organizing Dissent: Contemporary Social Movements in Theory and Practice*. (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1997) pp. 197-212.
- 48 Heather MacIvor. *Women and Politics in Canada*. (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1996) p. 39.
- 49 Personal interview with Paula Mallea and Gladys Worthington, The Women's Centre, Brandon, September 25, 2003.
- 50 Personal interview with Jennifer Howard, former member of MACSW, Brandon, August 6, 2003.
- 51 Equality Day is April 17. It commemorates the signing of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the day, according to LEAF, women were declared equal under the Constitution.
- 52 Personal interview with Betty Hopkins, LEAF, June 20, 2003.
- 53 Immigrant Women's Association of Manitoba. *President's Report - AGM 2003*. (Winnipeg: Immigrant Women's Association of Manitoba).
- 54 Personal interview with Arlene Draffin Jones, Provincial Council of Women, April 1, 2003.
- 55 This event, initially the idea of Anita Neville, Member of Parliament for Winnipeg South Centre, was organized by political, social, and community-based women as a "non-partisan 'primer' for any woman considering running for elected office" ("See Jane Run...Women in Politics Make a Difference." See Jane Run Organizing Committee, pamphlet, n.d.).