

JUSTICE FOR ALL, EXCEPT IN NEW BRUNSWICK

BY SEÁN P. RILEY

In April of 1988, Frank McKenna's Liberal Government dropped New Brunswick's legal aid program. This action was part of McKenna's overall cost-cutting strategies, through which many other social programs have been trimmed or cut in an attempt to lower the province's deficit. This conservative fiscal spending is winning accolades of praise from the banks and accountants as they review and evaluate McKenna's first year in office. It seems the legal aid program's cost of \$600,000 was much too strenuous on the province's annual budget of \$3 billion. *Consequently, New Brunswick now has the distinction of being the only province in Canada without a proper legal aid program.* This is in sharp contrast to the rest of the country's legal system, where legal aid budgets have generally been increased over the years, so that the nation's poor - those who often need the protection of the law most dearly - may have equal access to the courts.

To be fair, Premier McKenna did inherit a precedent of program slashing from Hatfield's Conservatives. Although, at its 1982 inception, New Brunswick's legal aid program started with a fairly healthy budget of \$1.2 million, the following years saw it continually trimmed to the point where the \$600,000 allotted to the program for 1988 was not nearly enough to sustain equitable justice.

Clearly, \$600,000 was not enough to sustain a full-scale legal aid program where all New Brunswick citizens in need of legal assistance, would be assured equal access to the justice system regardless of their economic status. Frank McKenna - *educated as a lawyer at the University of New Brunswick* - knew this, and he had a decision to make about how to rectify this situation, which amounted to an injustice to the poor people of his province.

Most unfortunately, for those who need our government's help the most, Premier McKenna chose to completely axe the legal aid program instead of increasing funding, as one would expect, were the New Brunswick government more concerned about fostering a more fair, equitable, and just society. However, this does not seem to be the case; in this instance at least. One can only guess what series of events led up to McKenna making a decision which is tantamount to cutting off access to justice. In fact, speculation as to the reason does not really matter at this point. What really matters now is that the Liberal Government own up to a very serious mistake and rectify the injustice of denying help to those who cannot afford to pay a lawyer or cannot find one to take their case pro bono, for free.

Having access to justice should not depend on one's economic status. This is a direct contravention of Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms which clearly states in one particular section that, *"every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to equal protection and equal benefit of the law..."* as such, until a proper legal aid program is reinstated within this province, justice is being denied to many victims of crime, all of whom are having a very fundamental constitutional right violated in the process.

No doubt, soon, New Brunswick will have a legal aid program we can all be proud of, however, in the interim, real people are being hurt, and Canada can be said to be a nation where there is *Justice for All - Except in New Brunswick.*

(Next week: A possible solution
to N.B.'s legal aid dilemma.)

Feminist to Lecture

By JOYCE OUELLETTE

Women have only been "persons" since October 18th, 1929. The struggle for this legal recognition took two decades of lobbying efforts and numerous debates.

The U.N.B. Women's Studies Programme has invited a special guest lecturer to celebrate "Person's Day."

Charlotte Bunch is an internationally known speaker, writer, organizer, teacher and theorist. She has been a leading figure in the Women's Movement for two decades.

Her lecture is entitled "Feminist Perspectives on Diversity and Pedagogy: Implications for Global Feminism". The talk will relate to Ms. Bunch's experiences and research in a wide range of feminist activities organized by women's groups in North America and in developing countries. She believes that "the trend of the '80's is diversity and it is this growing phenomenon of global (read: non-white feminism) which is our hope for the future." (Interview with Philinda Masters in *Broadside*).

Ms. Bunch's active participation in the International



Charlotte Bunch

Women's Movement is varied and impressive. She was founder and director of Interfem Consultants, a women's consulting firm in New York. Through Interfem she has worked with a number of organizations including International Women's Tribune Center; the Secretariat for the 1980 World Conference on Women for the United Nations Decade on Women; the Women and Development Unit of the University of the West Indies; the Asian and Pacific Centre for Women and

Development; the National Congress of Neighborhood Women; and the National Women's Studies Association.

Ms. Bunch is currently the Laurie New Jersey Chair in Women's Studies at Douglass College, Rutgers University. She has edited seven anthologies of feminist thought. Her latest book *Passionate Politics: Feminist Theory in Action*, is a selection of her essays and speeches from 1968 to 1986. Naomi Black, in the *Globe and Mail* describes it as: "Fascinating ... this book is also a useful guide to the practical politics of changing the world." (Sat, December 19, 1987).

Ms. Bunch will speak at 8pm on Tuesday, October 18 in MacLaggan Auditorium. Admission is free and everyone is welcome. A reception will follow the lecture and give the audience a chance to meet and chat with Charlotte Bunch. The lecture is co-sponsored by the Advisory Committee on the Status of Women at U.N.B., N.B. Department of Education, N.B. Women's Directorate, and the Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women in N.B.

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