

## COMMUNICATIONS

To the Editor:

I would like to take issue with several points in Veronica Strong-Boag's article "Mapping Women's Studies in Canada" in your August issue, where she treats the situation at Concordia's Simone de Beauvoir Institute and particularly the role of Professor Mair Verthuy.

I have been a part-time faculty member teaching women's studies at Concordia for nine years, and I have been involved with the Institute since the earliest stages of its planning. The issue within the Institute was never simply one of attempting to "concentrate power in the hands of a few senior faculty members" as Strong-Boag states. There were fundamental ideological differences which cannot be simply reduced to authentic vs. inauthentic forms of feminism. One issue was that of "integration vs. separation" which Strong-Boag treats of so perceptively earlier in the article. Verthuy always recognized the real situation of a college situated within a university structure which had to be dealt with on its own terms if the college were to survive. I do not know how anyone who knows Mair Verthuy can suggest that her feminism is "fundamentally inadequate" — she is one of the most active and outspoken champions of women's causes, both within and outside the university, that I know of.

The situation of part-time faculty at Concordia is a complex and ambiguous one, and the 1979 conflict between the two parties in the Simone de Beauvoir Institute cannot be simply reduced to a conflict between part-time and untenured faculty on the one hand and fulltime tenured faculty on the other. (It must be pointed out that Greta Nemiroff, during the time of her involvement with the Institute at Concordia as a part-time instructor, was a fulltime faculty member and administrator at another academic institution; and it was hardly a case of casting her out into the cold of unemployment.) It is not clear what Strong-Boag means by the tenured faculty members' efforts to "shore up their position." Being already tenured, the only thing they had to gain personally by their work in the Institute was just that — more work.

I'm not sure what Strong-Boag is referring to when she says that the principal (Verthuy) and others stressed the scholarly distinction between full and part-time faculty. I can only speak from personal experience and say that Professor Verthuy and the other full-time faculty members of the Institute have never made me feel such a distinction and have always respected me and treated me as an intellectual equal, welcoming my input and participation in the Institute.

The Simone de Beauvoir Institute under Professor Verthuy has not only found or created positions for a number of part-time instructors, as well as encouraged our participation on committees and the council of the Institute, but has also, through the efforts of Verthuy, found monies for additional stipends for part-time instructors who put in time in institute projects for which their small instructor's salary does not compensate them.

In conclusion, I consider Strong-Boag's summary of the situation of the Simone de Beauvoir Institute to be very biased and one-sided, as well as damaging to the prestige of the Institute and the reputation of its very dynamic and effective past principal Mair Verthuy; and I hope that you can print this letter in a forthcoming issue as a means of partially undoing some of this damage.

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### Reply from Professor Strong-Boag:

I am pleased to hear that matters are proceeding more happily in Concordia's Simone de Beauvoir Institute and Women's Studies Department. The new principal, Elizabeth Sacca, seems well able to make the Institute and the Department the presence it promised to be in its early days. Certainly the entire women's studies community in Canada will welcome a strengthening of the Concordia centre. Although the present situation looks very hopeful, I would nevertheless be, especially as an historian, remiss in failing to attempt to locate women's studies in Canada, and in this instance at Concordia, in terms of past events. My contribution to JET's Special Issue on Women's Studies and Higher Education, "Mapping Women's Studies in Canada: Some Signposts" set forward my own understanding of a decade and more of women's studies. This interpretation was shaped fundamentally not only by much reading, reflection and discussion, but also by my own experience as an historian and scholar of women's studies at the University of Toronto, Concordia and Simon Fraser, and my close association with the Canadian Women's History Committee and the Canadian Women's Studies Association. Such credentials are far from perfect and others may claim more authority in commenting on women's studies. I would welcome, as I indicated in the article, additions from new perspectives to the account. I do, however, stand by the substance of what I wrote. For all our wishing, feminist scholars have their differences and so much their interpretations of the past. To demand, as some critics of the article have, that disagreements be ignored or at least not reach the state of publication presents a fundamental obstacle to intellectual progress. Feminists need to debate publicly their understanding of the past. Only this will allow us to deal creatively and non-destructively with present and future controversies. Whatever the perspective on what happened at Concordia in the late 1970s, perhaps it can be agreed that it was paid for in the hard coin of lost good will and trust from some at least in the feminist community. Mistakes were made, no doubt on every side; not thinking about them will not make them go away nor help us deal with the here and now. Learning our history is not always edifying or reassuring, it is, however, essential to self-understanding and thus to the better future we all desire.

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### Editor's Note:

A recent communication from Ms. Verthuy states "co-operation with CRIAN and other national and regional groups in holding one of the organizational meetings for what is now the CWSA during our international conference in July/August 1982" (and) "arranging for APFUCC to co-host the CWSA meeting" at the forthcoming 1984 Learned Societies Conference. For further information see *Annual Report* (1979-80), Simone De Beauvoir Institute/*Institut Simone de Beauvoir*, Conference Proceedings, 1-2/6/1980.