

## WOMEN

## N.Y. supports center for battered women

By Stephanie L. Twin

"Have you stopped beating your wife?" is an old joke used to describe an innocent man trapped in a catch-22 solution. His guilt is assumed whether he answers yes or no.

In the past couple of years, however, it has become obvious that wife-beating is no joke. It is neither a quaint and archaic cave-man custom nor a "culture of poverty" syndrome. It cuts across class, racial and geographic lines. At a recent conference in New York City Gloria Steinem estimated that wife-beating affects 30 percent of all women in every social class. NBC-TV claimed in January that it involves a million women a year. A marriage counsellor attending a battered women's counsellor-training session in Brooklyn reported that a Rabbi she was counselling had recently begun beating his wife.

Embarrassed, economically dependent, socialized to "stand by their men" and lacking options, women have too often simply put up with beatings and abuse.

In 1965 the Pasadena, Calif., chapter of Al-Anon, an organization for families of alcoholics, opened Haven House, a battered women's shelter. In 1972 the more well-known Women's House in St. Paul, Minn., appeared. Since then similar ventures have started in other cities. Most are privately funded, though a Fullerton, Calif., group operates on matching federal community development funds. Jacksonville, Fla., and Milwaukee, Wisc., are among the cities with groups addressing the issue.

In Los Angeles an organization called Women Against Violence Against Women has successfully publicized the problem there by protesting billboards and other cultural artifacts (like album covers) that display happily abused females (ITT, March 16).

## ►State supported center.

In Brooklyn a program both different from and similar to these has recently opened. The Center for the Elimination of Violence in the Family is, like other shelters, a refuge for battered women.

It is a place where they can get short-term support and assistance. An experienced, racially and ethnically mixed staff, supplemented by a corps of volunteers and interested professionals is being formed to help abused women through the maze of legal and welfare services.

Sympathetic women lawyers at legal aid societies are giving battered women's divorce requests priority and Women's Martial Arts Union members are serving husbands the summonses. Sympathetic female psychotherapists and family counsellors are offering longer-term assistance and an attempt is even being made to find men capable of counseling wife-beaters. The Center also operates a hotline.

However, unlike other shelters the CEVF is entirely state-supported. It is the first state-supported shelter in the U.S. "That is the most progressive move by far" on the issue, at least in the Northeast, says Ernest Caposela of the Council on State Governments.

Caposela feels the states are just beginning to understand the urgency and scope of the abuse problem and that New York's \$200,000 seed money bequest will encourage other states to follow suit. Already, he says, states in the Midwest are calling New York and New Jersey, which is moving fast on the abuse issue, for direction and advice.

## ►Cooperation between groups and legislators.

New York's ground-breaking involvement with battered women is the product of the combined efforts of two community groups and some liberal legislators. About a year ago the Brooklyn YWCA and the National Congress of Neighborhood Women independently drew up

proposals for battered women's projects.

The NCNW is a working-class feminist organization located in a lower middle-class area of Brooklyn. Its interest in an anti-violence program had developed naturally from its constituency.

The YWCA's interest had evolved as an unexpected offshoot of its rape crisis work. Y volunteers had set up rape sensitivity training sessions at Brooklyn hospitals and had been asked by nurses how to deal with battered women. In addition, abused women had been calling for help on the Y's rape hotline. At a Y community meeting the idea of establishing a shelter caught fire and a proposal was worked out.

At this point two liberal Democratic state legislators intervened for both the NCNW and the Y. Sen. Carol Bellamy, whose district includes that served by NCNW and who is a Y board member, took both proposals to the office of Senate minority leader Manfred Ornstein. They arranged for each group to be awarded \$100,000 out of the state's supplemental budget (not subject to legislative approval). The two organizations then decided to pool their resources and form the CEVF.

Serious planning for it began last August and in February staff interviews and volunteer training got underway. Currently the center is operating out of the Y, which has donated room and office space. The project hopes to move into its permanent quarters, an unused hospital building, by August.

## ►Breakthrough for all women's groups.

Jan Peterson, NCNW's founder, and Julie Morris, the Y proposal's chief architect, find it significant that the shelter is the first all-woman project funded by New York State. "The fact that a really feminist proposal like that got approved is a true breakthrough" for all women's groups, says Morris.

They are not counting on the state to refund them next year—a realistic assessment as the initial \$200,000 grant was meant as start-up money. Federal Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA) funds are assisting the Brooklyn program, but Caposela expects that most future funding for abuse projects will have to come from private sources.

There are other roles for states to play in the abuse issue, however, such as developing an enlightened definition of the term. At present no state has a domestic violence statute.

Family assault is theoretically treated the same as general assault but, in practice, you're safer in the street than in your home. Police and family courts are notoriously lax in using the assault statutes against husbands. Their fears of "breaking up the family" or interfering in a family quarrel run strong. Court observers and abused women report that many male police officers and judges also "sex identify" with the husbands.

In New York City a coalition of women's groups is suing the Police department and Family Court for dealing with the situation unprofessionally and often illegally.

Ten bills designed to clarify aspects of the abuse issue, strengthen women's positions in it and/or facilitate the establishment of shelters are currently pending in New York. New Jersey is considering four. New York Assemblyman Stanley Steingut held a public hearing on battered women April 29, the same day that the Council on State Governments held an Eastern Regional Committee meeting on the subject.

Similar currents are underway elsewhere in the country. Both locally and nationally articles and television specials on family abuse have proliferated. Battered women are, as an aide to Sen. Ornstein put it, a "hot" or "in" topic—a welcome fact that is long overdue.

Stephanie Twin is a writer in New York.



Lionel Delevingne

## NUCLEAR POWER

## Seabrook arrests are bankrupting state

The detention of 1,414 anti-nuclear power protesters in New Hampshire is turning into a political fiasco for Gov. Meldrim Thomson. Demonstrators who occupied the site in Seabrook where a nuclear power station is planned have forced the state to incur tremendous expenses by staying in jail after arrest, demanding to be released on personal recognizance.

Outlays for the care and feeding of the detainees and maintenance of the National Guard has severely drained the state's budget. Gov. Thomson has appealed for contributions from "corporations, labor unions and rank-and-file citizens" to help defray the costs of holding the anti-nuke prisoners.

"Our battle of today can become theirs of tomorrow," Thomson proclaimed, arguing that other states "contemplating or producing the benefits of nuclear power" might be "invaded by a mob."

So far Thomson's plea has generated only \$1,775, enough for a few Big Macs, the standard meals supplied by National Guardsmen to prisoners.

Gov. Thomson apparently had hoped for major violence at Seabrook. Before the demonstration, he publicly said that the protesters intended to seize the nuclear power plant site and blow themselves up. But the state police refused to crack heads, keeping their poise in the inflammatory atmosphere the governor tried to create. When it became apparent to Thomson that his ploy for violence had failed he attempted to forestall the arrests in the hope that construction workers coming to work on the power plant would attack the protesters. He was also thwarted in this maneuver.

New Hampshire is the only state that does not have a sales or personal income tax, an incentive that has drawn industry from across the Massachusetts border. The flight of firms to this relatively low-wage, no-tax haven led Massachusetts Senate president Kevin Harrington to recently declare "war" on New Hampshire. Thomson revealed in the publicity of his

popularity is based on his promise that there will not be taxes while he is governor.

With secure support from the electorate, Thomson has embraced various right-wing quack causes. He has asked the federal government to arm his National Guard with nuclear weapons, flew the flag at half-staff when the Taiwanese were denied entrance to the Olympics and took a case to the U.S. Supreme Court against a couple who taped over the state motto—"Live Free or Die"—on their auto license plates. (The couple won.) The John Birch Society monthly magazine, *American Opinion*, recently ran an adulatory article on Thomson, citing his administration as having created an American nirvana. Thomson's Shangri-la is now faced with fiscal insolvency, however, partly because of the new tactics of the anti-nuke guerilla foot-soldiers.

The county where the demonstrators have been housed in National Guard armories has filed suit against the governor, insisting that it will not pay any of the costs. Thomson has requested emergency funds from the federal Law Enforcement Assistance Agency, but it seems almost certain that this move will be fruitless. The Governor may be forced to ask the legislature for money—something he dreads since this will air the issue. The legislature may also reject his request, causing further embarrassment.

New Hampshire already faces a \$1 million deficit for the current biennium budget; a possible \$15 to \$20 million deficit looms for the next two-year period. "This state is really broke," New Hampshire Senate finance chairman C. Robertson Trowbridge said. Granite State voters may not be kind to Meldrim Thomson when they realize that he has pushed them into a fiscal crisis. The governor's 18th century dream may be a fallout casualty of the conflict over nuclear power.

—Sid Blumenthal

Sid Blumenthal is a writer in the Boston area and writes regularly for *In These Times*.



## ENERGY

By Roldo Bartimole

With utility costs zooming upward, residents here are on the verge of losing their publicly-owned electric utility. On April 26, Cleveland voters rejected a property tax measure that would have raised \$75 million over the next five years to bail out their 70-year-old ailing municipal light plant. With the defeat of the ballot initiative, the city's Republican administration is faced with a controversial political decision: whether to sell city-owned Muny Light to the privately-owned Cleveland Electric Illuminating Co., thereby creating a monopoly for CEI in north-east Ohio.

Muny Light has undergone a barrage of criticism in recent years from local politicians, the mass media and industry representatives and has had several serious blackouts. CEI has offered to buy Muny Light from the city for \$158 million. The city of Cleveland, however, has responded with a court suit charging CEI with anti-trust violations whose aim was to put Muny Light out of business. If won, the suit could pay triple damages of up to \$325 million.

#### ►No interconnections or wheeling.

The anti-trust charges allege anti-competitive activity on the part of CEI in refusing and delaying interconnections requested by Muny Light for back-up power. CEI has for years also refused to "wheel" power, that is transfer electric power through its lines from a third party to Muny, which is geographically surrounded by CEI territory. Both interconnections and "wheeling" are common practices among electric utilities.

The lack of interconnections has caused blackouts of Muny power and forced the city to forego repairs and expansion of its generating capacity. When CEI finally was forced, under threat of Federal Power Commission intervention, to provide emergency power to Muny, the price charged was at the highest rates, sometimes four times that charged large industrial users.

Presently, the city owes CEI from \$9.5 million to \$17 million in disputed charges. The city is under court order to pay the lesser amount. The tax issue was put on the ballot in part to answer court demands for a plan of repayment to CEI.

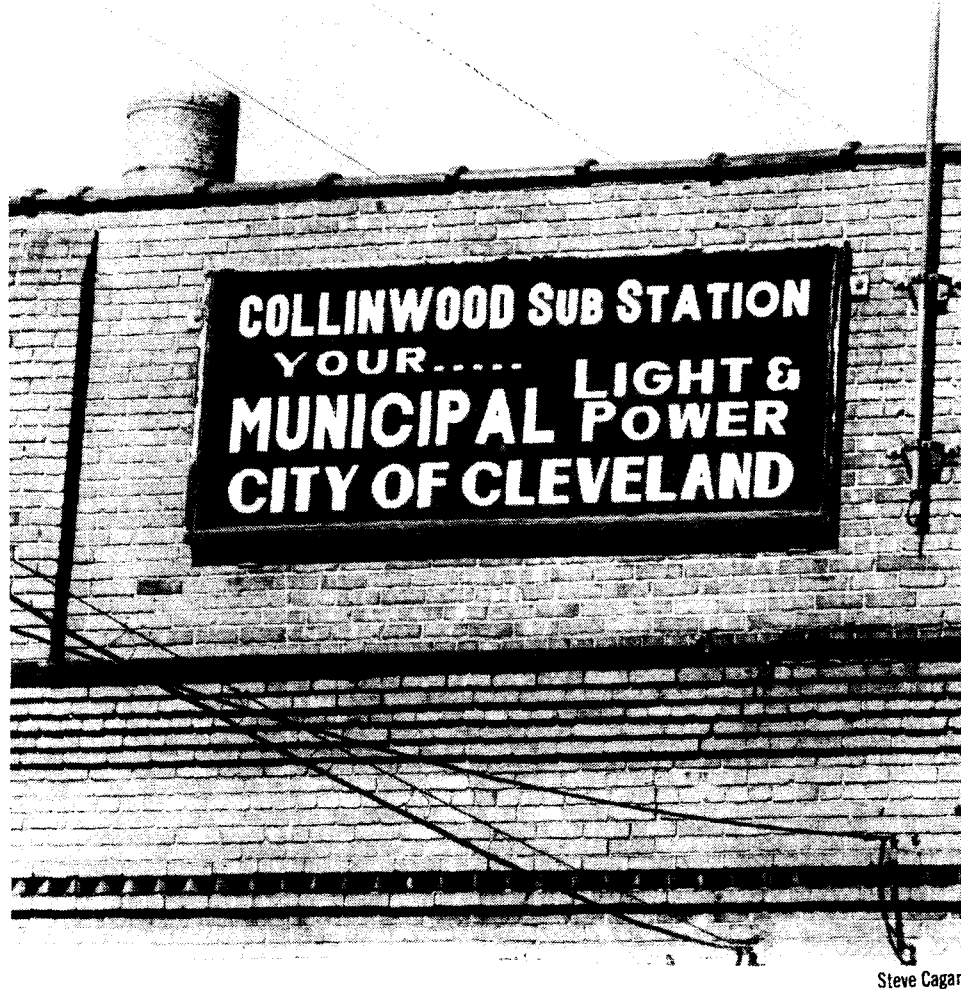
The Republican administration of Mayor Ralph Perk, despite past opposition, wants to sell the plant. Perk sees Muny as a financial drain. He has already used the sale of other city assets to keep the city fiscally solvent without seeking new taxes—a strategy that has won him three two-year terms. But there is stiff resistance to the sale from his major opponent, Democratic Clerk of Courts Dennis Kucinich, who charges a sell-out to corporate interests.

Sale of Muny to CEI has been a political hot potato in this highly unionized city, particularly because Muny customers, 20 percent of city residents, traditionally have paid lower rates than CEI charges. Kucinich has the means of not only making it a mayoral issue, but of bringing the fight into many of the city's 33 council wards where there are enough Muny customers to decide any close race. The council must approve any sale. The AFL-CIO and the United Auto Workers are both on record against the sale, though neither have been vigorous opponents.

#### ►Puny Muny.

The Cleveland municipal plant was the brain-child of Cleveland's turn-of-the-century progressive mayor, Tom Johnson, who as millionaire street railway owner understood the power of a monopoly. It took him six years to break the electric monopoly in Cleveland by annexing a small community with a generating plant. Voter approval of a \$2-million bond issue in 1911, then gave Cleveland the largest municipal generator in the nation. By 1940 the system had 60,000 customers (down to 43,000 now) and has been credited with keeping competing CEI's rates low. As late as 1964 Muny also provided cheap power for city agencies, street lighting and generated up to \$1 million in surplus revenue.

# Cleveland's Muny electrical system under threat



Steve Cagan

***That the cut-throat tactics of the privately owned CEI system against Muny were deliberate was revealed in a secret internal memo leaked to the press. It described a five-year plan "to reduce and ultimately eliminate tax-subsidized Cleveland Municipal Electric System."***

In the late '60s, however, the plant experienced serious problems. Political patronage, old equipment, heavy capital demands and inability to grow beyond the city's boundary hampered the system. CEI's unwillingness to give the city proper interconnections to enable Muny to avoid blackouts and repair older equipment added to these problems as well. In 1968, a major blackout occurred, knocking out traffic lights and causing a major traffic jam in downtown Cleveland on a frigid Monday morning. The city plant began to be called Puny Muny in the news media and its image declined with each setback.

The city's charges of anti-trust violations were buttressed this year through findings of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC). Because of the huge federal investment in nuclear energy, the NRC is required to rule on anti-trust issues regarding the generation of electric power.

The NRC ruled that CEI and other nuclear generator owners had to share nuclear-generated power "at reasonable charges" and must "wheel" power to smaller plants. Its ruling attracted little national attention, though some people in electric utility anti-trust litigation see it as a landmark decision.

The NRC findings reveal some of CEI's cut-throat tactics and show that Muny's problems were not only caused by mismanagement, but also from CEI attempts to cripple it.

#### ►Helped cause blackouts.

The NRC found that CEI actually helped cause Muny blackouts by avoiding proper interconnections. It also dispatched in-

adequate crews when power transfers were made and forced the city to buy power at more expensive rates than were normally charged.

"When Cleveland needed power from CEI, the loan transfer was operated in such a way to cause an outage of Muny's system," the NRC concluded. (An outage is a period of time when the energy supply is interrupted.) "The resultant load of power proved damaging to Muny's relationship with its customers. CEI was aware that Muny outages resulted in the conversion of customers from Cleveland [Muny Light] to CEI, and CEI solicited the affected Muny customers after these outages."

In other words, CEI deliberately undercut Muny's ability to service its customers in order to convince customers to switch to the privately-owned company.

The report also charged that "CEI's load transfer procedures were arbitrary, cumbersome and not in keeping with modern prudent engineering practices." Transfers of power that could have been made in less than five seconds took far longer, also causing Muny service outages. CEI also established elaborate and time-consuming procedures for requests for power, some requiring up to 12 hours notice for help and then special clearances were necessary from CEI executives who were not always available.

#### ►Secret memo outlines plan.

That the CEI was well aware of the results of its anti-competitive actions was vividly revealed in a secret memo from its public relations director to the company's chief legal officer leaked to the press. The memo described a five-year plan "to reduce and ultimately eliminate tax-subsidized Cleveland Municipal Electric Sys-

tem."

It went on to say that the Muny situation "is one that has undergone considerable and severe damage during the past year. Outages have been frequent and often of major proportions. It has received 'bad press' because of this poor continuity of service...." The 34-page memo devoted special attention to programing and advertising directed at the black community. It also called for infiltration of social organizations of news executives, suggesting, continued close cooperation...with organizations that facilitate development of close personal relationships with the news media, such as Sigma Delta Chi Journalistic Society." (Interestingly, the society's business address is the office of the public relations office of Ohio Bell Telephone.)

#### ►Conflict of interest.

CEI also attempted to wring from the city a price-fixing agreement by which the city would increase its rates to equal CEI's higher charges in exchange for selling the city its electricity. Says the NRC, "CEI was aware that a parallel interconnection between CEI and Muny would improve the reliability of the Muny system and make it more competitive."

The price-fixing arrangement was devised by Square, Sanders and Dempsey (SS&D), the largest bond counsel in Ohio and legal representatives of both the city and CEI, as well as many Cleveland corporations.

A crucial bond issue for improvement of Muny's plant and facilities was written for the city by an SS&D attorney. At a city council committee hearing on the bond legislation amendments were offered by CEI's legal counsel and incorporated into the legislation. The amendments made sale of the bonds unlikely. When the SS&D attorney who had written the original legislation was asked by the City Law Director to defend the legislation against the amendments, he would not. The bonds went unsold for three years.

This time the city lawyers were more direct: "An outright betrayal," they charged, accusing SS&D lawyers of "privately arranging these [damaging] amendments" with a CEI board director. The city concluded: "Here again the city charges SS&D not merely with a possible conflict of interest but with direct sabotage of its interests." The city has since hired a New York City law firm to represent it in bond matters.

Although proponents of keeping the plant are not happy with past operations of Muny, they believe that the system can remain competitive with CEI by becoming a distributor, rather than generator/distributor, of power.

CEI's offer of \$158 million for Muny is misleading. The offer, according to a study commissioned by the city council, would net the city only \$28 million after debts are paid, with other aspects making the deal even less attractive. The CEI offer calls for \$120 million of the total to be paid in \$4 million-per-year payments over 30 years but with no interest charges. (Meanwhile, the city would be paying off its debt to CEI at interest rates not to exceed 8 percent). The study also indicates that the city could be paying as much as \$4 million a year to CEI for street lighting alone, thus off-setting the amount CEI will be paying for the system. Another major drawback is that the city would have to promise to drop its \$325 million law suit.

With the recent defeat of the property tax measure pressure is again mounting for the sale of Muny Light to CEI. The local media and city council president Forbes have interpreted the vote to mean that Cleveland residents no longer support the publicly-owned system. As of yet there is no citizen's movement to counter that impression.

One lawyer for the city council expects to negotiate with CEI for a higher purchase price. Mayoral candidate Dennis Kucinich's continued opposition to the sale may make it an important issue in the campaign.

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