

## national women's political caucus convention

Women of the Republican and Democratic parties gathered in Cincinnati July 12th to 15th at the convention of the National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC). Sharing energies and skills, they envision asserting a feminist presence at the 1980 national conventions and future elections.

Bella Abzug, former chair of the President's Advisory Council for Women and one of the NWPC founders, urged the Cincinnati convention to get feminists elected as uncommitted delegates or pledged to "favorite daughters." A bloc of 500 feminist votes at the Democratic National Convention is not impossible, she said.

In the 1976 conventions that nominated Ford and Carter, there were twice as many Republican women delegates and three times as many Democratic women delegates as in 1972. The Democrats have since approved a rule giving women and men equal representation in the state delegations of the 1980 convention. Although the rule is being challenged within the party, 1,665 women delegates could be very powerful for a few days.

Women now hold only ten percent of the country's elective offices; NWPC was founded in 1971 to change that imbalance. In eight years it has grown to 40,000 members, and it contributed \$350,000 to the campaigns of women candidates in 1978. Like the Republican and Democratic parties, NWPC is organized in state and local chapters that decide the political candidates to be supported by the national organization and their own fund-raising efforts.

Over 1,500 women attended the three-day NWPC convention. They came to attend workshops, listen to the speeches, and, as delegates, to select a new NWPC chairwoman and five vice-chairwomen. Forty-seven states were represented in delegations that varied in size according to the state NWPC membership. The delegations held receptions throughout Friday and Saturday to

meet and question candidates for NWPC offices. A lesbian caucus was formed by women from many states to hear and endorse candidates.

Three vice-chairwomen positions assure national representation for Black, Chicano and Asian women. A fourth vice-chair is for the opposite political party from the chairwoman, and the fifth is open to anyone. After a weekend of politicking, incumbent Mildred Jeffrey of Michigan was defeated by Iris Mitgang of California. Vice-chairwomen are Mary Stanley, Goldy Chu, Olga Moranga, Barbara Davis and Kathy Wilson.

Recognizing that NWPC must organize a large membership to be politically effective, the first day of the convention was devoted to workshops on organization and campaign skills. Some of the topics were: media coverage/advertising, image awareness; direct voter contact; who are we: women voters/women candidates; warming the bench: appointing women to the judiciary; and the right wing.

Many feminists no longer believe they must limit their analysis and public remarks to traditionally women's issues. Seminars on women and the politics of energy, SALT II, women in sports, International Year of the Child, and nontraditional jobs were held to give women background information. Said one delegate, "As we become more sophisticated, we're able to embrace more issues. It's a function of growing up."

In general session the convention passed resolutions reaffirming NWPC's commitment to passage of the Equal Rights Amendment and endorsing the SALT II treaty. Other resolutions called for the eradication of world hunger, a decrease in nuclear production, implementation of Title IX (equal opportunity for women in school programs) and education of women in energy matters.

Between sessions luncheons and receptions for women in office were held giving more political women a time to meet and speak. Shortly before the convention, Carter's special assistant Sarah Weddington asked for time at the ERA luncheon, but her predecessor Midge Costanza had already been selected to speak.

Patricia Harris, then Secretary for Housing and Urban Development, was Carter's spokeswoman most acceptable to the convention. She lauded Carter's record of appointing women to office and deplored the decline in women's earning power. She pointed out that now a male high school dropout earns more than college-educated women. Black women and white women are economically at the bottom of the barrel together, she said.

Women of both parties at the convention agreed it is not good enough to get women elected to positions of power--they must be women who will make changes to improve the lives of all women. Nor should women support candidates who wouldn't work for the ERA, daycare, job training and equal wages for women, and reproductive freedom.

An awkward moment in the opening ceremonies came when Ohio State Senator Marigene Valiquette, in welcoming the overwhelmingly liberal convention to the state, announced she was "pro-life." Valiquette served as a reminder of the thousands who gathered less than a month earlier in Cincinnati to pledge themselves against abortion.

At the concluding session, keynote speaker Gloria Steinem declared herself "a feminist before even I am an American." Without a sense of bonding, women will never achieve power, she told the convention, and urged women in office "to act as spies in the other camp. Otherwise, I'm not really sure that it's all that helpful to have the cream of the women's movement taken off and put inside (the system)."

by lin jansen  
info from NWPC & Washington Post

## being burned

Bernadette Powell, a 27-year-old black woman, has been sentenced to 15 years to life imprisonment on charges that she intentionally murdered her ex-husband who physically abused her during their six-year marriage.

At the trial held in Ithaca, New York, the defense argued that Powell had acted in self defense when she was abducted by her ex-husband, Herman Smith, at gunpoint. But the all white jury of nine men and three women were convinced by the prosecutor, District Attorney Joseph Joch, that Powell was masochistic and enjoyed the beatings, cigarette burnings and other violence inflicted upon her by her husband.

Joch, whose wife had recently obtained a divorce on the grounds of cruel and inhumane treatment, saying that Joch frequently beat her, refused to remove himself from the case.

Another dubious event happened at Powell's trial when Joch relied on testimony from a man who claimed he sold Powell the gun. The man not only repeatedly contradicted himself during his testimony, but admitted he beat his own wife so severely that she was hospitalized.

Supporters of Powell's managed to attend the sentencing despite several unannounced postponements of the trial.

Judge Bruce Dean chose the lesser of two options in sentencing. Powell could have been given 25 years to life, he said. Under her sentence, she will not be eligible for parole until she has served at least 15 years.

Her attorney has appealed for a hearing. In the meantime, the Bernadette Powell Defense Committee is trying to raise \$10,000 for legal fees. Contributions can be sent to BPDF, P.O. Box 164, Ithaca, N.Y. 14850.

Supporters can also write to Judge Bruce Dean and ask that the murder verdict be set aside and a new trial granted. The judge's address is: Tompkins County Courthouse, Ithaca, N.Y. Please send copies of such letters to the defense committee.

info from Ithaca Journal & BPDF.

by mk



## one by one

Yvonne Swan has won a long battle, JoAnn Little is finally out of prison, and now Cassandra Peten has been released.

Cassandra, a battered woman who shot her husband in the leg when he stole her money and threatened to beat her up again, was convicted of assault with a deadly weapon and denied bail last winter. The judge sent her to the The California Institute for Women for a 60 to 90 day "observation" period before sentencing her. That time ended a few weeks ago and the judge sentenced Cassandra to the time she had already served and released her on parole.

Cassandra's victory should be celebrated. But the other thousands of women who are victimized by their husbands must not be forgotten. Total victory will come only when no woman has to live in fear of physical and emotional brutality.

info from No More Cages  
by mk

## "in the tijuana jail"

A South Dakota woman, convicted last year without a trial of marijuana possession, remains in a squalid Mexican jail, despite attempts by politicians and lawyers to help her.

Tossed in jail in March 1987, Dee McStravick faces more than four years more in the rat-infested prison of Tuxpan, a small town in the resort area of Vera Como on the Mexican gulf.

She lives with the constant threat of rape, torture and disease. She needs help, but government officials say there is little they can do for her. Although McStravick has lived in the United States, she is a British citizen. U.S. Sen. Larry Pressler, from South Dakota, has contacted the State Department in Mexico, but "Dee is British and that's a real problem for us," said a spokesperson from the senator's office. McStravick feels abandoned by the British Embassy in Mexico, and efforts by an attorney hired by her mother have so far been unsuccessful.

The Legal Aid Society in McStravick's hometown of Hartford is raising funds for her defense. A friend who recently visited McStravick in prison found her recovering from a serious illness and a primitive surgical operation that endangered her life.

The ordeal began for McStravick when she and another woman decided to tour Mexico with two Mexican-American men. Unknown to the women, the men attempted to smuggle 30 pounds of grass back into the states. Although the men told law officials the women were innocent upon their arrest, McStravick was jailed. She was tricked into signing a confession written in Spanish, a language she does not understand. The men and McStravick's friend are about to be released under the Mexican-American treaty which allows for prisoner exchange.

Women prisoners throughout the world are frequently subjected to degrading, violent sexual abuse. Their voices are seldom heard and too easily forgotten. All women, whether they are in prisons or not, must constantly battle against physical and psychological degradation. The difference, of course, is that women inmates have virtually no place to run to, to seek help.

McStravick is a woman who needs support. Letters protesting her imprisonment can be sent to South Dakota senators Aiva Scarborough and Henry Poppen, and to U.S. senators Larry Pressler and George McGovern.

by mk