

**To See Ourselves: Five Views on Canadian Women** Shiela Arnopoulos et al. Ottawa: International Women's Year Secretariat, 1975. Pp. 225.

To See Ourselves: Five Views on Canadian Women is a book issued by the International Women's Secretariat in Ottawa. Large in size and scope, the book has an interesting format. Each of the first five sections is a self-contained unit which discusses one of the following groups of women--the non-professional working woman, the homemaker, the professional working woman, the disadvantaged woman and the young woman. The final section is a photo essay comprising sixty-one pages.

In some ways, the book is a government document: it is in large part an examination of statistics and other government research information; it is produced by the Department of Health and Welfare and is available through Information Canada. It is a true government document in not being critical enough of the forces and structures which work against the groups of women it studies. It is a sad comment on a government which five years ago produced the Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada to find that so much of the Report's findings have to be repeated here--not much has changed.

On the other hand, this is an unusual

government document. Marc Lalonde has to warn us in the Foreword that the opinions expressed "do not necessarily represent government policy." (p. 8) Most readers will be able to recognize the statements to which he alludes.

In chapter one, Sheila Arnopoulos, who is a features and investigative reporter for the Montreal Star, studies the situation for the non-professional working woman in Canada. Arnopoulos sets the mood of her essay by denying that there has been any improvement since the 1970 Report. She tells us not to evaluate the situation for all groups of women according to the limited picture of middle class women.

In two large sections of her essay, Arnopoulos gives the reader much statistical information along with comments by women working in non-professional occupations and unions. These personal statements add an extra element of interest and reality to the otherwise tedious and well-known facts and figures. More than a dozen women tell us what their jobs are like and how they are exploited. Included in this essay is a criticism of unions for their failure to organize women and for the discrimination against the all-too few women who are union members.

A section on Legislation brings the reader up to date on programs and laws which recently have started to bring about some changes. Arnopoulos is knowledgeable on this topic and is

frank in her evaluation of the inherent limitations of these laws and programs. She does give credit to the Toronto Mayor's Task Force on Women which has had some significant successes, including getting new wage levels for the city public health nurses. There is a depressing discussion of day care, emphasized by the example of the woman who had to leave her two children locked in the stairway between her apartment and the street entrance where they would be safe while she went to work. I dislike the message extended to women at the end of the essay, that "it is all up to you and me." The situation requires a more complex and more thorough response.

The second chapter by the well-known journalist Sharon Brown deals with the homemaker. Brown makes extensive use of personal interviews with seven homemakers --approximately 50% of the essay occurs between quotation marks--and there are seven full pages which contain no comment by the author. I find this overuse of quotations disconcerting for two reasons --it lends an air of non-seriousness to the essay, as though the quotes are not important enough to comment on, and secondly it emphasizes the isolation of each woman from the other. I would have liked more analysis and explanation from the author to unify the essay and to give a wider perspective to the homemakers' separate statements.

Brown shares her interesting encounter with a Statistics Canada official who

tells her that homemaking has never been considered an occupation in an economic sense. We have to guess, then, that the number of homemakers in Canada is somewhere between 2.5- and 4.5- million. The author defines homemakers as "those women who are not forced into the labour force by reason of economic necessity," those who have "chosen to make their careers in the home because they honestly feel this offers them the most personal self-fulfillment." (p. 46) Brown's women talk about their isolation in the home without the company of other adults and lament that theirs is a 24-hour a day job which leaves them no time to themselves. They point out the contradictions in a society which claims to place high value on motherhood but which refuses to provide training for the task or to ensure the sense of dignity and worth which ought to go along with their chosen role. One of the advantages of the role, the women point out, is the pride they feel in raising healthy, happy children. It is a discontented pride, though, mixed with resentment for the lack of credit given to what they believe to be their contribution to society and with fear for the future when the children will gain their own independence. In a section called "Liberation and All the Tomorrows," a fear for the future emerges alongside what appears for most of the homemakers interviewed to be a strong faith in their own personal growth towards independence and self-hood.

Dian Cohen, writer and economist from Montreal, writes on *The Professional Working Woman*. There is not much that is new in this essay although Cohen puts it together well. This is the only essay of the five which does not describe the situation by means of personal interviews. It comprises, instead, statistical tables, analyses and other factual material on the participation rate of women in the labour force, the rate of unemployment by geographical area, the age of women and men in Canada, the occupations in which professional women are currently employed and the forecasted manpower requirements. Cohen points out that, although women have made great strides into new or traditionally male occupations, the proportion of professional women within the labour force has remained virtually the same since 1901.

In the final two sections, Cohen exposes some of the myths and attitudes which are prevalent in our society and which prevent the professional working woman from reaching her potential. She argues that society's attitudes are a far more potent force with which to contend than the elimination of discriminatory legislation and policy decisions. This may be true, to a certain extent, although considering how attitudes change, it is a mistake to disregard the values of legislation. In Cuba, for example, the new Family Code requires that women and men share equally the household duties when both spouses work outside the home. With

stiff fines for those who break the law, it should not be too long before attitudes toward household duties change.

Margaret Daly, author and features writer for the *Toronto Star*, writes about disadvantaged women by describing the lives of three women who represent disadvantaged groups in Canada. All three women are heads of households which exist well below the accepted definitions of poverty. Another shared characteristic is that their lives have been shaped by "forces of society that have crushed and moulded them into a lifestyle of poverty, of 'disadvantage,' because they are women." (p. 103) Their disadvantage is that they are not financially dependent on a man. A female-headed family has a 40% chance of being poor.

Throughout the essay Daly elaborates on the forces in society which cause the disadvantaged situation of the women. Simply being on welfare is obviously the best path to poverty. Furthermore, for those women who would prefer to get off welfare, a real choice does not exist. Like Frances they would work for poverty-level wages. They would remain poor. The single mother's special predicament is that she is defined by social agencies as unemployable and treated by Manpower officials as low priority for retraining. Her desire to enter or re-enter the labour force is not taken seriously; there are no incentives provided and she faces discrimination in policy and

attitudes of the Department of Manpower. Either there is no suitable day care or else she would have to pay out most of her wages for it where it does exist.

There are special forces operating against immigrant women, farm women and women who live in certain areas of the country. Immigrant women are severely exploited when they work illegally. Also, they often work at jobs which are an extension of the housewife role and are invisible in the economic mainstream, leaving themselves open to further exploitation. They may often face racial discrimination as well. Although farm women, according to the author, are spared some of the humiliations of the urban poor, they are nevertheless disadvantaged. The approximate annual income in Canada of farm families is below the poverty line. And even if they had the time, farming women would have difficulty finding work outside the home. Similarly, those women who live in communities where mining, pulp and paper and fishing industries predominate are at a great disadvantage in finding employment. Even when the families do have two incomes, they remain poor.

Daly is direct and unequivocal about placing the blame for the plight of the disadvantaged woman. She quotes an article by Simon Fodden in the *Bulletin of Canadian Welfare Law* that ". . . her dependent situation arises from the fact that she is unable to

work--and that is the fault of society at large . . . . Insufficient education and skills training, insufficient job opportunities, insufficient salary and insufficient day-care centers are the cause of the dependence. Society, having caused the problem, should bear the cost."

Katherine Govier is a freelance writer who lives and works in Toronto. She writes the fifth essay, entitled *The Young Woman*. This essay is a brilliant treatment of a complex and difficult subject. Govier shows not only a keen understanding of the forces operating in a young woman's life, but also a genuine empathy and compassion.

Govier describes the great change in women between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five. The fifteen year-old is arrogant and sure of herself. She is full of imagination and has great plans for her future. She has to be told and taught that she will not be the prime minister or an astronaut but may not fully appreciate these limitations. Govier sees growing up as cutting oneself down to size and striking compromises between fantasy and reality. For the young woman, the business of living "falls tragically short of the dream, short of the capabilities and even the possibilities." (p. 128)

In this essay eleven young women from British Columbia to Newfoundland speak

for themselves. Generously interwoven among personal statements are intelligent comments by the author.

Govier points out that it is not surprising that young women don't seem to be changing, given that the two main institutions of socialization have not changed. While discussing the family as socializer, she makes a powerful statement about sexual exploitation of young women within families. With case histories of sexual abuse by fathers and uncles, Govier introduces a subject which has been ignored in much of the literature on the socialization of women. She explains that, although the family helps the male to develop an ego that will be self-sustaining and lifelong, the girl learns from her family that her efforts are largely irrelevant to her future. She is taught not to "see her future as a direct flow from her aims and actions. . . ." (p. 139) The school, as the other great socializer, is an obstacle to any real change for the young woman. Govier does not subscribe to the 'backlash' or 'reactionary' theory of young women's attitudes. She believes, rather, that they are confused--looking backward, yes, but forward, as well.

A Photo Essay is the final chapter--sixty-one pages of black and white photographs by four photographers: Vivian Frankel, Ellen Tolmie, Edith Dalschen and Pamela Harris. The themes of the photographs seem to fit

roughly into the same categories as the rest of the book--there are photos of young women, disadvantaged women, professional and non-professional working women and homemakers.

Although the photos of Vivian Frankel add up to almost half the total (twenty-four out of sixty-one) they are the most forgettable. They are mediocre in both technical quality and content. Her few successful photographs stand apart from the cluttered, grey humdrum of the others. The photos by Ellen Tolmie and Edith Dalschen are well chosen and technically excellent.

By far the best photographer, however, is Pamela Harris. Her photographs are so good that they stand out alone in one's memory of the photo essay. Most of her subjects are mothers and homemakers: kneading a bright pan of dough, preparing food in the comfortable company of a child, posing proudly with children and husband or with fresh homemade bread or in a tidy memory-laden living room. Harris achieves some powerful effects with the use of light. The final photo shows a young mother holding her infant, natural sunlight highlighting her wavy hair, the baby and bassinet and a large jug of pussywillows on the table.

Oh, yes, the International Women's Year Secretariat produced this book in a hurry, for THE Year.

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