

# REPORTS



AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF CRIMINOLOGY APRIL 1975

WOMEN AS VICTIMS OF CRIME:

AN EXPERIENCE IN ALIENATION

The memory of the three days we spent at this conference in Canberra's Academy of Science in mid-April leaves us — four normally loquacious women — utterly speechless

temporarily.

As part of 1975's indulgence of women, some seminars on women and crime were considered appropriate. The one we attended was organised by the Institute of Criminology and the International Women's Year Secretariat at the cost

of a mere \$40,000 for three days for 80 participants — that is roughly \$170 per day per participant. This included return air fares, transport in Canberra, motel accommodation ( graded according to the status of the guest ), lunches sold to outsiders at \$4.50 a pop, individualised plastic folders containing specially printed handouts, booklets, etc., a scenic tour of the national capital and a cocktail party.

The Academy of Science was the ideal venue. It consists of a large, luxurious lecture theatre, with no provision for small group discussion. The program was a masterpiece in indigestibility: three speakers per session followed by ¼ hour question time, and in bias: one day on sex education, one day on rape, one speaker in one session on domestic violence: the trendier issues. Nothing on women as victims of robbery, fraud, discrimination, exploitation, industrial accident etc. The time allocated — three days — was totally unrealistic for such a vast topic.

We consider the participants last, as did the conference planners. From the women we have spoken to, it seems the selection of participants was largely from the establishment ( policewomen, social workers, sociologists, nuns, Salvation Army ) with the occasional accidental and/or token activist. Not, as you might expect, at a conference on women as the victims of crime, some real life victims — alcoholics, drug addicts, rape victims, battered wives, victims of the consumer ethic; not as you might expect some blacks, migrants, lesbians. There was one woman from Elsie Women's Refuge and one from Rape Crisis Centre, neither of whom was originally invited or even notified of the conference. Sydney feminist organisations were represented because discovered inadvertently about the thing and insisted on being invited. Melbourne groups were not so fortunate. The Rape Crisis Centre there was listed on the program as Red Cross, and Melbourne's Halfway House sent a representative as an observer only.

Who then were the lucky participants? The three star performers were a Swedish sex therapist, a Japanese public prosecutor and a Canadian criminologist whose specialty is women as criminals. There were a handful of other foreign guests from India and Hong Kong — not New Guinea or Fiji. Next in the hierarchy was the all Australian cast including the ubiquitous Paul Wilson, author of nine books, Roseanne Bonney, apologist for the NSW

Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research and Dr Robert Birrell, ex police surgeon from Victoria. Last were the humble miscellaneous participants and observers, supposedly selected on the basis of their involvement with women as victims. Probably the most unfortunate victim of the conference was the Institute's librarian, Ms Sylvia Blomfield, who suffered at the hands of gross tokenism by being put in a role for which she was ill-prepared and where she was totally unsupported, only to be used as an excuse for any mal-planning.

Although tranquillised by the soporific atmosphere of the early speeches and stunned by a very sexist film on how beautiful people fuck – in missionary position – after one and a half days a group of women had woken up to the hoax. Formal procedures were followed and a request was made for a break-down into small interest-based discussion groups. The vote was 37 to 25 against self-management. A formal apology was moved to the visiting expert whose session we were interrupting. When we left the lecture theatre about 50 women followed, to join in fruitful discussion outside. Thereafter the conference improved – but alas too late for any real progress. The one afternoon set aside for group discussion on the formal program put all the experts in one group, chaired by the popular Paul Wilson, for the benefit of the TV cameras.

It has come to our notice that the Institute of Criminology regards the conference as having been a complete waste of money – a view to which we obviously subscribe – but that the Institute can place the blame for this waste of public funds on the shoulders of the women participants adds insult to injury. We await the Institute's public acknowledgement of their responsibility for a \$40,000 fiasco.

Helen Golding  
Sally Johnson  
Jane Schwager  
Sue Walpole

#### *IS YOUR CELL LIKE A MOTEL?*

*In the Australian Senate Estimates Committee F on 15th April 1975 it was revealed that the cost of maintaining a prisoner in NSW amounted to \$5.575 per year, a daily cost of \$15.27. When asked how this compared with other states, Mr Crotty stated that he did not know, and went on to say that the cost seemed "to approximate to motel charges".*

*(see Hansard – Senate 15th April 1975 p. 82)*