

For Vita

Box 521,
Nelson, B.C.,
December 10, 1975.

Sue Findlay,
Women's Program,
Secretary of State,
130 Slater Street,
Ottawa, Ontario.

Dear Sue,

Back in the Kootenays now pondering over the events of the seminar on Alternatives, I'm writing to you out of my own personal feelings rather than out of any kind of official stand regarding the events that took place at the seminar. Unfortunately I was the victim of a mean flu bug which laid me up for a day and a half. I'm sorry that I didn't have a chance to talk with you, as I have a lot of unsaid and unresolved feelings in looking back on it all.

I think that many of us who came to the seminar, and it seemed to come up a lot in the workshops, were asking ourselves, "am I being co-opted by accepting this invitation" - so great is our paranoia of being co-opted (and rightly so in many circumstances). This fear seemed to create a tension which I certainly felt during during the first two days in my small group. Possibly, as a reaction to this fear, some women decided to try and take some power into their own hands by striking out at the "hand that feeds us", i.e. the government programme that channels money into various activities of the women's movement. Possibly another paranoia that was felt^{was} that the Secretary of State, by observing the most radical elements in the group would then use this information to defuse the movement through grants. Although I was not in attendance at the plenary where it was decided to ask the Secretary of State women to leave, from conversations with other women, I understand that many people were ambivalent and did not come to an individual decision one way or the other. However, once the idea was presented, it had to be dealt with. It was decided that a delegation be sent to you with questions and concerns from each workshop. ^{Street} I found it regrettable that at the last plenary on Friday there was not the involvement on the part of all participants to go through the process of analysis and self-criticism to its bitter end. People kept leaving until there were about 6 or 7 of us left. I see the group process of criticising

the tactics used by the eleven women who met with the purpose of counteracting the power of the organizers of the seminar to be a potentially constructive way of learning power politics. A lesson in strategy. However it is unfortunate that the learning experience had to create dissension and alienation. I think that we cannot just expect to act and think and make decisions collectively by espousing collectivity as an important value held by the women's movement. I think possibly it can come naturally if each person in the group feels herself equally in power and control in any decision-making process. If the power becomes concentrated in the hands of a few (who are more vocal, more articulate, more forceful, better educated etc.) and we do not consciously look for ways of helping each person in the group feel her own power and express it, then yet another hierarchy is being set up. I felt that the power was not equally shared amongst the women there, nor was there any effort ~~expended~~^{expanded} to make it so. Consequently, what happened was not based on a collective decision. It turned out to be an inadvertent experiment in the structuring of the decision-making process. Experimenting, trying out new forms, is essential in building a new foundation in society. But in doing so, perhaps we could have tried harder to give support and acceptance to each others positions in the present societal framework within which we are all living, working, struggling. (That is not to say that our acceptance of each other should be without criticism.) Rather than reinforcing the present system of dichotomies by reacting in a scapegoat fashion, we would have done better to strive to identify some common grounds to work from ^{and} ~~even~~^{leave out} though you, as a government employee, may be coming from a different set of interests and pressures from me.]

What to say at this point?? I felt that I had to somehow give you feedback on this because I feel that oftentimes you are in need of support in what you are doing. Maybe I'm trying to reach out to you in the spirit of wanting to build upon that common ground that is there for all of us to stand together on.

In sisterhood,