

The Women's Office

ROOM 2.30 STUDENT UNION building
PHONE. 228-2082 OR 228-6228

January 10, 1976

The Honourable Grace McCarthy
Provincial Secretary
Provincial Secretary's Department
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, British Columbia

Ms. McCarthy,

The statements you made on the occasion of the closure of the Status of Women's Office reflect a misunderstanding of the basic objectives of International Women's Year, the role of the Status of Women's Co-ordinator in B.C., and a total lack of concern for or awareness of the needs and priorities of women's groups throughout this province. We, at the Women's Office at the University of B.C. believe that B.C. women deserve an explanation of the above issues.

In a statement reported in the Vancouver Sun on January 9, 1976 you suggested that "The objective of International Women's Year was to draw attention to the plight of women." While the above was, indeed, one of the aims envisioned by the proponents of IWY, it was by no means the only one. Witness the United Nations World Plan of Action for IWY, which called for "intensified action to promote equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities of both sexes, to ensure the full integration of women in the total development effort, and to involve women widely in international co-operation, and hence in the strengthening of world peace." The federal Minister responsible for the Status of Women, Marc Lalonde, summed up the Canadian government's program for IWY in the following manner: "...I am vitally concerned that International Women's Year not become an end in itself, but rather, that it be seen in the context of the government's overall program to improve the status of women, and to create an awareness of the principles of equality in all Canadians. 1975 can provide a country-wide focus for that aim, but full equality in our country will not be achieved in one year. The on-going work towards effecting change, must be continued." Your predecessor, former Provincial Secretary Ernie Hall, outlined the B.C. government's attitude to IWY in a press release dated February 27, 1975; "We recognize that women face some serious and specific problems, and therefore we are making a commitment to take positive action to overcome the various forms of discrimination arising from the **past**. We view International Women's Year as an opportunity to begin to focus on this important area of governmental responsibility, We do not see International Women's Year as an isolated ack-

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not see it **as** an excuse to undertake slick advertising campaigns and spew out useless buttons.... We expect to make substantial progress in various areas during International Women's Year. But more important is the fact that we will continue this progress in the years ahead until we have achieved a state of affairs of which all British Columbians can be proud." Finally, and most importantly, the representatives of 76 women's groups from across the nation, who met in Ottawa for consultation on IWY stated their priorities "...for significant legislation and legislative change." "We expect the Minister responsible for the Status of Women," they declared, "to take more positive action to initiate legislation at all levels of government — federal, provincial and municipal: so that women achieve full equality before the law in all fields... ; so that social services are provided, including family planning, childcare, social and community services; so that special health needs of girls and women be provided for; so that abortion be removed from the Criminal Code; so that women are provided with proper guidance and counselling and encouraged to train for and enter non-traditional occupations; so that equal participation of women and men in the labor movement be promoted; so that seminars and workshops be provided to prepare women for participation in politics at local, provincial and national levels; so that sex stereotyping prevalent in educational program materials and textbooks be replaced by material depicting women in changing roles; that specific targets be established for the attainment of the objectives set above."

By failing to acknowledge IWY's full objectives, and by declaring worthwhile projects begun during 1975 in B.C. "completed", you have brought into reality the worst fear of Canadian women's groups with regard to IWY, namely, that it would amount to nothing more than a token gesture.

Acknowledging that the Status of Women's Office "did a good job", you implied that it did no more than point out the plight of women in B.C. You seem to be unaware both of the former government's aims in creating this office and of the work carried out during 1975 by Ms. Errington and her staff. In a press release dated February 27, 1975 Ernie Hall outlined Ms. Errington's responsibilities: "...to co-ordinate programmes contributing to improvements in the status of women in British Columbia which are already underway in various Government departments, and to work with the departments to develop additional programmes to meet the needs that women themselves have identified throughout the Province, .*. to work closely with appropriate community groups throughout the Province to obtain for the Government a clear understanding of the areas of public concern with respect *to the needs of women to assist those community groups* in the development of

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their own programmes, and to assist in the co-ordination of community and Govern-
ment programmes... While not primarily involved in the funding of community groups,
the Status of Women Co-ordinator's budget allows for the provision of financial
assistance to community groups to carry out worthwhile projects for International
Women's Year, Emphasis will be on communities outside the Lower Mainland, where
facilities, services and information are not so readily available." We feel
satisfied that during 1975 Ms. Errington and her staff acted in accordance with
the program outlined by Mr. Hall. Indicative both of a more general appreciation
of the value of their contribution and of an awareness of the continuing need for
the co-ordination of programs intended to improve the status of women in B.C.
is the outcry against your decision to close the **Status** of Women's Office by
feminist, labor and education groups.

Finally, you argued that you "could not be accused of being against women's groups. Yet, the immediate and unequivocal
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women's groups indicates beyond any doubt that they feel you have acted against
them.

Is \$200,000 such a high price to pay for a service whose importance in the
struggle to end the oppression of women in this province has been recognized by
those who, through their involvement in various community groups, have become
most familiar with the needs of women from all walks of life in B.C.?

We, the Women's Office Collective at U.B.C., strongly protest against your
decision to close the Status of Women's Office. Furthermore, we are circulating
petitions to this effect.

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The Women's Office Collective

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Women's papers and groups in B.C.