

which they predictably and hilariously (as in ha-ha) fail. But at the last minute they bounce back, save the town and become the new police force.

All the basic elements are in place. Lots of naked flesh, motorcycle gangs, one nerd, our libidinous gang, one incompetent bully training-sarge and his partner – she of the bad German accent and the big bazooms – one ineffectual mayor and natch, the mayor's daughter. Well, it's been done before, right?

Maybe, but never this badly. If it wasn't for the T&A you would think it's the work of amateurs, and come to think of it, perhaps it is. Crammed with gags that are neither set up nor pay off, riddled with T&A squeezed into a cockamamie plot – you know, connect the dots – reject casting, serious hamming. The whole presented straight – almost like a children's play, – blessedly unaware of glaring loopholes, character, believability, you name it. However, I would have to believe this is one badly drawn cartoon cynically and execrably staged by Rafal Zielinski – formerly of these parts – and give it a merit rating of O.

But I think I'm making it sound too good. This picture really shouldn't be reviewed. Up-chuck time boys. Go back home to Pasadena and the day job.

Ah, film madness. Glorious and blind.

Daniel Hausmann •

Nancy Nicol's

The Struggle for Choice

Prior to 1969, according to Statistics Canada, abortion was the leading cause of death for pregnant women. Between 1958 and 1969 over 12 women died each year from illegal abortions, and as many as 2000 women annually suffered complications, infections, perforated uteruses and sterility. Due to the illegal and covert status of abortions, these statistics grossly underestimate the situation. One Vancouver doctor in 1970, for example, numbered abortion-related deaths to be as high as 2000.

A major turning point in Canadian legislative history occurred in 1969. The Criminal Code of Canada was amended. Abortion was legally permitted if a 'therapeutic abortion' committee of three doctors decided that continuation of the pregnancy would endanger the woman's health or life. Despite this 'liberalization', women still lacked the access they wanted, and a campaign against the new law began.

Nancy Nicol's video series, *The Struggle for Choice*, begun in 1984, chronicles the movement and strategies of abortion rights groups since 1969. The video is divided into 5 parts, each 30-minute segment focussing on a different aspect of the Canadian experience: (i) **Abortion Caravan: The Early Movement**; (ii) **Access**; (iii) **Quebec 1971-1980**; (iv) **Restraint/Repression**; (v) **Morgantaler**.

Nicol concentrates on the women who have participated in the movement since its early days. From NDP MP Grace MacInnis to Veronique O'Leary, founder of the Women's Health Centre in Montreal, to Betsy Wood and Marcy Cohen, co-founders of the Vancouver abortion referral service in 1969 who, in 1970, marched with a group of women to the Parliament in Ottawa and declared war on the government of Canada.

The first segment, **Abortion Caravan**, sets the stage. Women remember their experiences in the '50s and '60s. Pioneer activists are interviewed. Marie-Angé Fournier of the Canadian Abortion Rights Action League in Moncton recalls her experience as a seventeen-year-old student nurse, when women for whom abortion was not an option were forced to breast-feed their babies before giving them up for adoption, to pay for the 'sin' of their pregnancy.

It is in this atmosphere that, in 1970, NDP MP Grace MacInnis – the only woman MP at the time – challenged her fellow MP's to further amend legislation to allow for the establishment of abortion clinics. But, she says, "They would become just like little boys in a washroom. You know, they'd get kind of nervous and raucous in every way they knew."

Outside the House, women gathered around, invaded Question Period, draped banners over the railing and, on May 11, 1970, declared war. Recounts Marcy Cohen: "We charged the government of Canada with being responsible for the murder, by abortion, of thousands of women who die from illegal abortions, and with being responsible for the oppression and degradation of thousands of women who are forced into unwanted motherhoods and who depend on inadequate birth control methods."

Access expands on the problems of availability of abortion, to include the whole support network of birth control, daycare, special services for working women, battered wives etc. The structure of the family, and the state, is designed to deny women power and autonomy.

Quebec, a province where conservative catholicism and the repressive measures of Duplessis' Union Nationale

managed to ensure that the status and freedom of its women were the lowest in Canada, nonetheless became the first province to defy the federal abortion law by 1976.

Nicol explores this process in **Quebec 1971-80**, expanding her focus to include a concrete analysis of class struggle. It is in this part, especially, that Nicol makes her point. Says Veronique O'Leary, "You cannot separate what happened in Quebec socially from the issue of abortion; it is about women, labour, politics; it is about nationalism, about working-class struggle. It's all linked, really."

In Quebec, abortion rights activists found a sympathetic environment in unions such as the Quebec Federation of Labour. Feminists considered themselves part of the Quebec battle for autonomy. It was a time for rising and embracing – politically, economically and socially, Quebec flourished.

In the early '80s an economic recession settled across the country. Its impact was felt in the social services, even in Quebec. **Restraint/Repression** examines the provincial governments' increasing use, under economic duress, of legislative measures to erode social and health services and drive down the working class and unions. The BC government under Bill Bennet, and Quebec's disheartening transition from the Parti Québécois to Robert Bourassa's Liberal policies, are viewed in this dim light.

Twenty-five bills have been targeted against Quebec's Common Front in the last 15 years, the majority of them since 1978. Bill 111 legislated teachers back to work, with a 20% wage cutback. Bill Bennet fired elected officials and appointed his own. "Operation Solidarity" lost in BC in 1983, defeated by a major sellout of the trade union bureaucracy.

Seen from the viewpoint of abortion rights activists – for whom availability and choice is a working-class issue (for wealthier women, it, like any other commodity or privilege, can be bought) – this backlash against social services, jobs for women and union independence is a rude awakening to the tenuousness of their achievements and the intent of governments to deny services to the powerless in times of economic hardship. In Ontario and Manitoba, since the opening of Morgantaler's

clinics, time and energy has been directed towards legislative reform which increasingly favours anti-abortion pro-lifers.

In **Morgantaler**, Nicol asserts that the abortion-rights campaign – because it concentrates on legal strategy – is defensive in character and therefore ineffective. The pro-life movement is getting stronger and richer – two major reasons for any government not to resist it. The NDP in Manitoba, for example, while espousing a pro-choice stance, actively engages in prosecuting Morgantaler.

Today, there is a major attack on abortion rights and, by extension, most minority/working-class gains. The question is, should activists spend their time and energy in the courts, or turn to each other to create a pool of resources, services and support?

As exemplified in previous videotapes such as **Let Poland be Poland**, **Our Choice: A Tape About Teenage Mothers**, **Mini Skools Pay Mini Wages** (about the 1983, 8-month daycare worker strike in Mississauga), and **Selling Out** (about the 1980 strike by 50,000 federal government workers), Nancy Nicol combines a radical analysis with a straight-forward documentary style. She simply relies on interviews with activists, whose recollections are underlined with archival footage, rallies, marches, news reports and performances. There is no 'expert' in *The Struggle for Choice*. What Nicol searches for, and finds, are the articulate desires of women for whom choice is the basic tenet of freedom.

Leila Marshy •

STRUGGLE FOR CHOICE p/d. Nancy Nicol assoc. p. Janis Lundman prod. co-ord. Julia McMahon. Michelle Robidoux res. and sc. Nancy Nicol sc. consult. Janis Lundman, Michelle Robidoux, Phyllis Waugh trans. Alain Bruouard, Michelle Robidoux narr. Linda Chartrand, Danielle Depeyre, Arlene Mantle, Dominique Provost, Michelle Robidoux cam. Phyllis Waugh audio and lighting Marian Collins, Karen Feinmen, Mai Mills, Elizabeth Schroder post prod. Charles Street Video, Toronto ed. Nancy Nicol, Nancy Reid, Geoffrey Shea Special Thanks to The Ontario Women's Caucus of the NDP, Canadian Abortion Rights Action League, Regroupement des centres de santé des femmes, La Vie en Rose, Groupe intervention video, video femmes, and the many individuals across the country who have donated generously toward this project Co-produced by The National Film Board of Canada and Trinity Square Video, Toronto running time 150 min Video

• Women struggling for Choice

