Pressuring the Canadian State for Women's Rights: the Role of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women

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This paper examines the history, structure and operation of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC). Charged with the enormous task of addressing all women's issues with public policy implications, the argument is that the organisation is undeservedly criticised as élitist and ineffective. In addition to its broad mandate, the weaknesses and limitations of NAC are attributed to certain restraining conditions: class, ethnic and ideological divisions within the constituency and membership, a high leadership turn-over and the dilemma of restrictive government funding versus time consuming fund-raising.

Pressure groups, or public-interest groups as they are often called, are "organizations whose members act together to influence public policy in order to promote their common interest" (Pross, 1975:2). Interest-group liberalism assumes that the public interest and the public policy agenda should be defined in terms of the organized interests of society (Lowi, 1968). Accordingly, all sectors of society may participate in the democratic process by banding together to express and defend their interests. The aggregation, ordering and balancing of interests thus defined constitutes the ongoing policy process. According to Lowi (1969:71) this working model rests on the following assumptions:

> (1) Organized interests are homogeneous and easy to define, sometimes monolithic. Any "duly elected" spokesman for any interest is taken as speaking in close approximation for each and every member. (2) Organized interests pretty much fill up and adequately represent most of the sectors of our lives, so that one organized group can be found effectively answering and checking some other organized group as it seeks to prosecute its claims against society. And, (3) the role of government is one of ensuring access particularly to the most effectively organized and or ratifying the agreements and adjustments worked out among the competing leaders and their claims. This last assumption is supposed to be a statement of how our democracy works and how it ought to work. Taken together, these assumptions constitute the Adam Smith "hidden hand" model.

Most of the literature on pressure groups is specific to the United States. While there are clearly many similarities between the United States and Canadian socio-political systems, the differences are too important to be obscured by reliance on theory and analysis generated by the United States experience. As Pross (1975:5) emphasizes, "the structure and behaviour of pressure groups are functions of the political systems in which they are located." The little research that has been done on Canadian pressure groups is more descriptive than analytical. Pross, therefore, has developed a

conceptual framework for analyzing pressure groups. The institutional continuum model, as he calls it, distinguishes between "issue-oriented" groups at one end of a four-point continuum, and "institutional" groups at the other end. Groups are categorized according to their organizational characteristics. The process of institutionalization culminates in the ideal type of pressure group characterized by organizational continuity and cohesion; expert knowledge of relevant government sectors; stable membership; well-formulated, short-term objectives; and high regard for overall organizational imperatives. Issue-oriented groups have characteristics which are opposite to those of the institutional pressure group. In reality, of course, particular groups cannot be expected to conform exactly to the typology here, but Pross contends that the pattern does represent the central tendency.

In Canada, political power and control over policy lies within two federal structures: the party system and the bureaucracy, "both of which achieve an apex in the cabinet" (Pross, 1975:18). Parliament or individual MPs are not the first target of pressure group activists. According to one experienced lobbyist, quoted by Van Loon and Whittington (1976:306), "When I see members of Parliament being lobbied, it's a sure sign to me that the lobby lost its fight in the civil service and the cabinet." The task of formulating policy belongs to the bureaucracy; for cabinet ministers this is a secondary role.

Recent changes in the Canadian political process have altered the context in which pressure groups act, with subsequent implications for their behaviour (Aucoin, 1975). These changes have occurred in three areas: (1) The policy advisory functions of the Prime Minister's Office and the Privy Council Office have expanded to de-emphasize the bureaucratic departmentalization of policy formulation and re-assert the

primacy of the political executive in the setting and monitoring of policies. (2) The Prime Minister's Office and the Privy Council Office now advise on broad policy concerns across departmental lines, providing cabinet members with a broad context in which to evaluate advice from their individual departments. (3) The standing committees in the Commons have been re-organized along national policy lines. These reforms have forced pressure groups to: (1) assume a more public role and provide more expert documentation; (2) demonstrate that their proposals conform with the public interest and national priorities; and (3) compete openly with other groups for material and power resources.

Canadian pressure groups face a different set of circumstances from their United States counterparts, because of Canada's parliamentary-cabinet system (Dawson, 1975:35). According to Pross (1975), the Canadian political system is based less on a pluralistic, competitive approach to decision-making than the United States political system. The parliamentary system of government does not allow pressure groups to exploit rivalries between houses of legislature as they do in the United States. Nor is there as much rivalry betwen government agencies in Canada as there is in the United States. Consequently, issue generation is de-emphasized in Canada in favour of access, which as Pross notes, need not be a function of publicity. Access to the bureaucracy and the cabinet depends upon careful cultivation of relationships and channels of communication, possession of expert knowledge, and adoption of an accommodative and consensus-seeking approach. It follows, then, that pressure groups whose characteristics most closely approximate the institutional type have the greatest likelihood of achieving their objectives for influencing public policy. As Pross observes:

> The Canadian policy system...tends to favour elite groups, making functional accommodative, consensus-seeking techniques of political communication, rather than conflict-oriented techniques that are directed towards the achievement of objectives through arousing public opinion (1975:19).

Pross hypothesizes that pressure group success is associated with two main behavioural characteristics: the cultivation of access to public decision-makers in the relevant policy areas, and the demonstrated willingness to accept short-term defeats in the interest of maintaining good relations and achieving long-term success. Two imperatives follow: the necessity for non-partisanship, and the necessity of maintaining staff headquarters in Ottawa. Dawson (1975:46) describes the prerequisites to successful pressure group influence on the bureaucracy in particular:

> A wide network of acquaintances, and even friends, within the bureaucracy, is essential for utilization of all the opportunities... The group and its officials must have a reputation for expertise, reliability and political non-partisanship. They should be able to provide accurate information quickly; they must be reliable about keeping confidences; preferably they should try to restrain their clientele from great public excesses. If the relationship is working properly there is a constant two-way flow of information.

Restraining Conditions Facing Pressure Groups in Canada

For groups willing to operate within this framework of realpolitik, what are the restraining conditions? Goldstein contends in his study of the Consumer's Association of Canada that pressure groups work with certain inherent disadvantages in the capitalist democracies. "These problems include limited financial resources, limited political legitimacy and particular difficulties in defining their priorities clearly" (1979:137-38). In particular, Goldstein notes, "general" groups, characterized by broad goals and the inability to provide material rewards to members, have difficulty in developing strategies to

overcome these inherent disadvantages.

Dawson's (1975) analysis emphasizes the relationship between federalism on the one hand, with its over-riding question of jurisdiction and its requirement that a "national consensus" be constructed out of varying regional priorities and interests, and the financial constraints which pressure groups face on the other hand:

> The problems associated with unclear constitutional jurisdiction and group difficulty in aggregating client demands into cohesive country-wide policies are the cause of major weaknesses in pressure groups claiming national support. They affect not only the groups' ability to perform effectively their role in influencing federal government policies, but have also led...to financial instability. The problem is most serious for groups which depend upon "voluntary assessment" from component organizations...The financial weakness is exacerbated by the necessity of maintaining well-staffed offices at both levels, and it also has an adverse effect on the frequency of board and executive meetings, thus compounding the normal communication problems extant in larger national organizations. Lack of money has led to restrictions of activity at the national level or to acceptance of a government subsidy or grant (1975:33, emphasis added).

For Loney, whose 1977 critique takes a Marxist view, this last point is critical in understanding the restraining conditions facing voluntary groups concerned with social change. Government funding of the voluntary sector must be understood as an important instrument of social control. In the mid-60s, Loney notes, the federal government expanded its support in the field of citizen participation beyond established agencies to include innovative and apparently radical groups:

> It could of course be argued that all of this represents no more than the laudable desire of the government to facilitate the fuller workings of democracy. In fact, government has a very pronounced effect on the way in which democracy works, serving to contain the debate within broad, but nonetheles definable, parameters (1977:457).

Loney's data on such recent federal programs as Company of Young Canadians and Opportunities for Youth lend some support to his claim.

As well, the literature generally supports the view that public interest groups have little hope of successfully influencing public policy if they are belligerent or uncompromising, or if they employ non-routine techniques in pursuit of their goals.

The Case of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women: The Women's Federal Lobby

1. History

The roots of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) lie in the campaign to establish the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada (RCSW), led by a group of prominent, Toronto-based activists with Laura Sabia at their head (see Morris, 1980). NAC was founded by these same women, and the thirty-two groups they represented along with some twenty newly-formed feminist groups, to pressure the federal government to implement the RCSW recommendations. The mandate to create NAC was given by the five hundred delegates to the 1972 "Strategy for Change" convention, chaired by Sabia. Its formation represented a major response to the RCSW report by one of its main constituencies.

As an umbrella organization, NAC maintained its diversity at the national level with the aim of truly representing Canadian women. NAC founders saw from the outset that it was essential to keep women of all classes involved, especially those from the labour movement. Working-class women offered social criticism while professional, academic, and business women, and some women from the public service, offered mainstream political experience and contacts (Lorna Marsden, personal interview, September, 1978).

2. Structure

By 1980, NAC represented one hundred and fifty non-governmental groups from across the country. These ranged from the large, established women's voluntary organizations which have been the mainstay of NAC — groups such as the National Council of Jewish Women and the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs -- to newer "status of women" and issue-oriented feminist groups, such as the Hamilton Rape Crisis Centre and Kelowna Status of Women Action Society. To join NAC, groups must have at least ten members and be sponsored by another member organization. Individuals do not have voting rights in NAC, although they may participate as observers and "Friends of NAC." As such, they make financial contributions and are invited to support activities.

Eight of the twenty-two members on the executive are elected by groups within their own region. The executive is constitutionally empowered to run the organization; its agenda is set at NAC's annual meetings. All affiliates accept NAC's official purposes, which are:

> 1. to press for the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women and for additional reforms supported by the participating organizations;
> 2. to encourage communication between organizations, local groups, and individuals working to improve the status of women in Canada (NAC brochure, n.d.).

Because of the breadth and generality of these objectives, NAC's member organizations are highly diversified in ideology, and class, regional, and ethnic interests. This diversity produces conflicts of interest among member organizations and disputes over priorities. Yet NAC has never formally excluded a group, and the views of both the Communist Party of Canada and the YWCA are aired.

For historical reasons, NAC was based in Toronto. Although the

organization was national in scope, the initial organization and executive decision-making was largely carried out by the Toronto women. Given limited financial resources and the inevitable conflict of loyalties for women representing their far-flung local and regional organizations, it was deemed easier to depend upon members living in Toronto. Predictably, this led to tensions and charges of narrowness and elitism in the executive, which, in any case, effectively is NAC. The problem of adequate representation of regional interests and priorities was seriously debated in NAC. Although funds were raised (or diverted) for members to travel to Toronto for monthly executive meetings, the whole question of regionalism remains a problem for the organization. One member of the executive articulated some of the difficulties and frustrations related to this question in 1978:

> When I hear the suggestion that regional representation include areas such as "the prairie provinces and territories" or "the Atlantic provinces," I shudder. I cannot conceive of one person providing meaningful representation from areas which are so large. In Alberta, for example, we face the problem of not being able to liaise with women from the far north and even south of the province. Our needs and interests are often quite different and frequently I feel hopelessly inadequate when I attempt to speak for sisters scattered so far apart...I believe we must establish what regionalism implies to a) member groups and b) NAC. What are the objectives of regional representatives and what obligations do they have to NAC and to their areas? Perhaps it's mandatory for regional rep's to have back up - a consulting group in their areas, but then it seems to me that even more funding has to be found to not only back NAC but also the smaller regional groups. Funds everywhere are tight...being a member of the NAC executive is a commitment to work, and electing a regional representative who has no commitment to working or being actively involved in some specific aspect(s) of NAC is ridiculous. Surely we can avoid tokenism in our feminist groups (Pat Preston, "Regional Representation...some thoughts" mimeo., undated).

The problems for public interest groups with limited financial resources have been summed up by Goldstein (1979:139): "Since they represent no special interests, they are unlikely to possess any

automatic source of financial support and must scramble for money where they can." This condition is aggravated when the public pressure group is an umbrella organization for voluntary groups, as is NAC. Members of NAC owe their primary allegiance to their own organizations. NAC neither expects nor receives significant financial support from its groups or their individual members. Annual dues range from $15.00 to $25.00, depending upon size and type of the group. While NAC depends largely upon federal government funding for its operations [1], there are pronounced differences of opinion within the organization about the wisdom of this situation. Some fear that dependence upon government funding will lead inevitably to cooptation; others that NAC has already been coopted, in deed if not in word.[2] Still others feel that cooptation is neither necessary nor inevitable.

Three models for funding were debated at NAC's 1981 annual meeting (From discussion paper, Finance and Funding Workshop, 1981 NAC annual meeting):

1. Complete self-sufficiency, with all money being raised by NAC and no government funding.

2. Core funding from the government, with NAC raising a percentage of its budget from other sources.

3. All funding from the government, with additional input from affiliation fees.

In the opinion of NAC leadership, self-sufficiency is presently unattainable. The second model is currently followed within the organization and probably best reflects present realities. There is no strong current of opinion in favour of the third model, complete dependence upon government funding. The extent to which NAC is constrained by limited funding is best illustrated by the fact that in 1981 it was still unable to maintain permanent headquarters or lobbyists in Ottawa.

Methods of Influence

1. Action oriented toward the policy system

NAC operates, as a Canadian pressure group of national scope must, by attempting to influence the bureaucracy and cabinet. It has two ways of doing this: through its annual Ottawa lobbying with cabinet ministers and MPs, and through briefs and position papers on current policy issues affecting the status of women, which it is invited with increasing frequency to present to parliamentary committees. Priorities are determined by the membership at an annual meeting. Between meetings, the executive committee responds to issues as they arise.

Former NAC President, Lorna Marsden, explained the campaign for 'equal pay for work of equal value':

> There was a wrangle within the cabinet about whether the equal wages provision should get into the Human Rights Commission or should remain in Labour. Since we favoured its remaining in Labour, we contacted Munro and his officials to put forward that view. Our contact took two forms. At our annual meeting and lobbying in Ottawa in April 1976, we invited the ministers and representatives to come to appear on a panel. Our members that evening included well-informed women from across the country. Our anger and distress at the ill-informed responses from the members of Parliament and their representatives had quite an impact on some members of Parliament and government. Subsequently we were invited to several long meetings in both Toronto and Ottawa with representatives of both the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Justice concerning our point of view...
>
> In the meantime, several of us inside the Government party (Liberal) had been lobbying with the Prime Minister and his assistants, the party leaders, and the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, using NAC materials and positions. Women in the other parties had been lobbying with their members of parliament and party leaders. Questions were asked in the House and in party meetings...The bill was withdrawn for amendments in 1975 and for a long time we had to rely on inside information and our contacts for news of what was going on... the lobbying had some impact although our view that equal pay for work of equal value be included in existing labour legislation was not sustained. The federal government re-introduced the issue as a new bill (C-25) in November 1976, complete with the equal value section added (1979:254-55).

Although in this case NAC was only partially successful in achieving its policy objectives, Marsden's account demonstrates the way in which the organization operates. Clearly, NAC's informal methods of influence were important in this campaign, as Dawson (1975) and Pross (1975) stressed above. NAC leaders are firmly plugged into the federal women's network and many key women in the government are also NAC members.[3]

NAC need not rely entirely on informal contacts with women in high places. Among its own leadership are women who have mainstream political legitimacy and political access on their own terms. Marsden, for example, is a senior sociologist at the University of Toronto, and was elected to the national policy chair of the Liberal Party of Canada in 1980. Many NAC leaders are affiliated with either the Liberals or the NDP, and have attained prominence in their professional or public lives. In this way, NAC is able to participate informally in the policy-making process. Marsden's account of NAC's campaign for 'equal pay for equal value' also illustrates this aspect of influence:

> The bill was withdrawn for amendments in 1975 and for a long time we had to rely on inside information and our contacts for news of what was going on. Influencial people, such as the former head of the Women's Bureau in the Department of Labour were reported to be against the equal value concept on "practical" grounds. Several of us knew lawyers inside the ministry and asked them to get us news. "Anonymous" brown paper envelopes came our way. At social gatherings we pressed for news and questions. Officials in town on other business would stop off for a chat in our offices. A newly formed and highly effective organization of women lawyers and legal secretaries made presentations and briefs and accompanied us on lobbying visits. The Ontario Government formed a study group on which one of our members sat. Officials in the Ontario government, while remaining officially neutral, unofficially pressed us to continue, fed us information, and warned us of impending developments (1979:255).

2. Mobilizing the constituency and influencing public opinion

NAC is always trying to strengthen its support base and inform

and influence public opinion about status-of-women issues. One major vehicle has been its Status of Women News, a political magazine published an average of four times a year between 1974 and 1980. Publication was suspended in 1980 due to lack of funds, but was to be resumed in 1981. Total circulation of the magazine in 1980 was about 2,500 copies. Distribution was limited to feminist centres, community groups, women's organizations and subscribers.

According to Haviva Hosek, NAC's Secretary at the time of writing, the importance of Status of Women News in achieving NAC's goals is "unclear," but the organization remains committed to using the magazine as a platform for communication. It intends to launch a subscription campaign and otherwise attempt to enlarge the magazine's circulation in Canada. NAC's decision to resume publication was based on two considerations. First, NAC was granted a budget increase by the Secretary of State in 1980, enabling the organization to meet publication costs without sacrificing other priorities. Second, several other feminist publications ceased operation around the same time as Status, and will not be resurrected.[4] There is, then, a lack of feminist-oriented publications with national focus and distribution. "Our decision to resume publication of Status can be viewed in a different publishing context now, which may influence its impact" (Hosek, personal interview, October, 1981).

All member groups and "Friends of NAC" receive NAC Memo, a monthly mimeographed bulletin concerning NAC activities and current issues and events affecting women. As well, NAC reproduces copies of its position papers and briefs, and has printed a cross-referenced index of all its resolutions and recommendations since 1972. The organization

also sponsors and participates in public events such as conferences.

Perceptions of NAC

NAC is not a household word for women in Canada, even though it is the only national voluntary organization dedicated entirely to defending and enlarging women's rights through political lobbying. It is likely that the majority of people outside of the women's movement and policy networks have never heard of the organization. Among those who know NAC, opinion is divided about its orientation and effectiveness. A humorous comment made by a feminist activist during a panel discussion on the direction of the women's movement in Canada conveyed the unflattering image of NAC: "If the major American women's organization is called NOW, ours should be called LATER!"[5]

Responding to the lack of public awareness of NAC and perceptions of it as a pale and ineffective imitation of the American National Organization for Women (NOW), Marsden said NAC does not have the resources to influence the general public effectively. There is, however, a more fundamental reason for NAC's style:

> First, many issues of the women's movement are too complex to be put forward in a useful way to influence public opinion; eg. "crummy pay" is OK to talk about, but strategic considerations of equal pay for work of equal value are too complex...more fundamentally, if you look at the way social change occurs in Canada most impact comes from influence on institutional authorities challenged in a quiet, straightforward way - not from populist protest. We're about change, not protest (Marsden, interview, October, 1978).

While the latter point (which Marsden stressed was fundamental) is not necessarily an adequate description of the social change process in Canada, it does support Pross' (1975) argument. Pross traced the process of organizational maturation within the women's liberation movement from its early beginnings in the 1960's to its present stage of

development:

> Demonstrations still occurred but they were more orderly and less flamboyant, and increasingly they were supplemented or replaced by careful documentation of women's grievances and reasoned discussion of proposed solutions. Confrontation with officials has become less common. As these changes occurred women's lib [sic] groups ceased to be issue-oriented and became fledgling and then mature organizations... Those concerned with continuing problems or able to provide desirable selective benefits will be the most likely to survive at the institutional or mature level (1975:17).

Because many of the issues of the women's movement are philosophically and technically complex - 'equal pay' and 'affirmative action' are two examples - NAC favours strategies which put "a group of well-prepared, articulate, and pragmatic women together with those who actually implement law in a face-to-face negotiation. The important point of a social movement is to get a concept accepted (Marsden, 1979:248; emphasis added).

NAC's behaviour conforms to Pross' model of an "institutional" pressure group. As such, it makes no sense to criticize it for failing to behave like an issue-oriented radical organization. In its own terms, NAC is a relatively mature pressure group for women's rights; nevertheless, it has frequently been the object of criticism as summarized in Saturday Night ("Building the feminist network," unsigned, September, 1978:4):

> What critics contended is that it's either elitist, wishy-washy, ineffectual, invisible, has forgotten its middle name, and is a waste of time and money. For one thing, it remains entirely dependent for funds (about $55,000 a year) on the very government it's supposed to lobby; so, inevitably it has sought to avoid biting the hand that feeds it. For another, it continues to accommodate such a spectrum of viewpoints that it's been unable to avoid compromising on practically everything.

Many women within the federal government, some of whom belong to NAC, either as "Friends" or representatives of non-governmental, Ontario women's groups, feel NAC has yet to develop sophisticated political

strategies. As one NAC representative who refused to be named observed: "There is no shared analytic understanding of social change; it is more by leadership and luck than by design that NAC has had an impact." Another federal woman who is a "Friend of NAC" said:

> NAC is the closest thing we have to a representative group...It is as effective as the women who come from the member groups, and there is frequent turnover...Their lobbying is largely symbolic, but is a good learning process for women. Their orientation is more 'women's rights' than feminist, per se, - a 1978 version of the National Council of Women. The Advisory Council on the Status of Women is more sophisticated, and has more behind-the-scenes expertise than NAC. Nor does NAC have the funds necessary to produce good research (Hellie Wilson, personal interview, July 1978).

And from a civil servant in the Employment and Immigration ministry, involved in the development of voluntary affirmative action programmes:

> NAC is not equivalent to NOW, partly because it is an umbrella organization and they see themselves that way. NAC has been useful in saying what needs to be said, but in this department we don't see any followup after their annual lobby day...what the bureaucrats understand is political pressure, and this is what women don't yet know how to do effectively (Elizabeth McAllister, August, 1978).

The key to understanding NAC's weaknesses and limitations as a pressure group, I believe, is to be found in an examination of the restraining conditions it faces.

Restraining Conditions for NAC

NAC's diversity necessitates discussion, negotiation and compromise in order to arrive at organizational consensus. Positions adopted through this process cannot please nor accurately reflect all of NAC's constituent parts. Since the rhetoric - and to some extent the practice - of NAC is based on participatory democracy, internal dissension can be a draining experience for the organization. Insiders fear the organization could fall apart over a fundamental issue and some feel that members need to tread carefully. What could destroy NAC?

Centrists fear a possible "take-over" by more left-leaning and confrontation-oriented members. Leftists, on the other hand, view the dominant central tendency, middle of the road approach of NAC as a fundamental obstacle to "real social action on behalf of women's liberation," as one critical delegate at the 1980 Annual Meeting put it. This is not to imply that NAC fails to deal with fundamental women's issues; rather, the problem is NAC's vulnerability to internal, ideological conflict. "The real split is in terms of the confrontation-adversarial approach versus the lobby-and-influence approach" (Hosek, personal interview, August, 1981).

The complex and technical task of defining issues, and the education and expertise called for by the 'brief and lobby' method tends to exclude less educated and less politically-involved women from a pressure group such as NAC. While this may be inevitable, the fact is a source of irritation to women who have been steeped in an ideology stressing egalitarianism, anti-hierarchical organization, and the ideals of participatory democracy. Given this orientation, the charges of 'elitism' leveled against NAC are inevitable.

Class, ethnic and ideological divisions within NAC are further exacerbated by 'regional pull,' which has been a great problem for the organization. The demands of regionalism appear too great for NAC's limited resources. Scholars such as Dawson (1975) and Van Loon and Whittington (1971) point to the impact on Canadian pressure groups of problems associated with federalism and regional disparities. Marsden summarizes the particular impact of these problems on voluntary organizations such as NAC:

> The existence of two official languages in the country, and many cultural traditions, is a hard social fact which affects every social organization...Any group trying to bring about social change in the country...has to face these divided loyalties. An

attempt to build a national network of people often breaks down under the pull of regional concerns. It is also incredibly expensive in money and time to canvas a country over three thousand miles wide with five time zones.

A voluntary movement, like the women's movement, is hard hit by these divisions. On issues of major concern, Canadian women must address themselves to both federal and provincial legislation and administrations, usually with different political parties in charge. An attempt to build consensus on any issue implies building a compromise position that will take into account the sensibilities of French and English, Catholics, Protestants, and Jews, the economic interests of the various regions, the dominance of Central Canada, especially much-hated Toronto, and the dependent position of the economically poor regions such as much of the Maritimes (1979:248).

The critical problem of funding is exacerbated by the fact and implications of NAC's raison d'etre as a woman's organization pursuing women's rights. No matter which funding model prevails, the problems will likely remain: more government funding requires more vigilance in the face of real fears about dependence and cooptation, while less funding (or none at all) requires more organizational energy devoted to fund-raising -- and the prospect, at least, of NAC's disintegration.

Finally, the fact that NAC is often used as a political training ground means that some leadership will inevitably be lost to other career pursuits. This phenomenon is neither unusual nor unexpected. Active involvement in NAC means participating in a wide social network cutting across major areas of public life. Training is available in lobbying, research and brief writing, public speaking, organizational affairs, and politics. Just as the Voice of Women served as a training ground in the 1960's for bright, middle-class women concerned with social change, NAC has filled the same role since the 1970's. Because NAC cannot afford a paid, professional staff, it must continue to rely on committed volunteers to carry out its executive work. Yet recruiting capable women is becoming increasingly difficult; of all women, feminists are the most likely to be actively pursuing careers, higher

education, and other avenues to "a larger humanity."

Members of the executive work ten hours a week for NAC, on the average, in addition to their professional and personal commitments. One member of NAC's executive said that, even though there is a turnover, NAC never completely loses its people, because they so frequently move on to positions of prominence and influence in Canadian society and politics, carrying with them their identification with NAC's objectives.[6] In this respect, at least, a high turnover on the NAC executive has some benefit for the organization.

Conclusions

NAC's self-appointed task is enormous. The organization addresses, in effect, all women's issues with public policy implications. Although NAC focuses on the federal government, it frequently gives its attention to provincial politics as well. Yet NAC does not possess the resources to support offices and activities at the provincial level nor to maintain a systematic and effective follow-through or monitoring function in Ottawa. Instead, contacts in the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Office of the Coordinator - Status of Women and the various ministries must be relied upon for inside information.

Without funds for professional staff to perform research and public relations functions, NAC must nonetheless be well-informed and able to demonstrate its technical expertise on any of the issues it is promoting. Furthermore, NAC must continue to inform the women's movement by producing regular newsletters and a magazine.

Women newly-elected to the executive as representatives of their grass-roots organizations often lack political sophistication. Women

generally have not been encouraged, or afforded opportunities, to acquire this kind of learning. Hence, political naiveté frequently goes hand in hand with earnestness among the ranks of NAC activists.

It is important to appreciate fully all the conditions which shape and determine NAC's role in the policy system. Some of these conditions are common to all pressure groups in Canada; others are unique, or are exaggerated, because NAC is a women's organization dedicated to changing the status of women. The more we appreciate these conditions, the less we need to criticize NAC for those things over which it has little or no control. As one informant said: "NAC may not be everything we would wish for, but in reality, it's all we've got!"

NOTES

* This paper is a slightly modified version of a chapter in my doctoral dissertation, "No More Than Simple Justice: The Royal Commission on the Status of Women and Social Change in Canada" (McGill University, Department of Sociology, 1982). The data were gathered over the period 1978-1981 through personal interviews with representatives of NAC's leadership, participants from member organizations and informed observers; and through study of organizational documents and participant-observation at several Executive and Annual General meetings of NAC.

[1] See Morris (1982, Chapter 8) for a discussion of the question of government funding of Canadian women's groups.

[2] Loney (1977) analyzes government funding in the field of citizens' participation as a deliberate system of social control.

[3] One is reminded of the feminist slogan: "We are Everywhere!" More precisely, women are everywhere, though not all women are feminists nor even strongly pro-women in their sympathies. Nevertheless, the unique advantage possessed by NAC as a pressure group is its raison d'etre. The women's network cuts across divisions which might block or limit the promotion of other issues or causes. The cooptable communications network which Freeman (1975) posed as crucial to the formation of a social network is well-developed. Its potential is even greater, since women not already active in or convinced about feminist issues may still be won over when they see the relevance to

their personal lives of the issue of sexual discrimination. As the ideas and vocabulary of the women's movement continue to gain currency, more women in strategic sectors will likely be recruited to the feminist cause. As Lorna Marsden observed: "There are two kinds of people in the bureaucracy for informal contacts - NAC members or converts" (from interview, October, 1978).

[4] These include: Branching Out, Upstream, and for a while, Canadian Women's Studies.

[5] My former colleague, Roberta Hamilton, gets the credit for this comment, though she may have been quoting a standard joke in feminist circles.

[6] Lynn Verge, who was on the executive in 1978-79, was asked by the Newfoundland Progressive-Conservatives to run for public office. She did, and became Minister of Education in Newfoundland. Carol Swan, at the time of writing, was directing in-house economic research for the Office of the Coordinator - Status of Women. And Lynn MacDonald and Laura Sabia have both run (unsuccessfully) for public office. Pat Preston from Alberta served as an assistant to Lloyd Axworthy, who held the federal status of women portfolio in the federal government in 1980. Wendy Lawrence, Executive Assistant to Doris Anderson at the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, is a former part-time staff member at NAC. Lorna Marsden and Grace Hartman remain accessible to NAC.

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