

And now for something

by Eve Zaremba

Today, a friend waxed eloquent about the imminence of nuclear Armageddon; in the next breath she was discussing her trip to Italy next summer. Another, younger friend who doesn't remember the Other Cold War, informed me of the utter irrelevance of our federal election in the face of the U.S. and Soviet confrontation. Then she proceeded with long-term career plans. A third friend, who considers parliamentary politics a waste of time because you can't change anything within the system, is spending all her time fighting Ontario Housing on behalf of the poorest tenants. ants.

Consistency is not an outstanding feature of the human species. The world continues to continue because most of us act as if we expected it to continue.

Sure, it's easy to be overwhelmed by the specter of nuclear annihilation, by the probability of the Third World War (stocks of armament companies are going up, along with gold, a sure sign there are people who are counting on war). It does make our Canadian election seem totally unimportant, mere shadow boxing by the Three Stooges. If the world were to end tomorrow the election would be senseless. So would doing the laundry. But suppose it doesn't. Suppose a world holocaust doesn't arrive in time to save us from having to cope with the future. In that case it would be nice to have some clean socks, wouldn't it?

On a world scale Clark, Trudeau and Broadbent don't matter a damn and cannot affect anything of importance: Canadian governments are like Canadian citizens — powerless to control events. But we won't spend our lives on a grandiose global scale. Rhetoric aside, what matters to people are things that affect their daily lives. For instance, OPEC raises the price of oil — but what matters to us is how this is translated into dollars and cents at the gas pump. Governments in Canada have no influence on OPEC but they sure have control over how the world price of oil will hit us and when.

I don't believe that our powerlessness is absolute, only partial and relative. We cannot renounce all responsibility. We had better keep an eye on our masters, making sure we know how their system works. It's our system too, in the sense that we have no choice but to live with it and with its effect on us.

Granting that governments have power over our lives, does it matter what flavour of political party forms the government? Aren't they all much of muchness under this system? Aren't Pierre, Joe and Ed just Tweedledee, Tweedledum and Tweedledo? Aren't all three merely powerhungry, mindless puppets of vested interests serving various shades of the dominant, affluent, white, male spectrum?

My position is that even if that is the case, it matters who is running the show, how they got there, against what opposition, and which particular and contradictory aspects of the dominant ideology are momentarily in the ascendant.

Let's take a look at the three major parties the way we would like to be able to judge them. As to their specific perspective on women, there isn't much to choose between them. Generally we are so low in the collective consciousness of men in power or fighting for power that we can hardly be said to exist.

There are a few individual Members of Parliament who stand out from the dreary crowd of their respective parties. For instance, Monique Bégin of the Liberals, ex-cabinet minister, understands about women's poverty and appears to care. David McDonald of the P.C.s, in spite of his ludicrous claim to 'leadership in the women's revolution', is undoubtedly aware of women as a discreet political constituency and is the best Secretary of State we are likely to get.

These two are uniquely non-representative of their parties. The NDP has to be measured somewhat differently since, very naively, women expect more from it. In fact our home-grown social democrats tend to make platitudinous promises on economic matters and carefully avoid contentious issues like abortion. What the NDP would do in the unlikely event of gaining national office can only be extrapolated from its performance in provincial power — not much, apart from lipservice to equality.

None of our political parties perceives women as a separate constituency to which they are responsible.

How do the two major parties deal with 'big' issues which affect us all but in which women are not considered factors? On this basis also it's a temptation to damn them all as equally capitalistic, bourgeois, male, stupid and to forget the whole thing. But things are seldom as simple as we would like to make them. Our ability to handle complexities is a measure of our political wisdom.

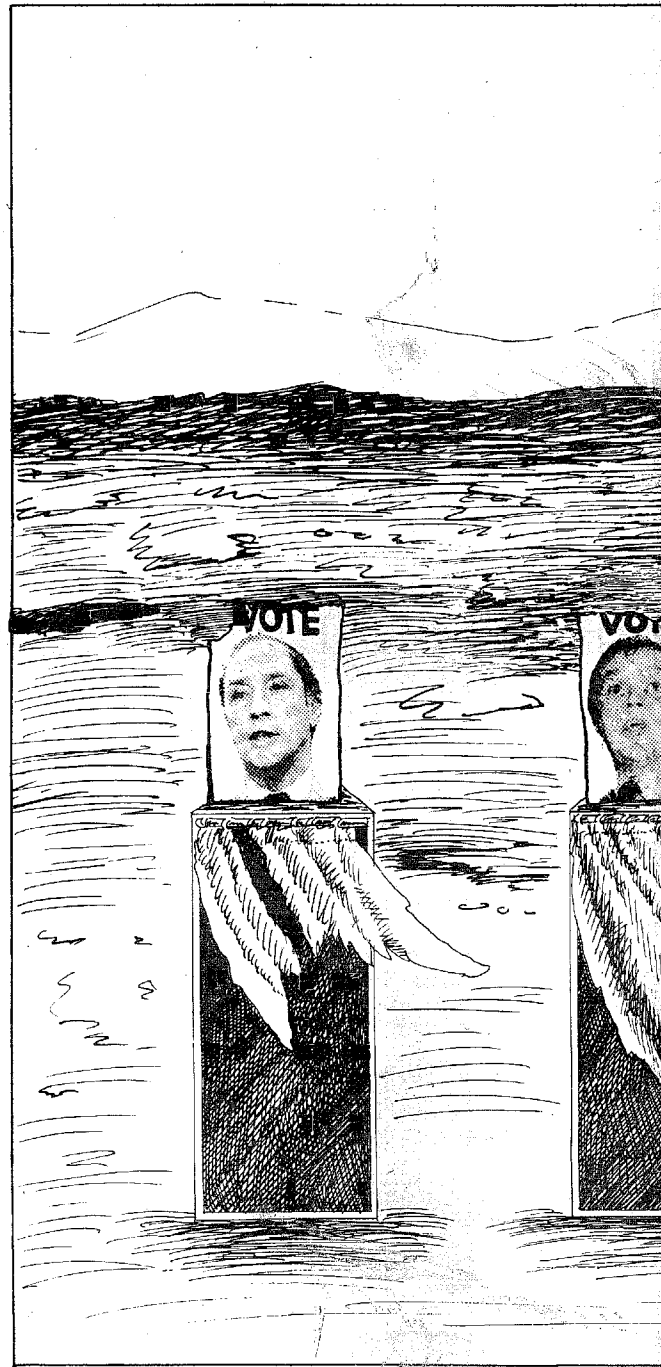
An example, control of off-shore resources, is a complex issue worthy of careful examination. This simultaneously involves energy ownership and control, environmental protection, provincial versus federal power, constitutional change and, for good measure, relations with Quebec (remember Labrador?). What could be better!

Joe Clark promised Newfoundland to transfer control of off-shore resources — essentially oil at this point — from the federal government (i.e. all Canadians. It's clear there is a distinction between 'government' and 'people' but until we reject state nationalism there is no way for this distinction to be realised.) to individual provinces. The matter is far from settled since it takes more than Clark's say-so to accomplish. Sure, Joe was fishing for Newfie votes, but he did it without any qualms, while Trudeau would never make such a promise. Leaving Joe and Pierre to their differences for a while, what is our feminist position on ownership to off-shore resources? Here are a few obvious questions to ask ourselves:

- Has any government the right to take something which belongs to the whole nation and give it to one part exclusively? It's difficult to be 'principled' on this; it can cut so many ways.
- The immediate issue is oil — a scarce, valuable and politically potent resource. Is Canada or Newfoundland better capable of controlling and administering it for the benefit of ordinary citizens? Considering its relative size, can Newfoundland reap the benefits for its people without becoming a captive of world-scale oil companies?
- Off-shore exploration and development involves danger to the environment and possible conflict with other states. How would those aspects be handled, by whom, at whose cost, and in whose interest?

How we answer these questions depends as much on our political philosophy as on 'objective' facts of the case. Clark and Trudeau differ on this issue because, despite both being free enterprise, parliamentary democrats, they arrive at this common point from somewhat different ideological locations. Under shifting political pressures one will do under duress what the other does gladly, and vice versa. Thus the perceived and actual differences between political parties in a country such as Canada are diminished and the operative distinction is between the *ins* and the *outs*. But where they come from ideologically does matter and is part of the dynamic we must understand.

To grapple realistically with issues which are more than mere artifacts of the system requires taking seriously the Canadian political process as presently constituted. Unless we do so we run the danger that our analysis will be no more than a series of slogans.



by Alison Sawyer

Voting is the means by which we, the citizens of a parliamentary democracy, participate in the political process of our country. Because of the upcoming federal election we are particularly conscious of the importance attached to our vote. Everywhere there are signs and advertisements wooing our vote for this candidate and that political party. The newspapers are filling their pages with reports on the election campaign.

The fate of the country, or so we are led to believe, hinges on how we cast our ballots. While we busily debate who we should vote for and whether it is better to vote for the candidate or for the party, we forget the less savoury aspects of the process. We do not like to think about the sophisticated techniques of manipulation employed by the parties to advertise themselves. We do not like to think that it's the rich guy who wins, much as we secretly suspect that to be the case. We do not like to think about how the boundaries of the ridings are (lawfully) changed around to reflect changing population patterns, or is it changing voting patterns? Why is it that the Toronto riding of Rosedale, for example, nicely balances the poor people who live in the Ontario Housing Corporation's 10,000 unit Regent Park with the wealthy of Rosedale?

I myself do not feel that my vote has too much meaning, nor do many other people. In the 1979 federal election some 75% of all eligible voters actually voted and in the 1974 election, only 71% voted. Yet, any democratic state, claims to derive its authority from the will of the people.

When we elect candidates to sit in Parliament we give them the authority to make laws. But we have no say, other than at election time, in how they are to govern us. In fact, in these complicated times, the Cabinet Ministers are the ones who actually decide which bills will be introduced for Parliament to consider. They, in turn, get their direction and knowledge from the civil servants who do the day-to-day running of the ministries. So the government is an institution which exists and carries on its affairs quite apart from the citizens who give it the power to act on their behalf.

When we think of how little say we have in fact over how we are governed, we are reminded of how little control we have over so much of what happens to us. Take for example the laws allowing roadside breathalyser tests, of the criminal sanctions against marijuana, of excise and sales taxes, of immigration laws, of the welfare system. How much input do we have when these laws are made? It is only the most controversial laws which arouse public debate — by and large we have little say.

WOMEN CANDIDATES RUNNING

NOTE: These lists were compiled before *Broadside's* press deadline of January 13 and are therefore not complete since many candidates had as yet not been officially nominated.

LIBERAL PARTY

Ione Christianson — Yukon
Doreen Lawson — Burnaby
Laurie Switzie — Yellowhead
Judy Erola — Nickel Belt
Sylvia Sutherland — Peterborough
Elizabeth Gomes — Oshawa
Anne Cools — Rosedale
Aideen Nicholson — Trinity
Ursula Appoloni — York Southwestern
Joanne Brennan — Brant
Jeanne Sauvé — Laval de Rapide
Silène Payette — Mercier
Monique Bégin — St. Léonard-Anjou
Thérèse Killins — St. Michel
Eva Côté — Rimouski
Colleen Campbell — Southwest Nova

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Pauline Jewett — New Westminster Coquitlam
Marcia Stickney — Richmond South Delta
Carol Langford — Surrey-White Rock-North Delta
Margaret Mitchell — Vancouver East
Judy McManus — Vancouver South
Cathie McCreary — Calgary South
Jo Evans — Edmonton East
Agnes Wilkey — Medicine Hat
Laverne Lewycky — Dawson
Miriam Simpson — Hamilton West
Paddy Musson — London West
Maxine Jones — Windsor West
Abby Pollonetsky — Ottawa West
Kay Macpherson — York East
Mildred Smith — Leeds Grenville
Mary Lou Weitzel — Elgin
Joan Stone — Gray-Simcoe
Marjorie Lanaway — Oxford
Alexa McDonough — Halifax

Progressive Conservative Party

Pat Carney — Vancouver Centre
Flora MacDonald — Kingston and the Islands
Marie Marchand — Nipissing
Anne Silverman — York Centre
Jean Pigott — Ottawa-Carlton
Diane Chevette — Outremont
Joyce MacDougall — Cape Breton-The Sydneys

COMMUNIST PARTY OF CANADA

Margaret Longmoor — Windsor-Walkerville
Liz Rowley — Hamilton Mountain
Gail Phillips — Davenport
Nan McDonald — York West

There are approximately 50 women candidates running for the Marxist-Leninist party, more than any of the other parties. In the interests of space we have not listed them. For information, call (416) 532-7729.

Compiled by Heather Brown