

to farm production, farm management, and the rural economy generally, which have become a focal point for young women concerned with rural economy.

However, I have to tell you that there are a number of compelling reasons why there should be a common front among women – and women's organizations – on a number of feminist issues.

1) Despite what an older generation of women may have accepted for themselves, there is the new situation of your daughters and granddaughters to consider. It is a fact that if you are born female you have a much greater chance of being poor than if you were born male; of making far less money at less rewarding tasks, and generally will be under-recognized for whatever contribution you may make to any economic enterprise.

Opportunities for rewarding and satisfying careers and reasonable incomes will not be afforded your daughters and granddaughters without some major feminist efforts in that behalf. Don't expect men to be fair. It is not that we wish to be unfair; it is simply that all of our major institutions have developed with a pronounced male bias, including many institutions which are dominated by women, such as the school, hospital and social services systems. And unfairness nowadays is much more obvious to young women and more difficult to accept than at any other time in our history, when the role of women was defined in such limited terms.

2) The second reason for a common feminist front is that the instability of family life is much more threatening to the security and well-being of women than of men. Dependence on men for security and support can no longer be presumed on at any age, to the extent that it once could.

Family conflict is now more likely to mean separations than in the past, when people remained together even in the case of deep and bitter animosities, simply out of economic necessity.

Separation still carries a much greater risk of financial and social hardship for the female partner than for the male, because of the extent to which social conventions and the law favour the male partner and his property interests, and recent changes in the law have not really brought all that much change yet.

3) While the burden of caring for and nurturing dependent people of all

ages has always fallen to women, for most of our history there has always been some form of extended family to provide support. Increasingly this burden is falling to women who are without social support, who are now in the labour force outside their homes, and who are overwhelmed by the personal demands which are placed on them.

Yet the primary sources of support – the social services, and child care services, and family support services, etc. are among the services threatened at a time of government spending restraint. *There is not a single government in this country which is acting appropriately with respect to the range and amount of social supports now required by women in their historic and conventional roles.*

4) The fourth reason for common action by women is that in many situations, being a feminist is simply the right and decent thing to be, especially insofar as they are the only ones interested in taking effective action on problems which are uniquely the problems of women, e.g. examining ways to cope with the increasing incidence of pregnancy among single teenaged women, or to establish shelters for battered and abused wives, or support centres for victims of rape, or to provide any of the other services required by women and children who are victimized by men.

This also involves the whole question of traditional male dominance over issues which are only the problem of women, and men need to be knocked clear out of the ring if these issues are to be correctly dealt with, because predictably men will do the wrong thing on any one of them. (In a recent sexual assault case in P.E.I. a Supreme Court Judge was quoted in a newspaper report as having said that the woman did not really experience physical harm; she had been kidnapped at knife point, tied to a tree and left alone for an hour, and then repeatedly assaulted all night; but by some oversight had apparently not been physically beaten).

So no matter what your feelings may be about the excesses in the women's movement, sober reflection of the options must make almost every woman a feminist believer deep in her own heart. That should not be bad news for men, except insofar as we are not prepared to extend to women the same respect and con-

sideration we show to one another. There can be no real threat to the status of men simply because we accept the equal status of women. Men and women will always bond as couples, will always have infatuations, will fall into love and out of love, will have affairs of the heart, and will always do the foolish things with one another which are dictated by our hormones and by our genes, but this can have nothing whatever to do with support for the feminist movement and for women's issues.

It is possible to be a feminist and be feminine, to be an activist supporter of women's causes and at the same time have a personal attraction to a man. Because we men are individually as innocent as everybody else over this situation – none of us willed the male-female situation: it just happened that way. So being a feminist is not a man vs. woman sort of thing – it is simply a matter of redressing an imbalance in the relationship.

With that out of the way I would like to touch on four main themes for the remainder of this presentation. They concern:

- 1) women and economic development;
- 2) women and political action;
- 3) women and bodily integrity;
- 4) women and poverty.

Women and Economic Development

Let me illustrate the situation of women in the labour force this way: I served as Deputy Minister and as Ministerial Assistant for twelve years, during which time I attended many Interprovincial and Federal-Provincial Conferences, both in my sector and in related sectors. Despite the fact that Health, Education, and Social Service Systems are largely staffed by women, the extent of participation by women hardly varied at those meetings over those twelve years.

The consequence has been that throughout those twelve years we dealt almost exclusively at our meetings with issues with which men – political men – were comfortable and secure: work incentives; manpower training; unemployment insurance issues; Federal-Provincial warfare of a most frivolous nature; welfare costs; but never – not ever – the important issues of child care, child protection, appropriate care of the aged, family supports, or any of the major service issues in that field.

This has been my experience with male perceptions of issues in a field