

International Women's Day

The last ten years of feminism are not the last years The last year of the United Nations Decade for Women has seemed to many people to be an opportune time to take stock of what women have achieved in the last decade. The UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination ushered in International Women's year in 1975. That year saw 10,000 in the IWD March, a whole day of women taking over the Town Hall for films, talks, exhibitions, etc., and the sponsorship of many women's programs (including the Women's Trade Union Commission, now Women's Employment Action Centre) which would lose their funding when the heady days of IWY and the Whitlam Labor government were both undemocratically and suddenly chopped off. The 1975 IWD Broadsheet said "Don't let the UN or the government or your boss or your man tell you what to do. March with us, women demonstrating for what women need". Women acted for their right "To live, to work, to love".

Proclamations of good intent during the last decade have included the federal government's (voluntary) Affirmative Action program, and federal and state anti-discrimination acts, as well as women's units in state and federal government departments. Equal Opportunity Officers have been appointed to make the most of the world's most under-utilised resource — womanpower — (Where's the greatest brain drain? Down the kitchen sink!)

What have we seen for it all?



It's been ten more years of struggle for a Women's Movement with a long history — IWD has been going since 1910 — still fighting for freedom from sweating conditions, child care, equal pay and equal work — just as in 1910. Some issues, particularly those around fertility rights (contraception, abortion, in vitro fertilisation, reproductive technology) have achieved new prominence, and campaigns have mobilised around them.

One focus of the 1985 IWD celebrations is to commemorate the victories women united have achieved, while remembering the demands we still have to attain. The general themes for the 1985 broadsheet are Freedom from Poverty, Freedom from Violence — Freedom to live in a world where we have a *real* say. Issues considered include: housing; social security; work; child care; women's services; women's peace

actions; with the overall theme of the rights of women to lives free of poverty and violence, and all that entails.

Women's refuges and rape crisis centres, once a very marginal concern, now have widespread acceptance — they're known, even if not yet adequately funded. Despite the failure of governments to reform abortion laws, obtaining an abortion has become more possible; and Family Planning centres and Women's Health Centres now provide access to information about contraception. Equal Pay cases in 1972-74 have still not yet achieved equal pay, due mainly to the differences in the work of men and women — women still have the low skill, low pay, low hours jobs, without adequate child care — and current campaigns are working to make equal pay a reality, hopefully with the support of the trade union movement.

Invitation to Readers

The Editorial Collective of *Australian Left Review* invites letters of topical comment, criticism and debate over theoretical and political issues for inclusion in subsequent ALRs. Ideally, letters should be between 200-500 words, and be addressed to:

Letters,
Australian Left Review,
P.O. Box A247,
Sydney South, 2000.

Get those red pens down!

Women's campaigns on peace and disarmament have continued to gain strength, particularly in the actions at Pine Gap and Cockburn Sound, indicating a growing commitment of women to this issue.

Women have also, despite the myriad political issues of the last decade, worked on developing a feminist culture — with its own films, radio, newspapers, books, concerts, dances, magazines and all the things that defy traditional labels.

All this work has been at some cost and great credit to the women involved — the only real conclusion to be drawn from the Decade of Women is that the strength and struggle of women is amazing and often successful, and without it other rhetorical statements of support are not worth the (tons of) paper they're written on.

Phillippa Hall

Kanaky

New Caledonia has slipped from the headlines in the past few weeks. The scene has moved to Paris where leaders of the Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front (FLNKS) and the European Right in Noumea have been negotiating with the High Commissioner Edgar Pisani and the Mitterrand government.

By the time this issue of *Australian Left Review* is printed, New Caledonia could once more be in the headlines. For, whatever the final form of the Pisani Plan, one side or the other is likely to reject it.

The first Pisani Plan proposed a referendum in July which would decide on an independence date — either on 1 January 1986 or in 1989. But such independence would be severely limited: New Caledonia, or Kanaky, as the FLNKS has named their homeland, would be "associated" with France, which would control foreign affairs, defence, internal security and even education. Noumea would be a white enclave and the European population would control its affairs.

Worse still, all residents in the territory who have lived there for more than three years would be eligible to vote in the July referendum. That would, in all probability, give the anti-independence forces a majority.

Despite the severe limitations of the Pisani Plan, the FLNKS accepted it as a basis for further negotiations. It was, after all, only a plan, and the FLNKS hopes to win further concessions on the question of full independence and voting, and citizenship rights.

The Pisani Plan, moreover, proposed 1 January 1986 as a date for independence — and that is something that the FLNKS has demanded over recent years. They now take that as non-negotiable, something that will happen whatever Paris finally decides.

The French settlers and their supporters in the Wallisian, Tahitian and other minority communities are opposed to independence at any time. It is probable that they will boycott the July referendum. However, the economic crisis now facing the European small businesspeople and population as a whole, due to the collapse of tourism and the closure of the nickel industry during the crisis, may well force the European leaders to face the new reality. A hard core among them, however, based upon the *pieds noirs* from Algeria, who form a neo-fascist terrorist wing of the European population, will resist independence by all means at their disposal.

Whether the FLNKS accepts the final Pisani Plan will depend on how many concessions the French government makes, and how much the FLNKS is willing to compromise and accept something less than full independence. But that could well be achieved in the months and even years after 1 January 1986.

The FLNKS must also face the realities of world politics. They live in a small country, with less than 150,000 people, in a part of the world which remains an imperialist, neo-colonial

lake. Only Vanuatu is a really independent country among the small Pacific island states. The Americans are so concerned about a new Grenada developing somewhere in the world that, through the US Ambassador in Paris, they have come out solidly against independence and for continued French colonial rule.

The American stand also conditions that of Canberra. But the Foreign Affairs mandarins there, and the Hawke government, realise that independence is inevitable and that the major strategic objective must be to find "moderates" to head a future neo-colonial regime.

Canberra is therefore putting cautious pressure on Paris to make sure that, whatever the shape of the final Pisani Plan, it should be acceptable at least to the "moderate" Kanaks, while not upsetting the French *colons* too much. Above all, Canberra does not want a repeat of the turmoil and destabilisation of recent months which led to a notable radicalisation of the Kanak population.

Canberra's tremulous footwork between all the potential minefields is unlikely to succeed. The Mitterrand government is as prone as any previous regime to believe in French imperial "grandeur", and the imposition of the glories of French culture and language on unwilling native populations. Paris also considers the South Pacific an area of French strategic influence, particularly given the continuing nuclear testing on Muroroa.

The proposal to build a major naval base near

Noumea is not only a move to reassure the French *colons* in Noumea, but to expand the French nuclear presence. The warships which will use the Noumea base will be nuclear-armed and/or nuclear-powered.

The Australian labour movement has paid little attention to New Caledonia until recently. The trade unions, through the Pacific Trade Union Forum, have developed links with their Kanak counterparts but, more generally, there has been little contact.

Yet the future of Kanaky is of importance for the labour and progressive movements. If Australia — and New Zealand — are to win some independence in their foreign policies, they will need independent states in their neighbourhood.

Moreover, in addition to the internationalist duty to support struggles for independence and social change in our neighbourhood, the labour movement also has a duty to fight the neo-colonial designs of our own ruling class. Australia has been allocated the South West Pacific as its "sphere of influence" to keep the world safe for imperialism. Lastly, the proposal to have a nuclear-armed naval base so close to our shores should arouse widespread opposition in Australia.

The coming months will be decisive for Kanaky. The Kanak people deserve the widest possible active solidarity in their difficult struggle.

**Denis Freney,
7 February 1985.**