

# FEATURES

## WOMEN'S LIB: THE REAL WAR IN IRELAND

Jim Pat Coogan, editor of the Irish Press and a wry commentator on Irish life, once said that "the conflict in Northern Ireland may get all the headlines, but the main war is the war of the sexes." In Coogan's observation may not be all that exaggerated, for women in the Irish Republic are joining forces in their fight for equality. However, Irish women's lib has been hampered by a number of things, including the nation's falling economy, the control of the Catholic church, male ego, and deeply embedded mores of a rigid society.

For one thing, there's a 9.5 per cent unemployment rate in the Irish Republic - the highest in the European Common Market. Since jobs are unavailable, working married women have had to abandon their careers and return to hearth and home. Also, since a great part of Ireland is still rural, a woman's domestic responsibilities are greater thus more women are forced to stay at home in these areas. However, for many women domestic life is very profitable, for they can rent out their homes as "bed and breakfast" establishments.

Indeed, the attitude that a women's place is in the home is deeply embedded in Irish society. Certainly the Catholic church has done its part to see that this age-old notion is upheld. The Roman Catholic church in the Irish Republic has traditionally maintained its influence over women in putting down the women's liberation cause. None the less, according to one Irishman of Dublin: "There is a definite liberalization process within the church that in some ways is more radical than the politicians."

Senator Mary Robinson, a long-time agitator for equality of Irish women, has a different view on the

plight of the women's liberation in Ireland. Mrs. Robinson, a lawyer and professor of constitutional and criminal law at Dublin's Trinity College, believes that there has been a drastic change in social mores in recent years, but the law has not yet caught up with it.

Unquestionably, the laws for Irish women are rather conservative when compared to other European countries which are more liberal. For example, the sale of contraceptives is illegal under the Republic Constitution although the High Court ruled 5 years ago that they may be imported by individuals for personal use. Abortion is illegal under the Constitution as well and is

bitterly opposed by the Church, but thousands of Irish women go to England every year to terminate unwanted pregnancies.

In truth, notable signs of the broadening roles of women in Irish society are beginning to take hold. There is an increase in the number of Irish women who are deciding against marriage and children in order to pursue a career. A greater number of Ireland's women are going to the universities, working in prominent jobs, and becoming involved in political matters. Also, blue jeans, pants, and other heretofore "masculine and forbidden" clothing are beginning to become a part of an Irish woman's wardrobe. More and more of the Republic of Ireland's 1.5 million women are starting to shake loose from the rigid dominance of the Catholic church, as well as from that of the prideful male ego. Although the Irish women's lib has made great strides, it still has a long way to go.

## Amen Corner

I hate it when people hit me with a line like "You're a History major. You ought to know this, or 'You're the historian. What happened in (year)?"

Why is it that whenever you're in a group and a question about History comes up that a History major is an instant know-everything? People think we can just rattle on for hours and hours about any subject with just the mention of some totally unimportant event. Why, there's even a vicious rumor

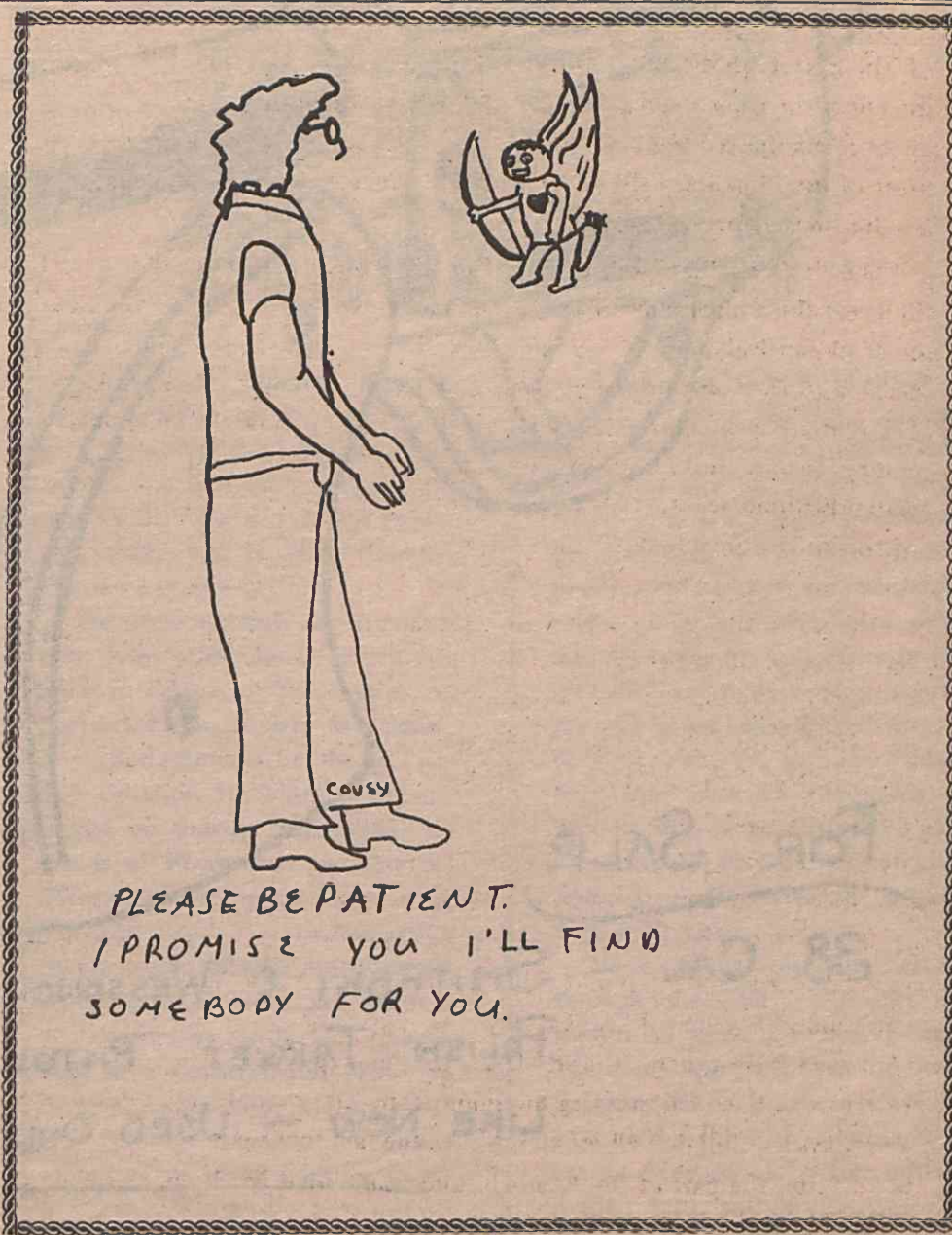
making the rounds at school these days that every morning, History majors (and profs, too!) rise, face Northeast, and salute Boston. How outlandish can you get? We never salute Boston. Philadelphia, maybe but never Boston.

What is it that provokes people to ask such dumb questions of us?

For example:

They: "Why didn't the South win the Civil War?"

I: "The North's S.W.A.T. team was bigger."



## WRITE THE EDITOR

They: "When did the War of 1812 end?"

I: "Nineteen-fifteen. They took long lunch hours."

They: "Who discovered America?"

I: "Rand-McNally."

They: "Why were they called 'The Gay Nineties'?"

I: "Anita Bryant wasn't around"

They: "Why were they called 'The Roaring Twenties'?"

I: "Someone kept pulling the MGM lion's tail."

And if you think that's bad, you should see some of my exams. I'm surprised that Dr. Bill O'Rights is still talking to me after he asked me once "Who led the charge up San Juan Hill?" and I came back with "The Muppets, the Sweathogs, and the Brass section of the Lawrence Welk Band."

He: "Which famous comedy team made the movie Duck Soup?"

I: "Huey, Louis, Dewey and Donald Duck."

He: "Who said 'I never met a man I didn't like'?"

I: "The same cannibal who said 'Show me a man with a lot of meat on his bones and I'll show you dinner for six'."

To say the least, my answers haven't exactly tickled his fancy. He called me into his office one afternoon last week for a conference.

"This has got to be one of the worst papers I've seen in twenty-five years of teaching," he said. I considered pleading temporary insanity, but knew that such things worked only with Psychology. "When was the last time that you answered a question seriously?" "January 23, 1963."

"And just how do you expect to get a degree in this subject with such responses?"

I must admit that I was stuck for an answer until someone in a nearby office turned on a radio. You should've seen Dr. O'Rights' expression when I got up on his desk and tap danced my way through a recitation of the Declaration of Independence. How was he expecting me to get my degree? With my good looks?