



UNION WOMAN

PUBLISHED BY ORGANIZED WORKING WOMEN

OWW
annual
meeting
May 2
— see page 3 —

VOL. NO. 3 4 3

MARCH-APRIL 1981

Women into the skilled trades raises concerns

By NANCY BAYLY

During the next five years, technological change will create massive unemployment in certain occupations now dominated by women. The women who are forced to look for new jobs will find attractive the relatively high wages and good benefits now available in the traditionally — and almost exclusively — male preserves of the skilled trades and certain industrial jobs.

There is a serious concern, however, now being expressed by members of the labour movement, as well as women's organizations. Women entering non-traditional jobs may find their presence used by employers to attack the standard of wages and benefits of the male workers. Women may remain isolated, performing the less skilled tasks, and receiving a relatively lower wage rate than their male counterparts within their new professions. The fact that women are victims of discrimination in hiring may mean they will be concentrated in non-union shops and be more vulnerable to company threats and intimidation.

Women's organizing have begun actively working with the labour movement to mobilize around these and other concerns involving women in non-

traditional jobs. Local 1005 of the Steelworkers, in coordination with a group called "Women-Back-Into-Stelco", was instrumental in forcing Stelco to hire 100 women into its Hamilton plant two years ago. At the last OFL convention, an initiative was formulated by the Women's Committee to actively support the struggle for women to be hired into the aerospace industry (specifically, at Fleet Industries in Fort Erie).

Local "Women-in-Trades" organizations have sprung up across Canada (including Toronto) to offer support to those in male-dominated occupations. In April, an Ontario-wide conference for "Women in Trades and Industry" will take place with the aim of educating women to some of the issues raised above, as well as tackling such thorny problems as affirmative action and seniority.

Women's organizations and the labour movement must continue to develop this commitment and cooperative to ensure that women achieve equal access to every form of employment, while protecting and extending the hard-won gains of all working people.

Nancy Bayly is a member of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners.



— K. McQuig

4,000 celebrate Women's Day

Over 4,000 people gathered in the rotunda of the new City Hall, March 7 to celebrate International Women's Day. The meeting focused on the need for universal childcare and the ending of roadblocks to women's economic development. It also condemned the rise of right wing groups such as the "moral majority" and the Ku Klux Klan. Organized by the International Women's Day Coalition, of which OWW is a member, the crowd then took their messages into the street with a huge parade from city hall to Harbor Collegiate. At the school participating groups had displays and workshops were held on the main themes of the day.

Constitution tops NAC meet

By LOIS BEDARD

OTTAWA — The 1981 annual meeting of the National Action Committee on the Status of

Women (NAC) was very informative for the over 300 delegates and observers in attendance. NAC is an umbrella group representing nearly 1,000,000 Canadian women from trade unions, women's organizations and political parties. OWW is among its affiliates.

The three day meeting and government lobby began with workshops on: pensions, taxes and benefits, employment, finance and funding, justice, membership and the impact of technology. In addition later workshops covered social services, editorial and media relations, and the Canadian constitution.

NAC not only called for the resignation of the minister responsible for the status of women, Lloyd Axworthy, but also for the resignations of the current executive of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

Axworthy has been in hot water with women's groups over the past three months for his interference with the government-financed and appointed CACSW. On his recommendation a country-wide conference on women and the constitution was cancelled, prompting the resignation of Council president Doris Anderson and seven of the 23-member council.

The annual meeting endorsed all the amendments to the Constitutional Charter of Rights and Freedoms that were passed by the historic Women's Constitutional Conference of Feb. 14-15. This conference had been called on an ad hoc basis to replace the one Axworthy cancelled.

NAC opposed the present method of constitutional reform by means of first ministers' conferences and instead called for a constituency assembly representative of women as well as all levels of government.

In other business, NAC described the impact of technology as a vital issue and will promote public action on its implications. A national conference on women's mental health is planned for March 1982.

The Red Rose Review, an Ottawa-based feminist theatre group, presented an incisive, sparkling satire in their production "You've come a Long Way, Baby!"

NAC's new president, Jean Wood of Toronto, replaces Lyn MacDonald. The executive and its officers come from all parts of Canada promising sound and alert leadership for a new year of high profile on women's struggles.

Lois Bedard is a member of the Ontario Secondary School Teacher's Federation.



— M. Phillips

OFL Daycare Campaign in full swing

Toronto marked the last leg in a series of open forums across the province in the Ontario Federation of Labour's Daycare Campaign. The campaign initiated at last November's OFL convention is aimed at pressuring all levels of government to live up to their responsibility in providing decent care for the children of working parents. The forums were held in conjunction with various women's, daycare and social welfare organizations. The OFL will compile its findings into a brief for presentation to the Ontario government in the coming months. The aim of the campaign is to provide free, universal and comprehensive child care for Ontario's children. Photo shows OWW executive member Iren Kuusela presenting a brief on behalf of her local CUPE 79.

Reshaping workers' compensation in Ont.

By ROSEMARY TATE
 "Reshaping Workers' Compensation in Ontario" is the interim report of Professor Paul C. Weiler, a Harvard Law professor and a former head of the British Columbia Labour Relations Board, who was appointed early in 1980 by Labour Minister Robert Elgie to study problems in Ontario's workers' compensation system. The current **Workmen's Compensation Act** has changed little from the original legislation enacted in 1914, and injured workers, their advocates and unions have been screaming for years for reform. Primary complaints have been grossly inadequate benefit levels, token rehabilitative measures with little hope of job security, abuse of the WCB's broad discretionary powers, biased and judgemental Board doctors and an insensitive, overly bureaucratic and unaccountable administration. A critical look at this first report reveals that few of these concerns have been met in Professor Weiler's recommendations; in fact, it appears that existing rights could be seriously eroded.

This is but a brief account of the highlights, particularly those of special significance to women workers, of Weiler's recommendations; the report deserves careful attention by unions and other concerned with work related disabilities.

Two themes recur throughout the report: Professor Weiler rejects any criticism of the WCB

policies and administration and insists that only legislative changes are needed; and he does not advocate increased employer assessments (the source of compensation benefits) but believes that a redistribution of the available money will solve the problems.

What's in it for Women?

Apart from official recognition that women work — he points out that the name "Workmen's Compensation" is "anachronistic, offensive and must be changed" — the report offers little in the way of changes directed specifically at women. However, within the context of the large disparity between men's and women's wages, the impact of his recommendations will be more severe on women than men, as WCB benefits are based on pre-accident earnings.

Weiler's proposed method of redistributing available money becomes apparent when two of his major recommendations are examined. He proposes to raise the ceiling on eligible earnings from the present \$18,500. to an amount which equal 250% of the Average Industrial Wage (AIW); this will benefit higher paid workers but will not change the situation for those earning average or low wages (women, immigrants, youth and other unskilled workers). As well, he lowers benefit levels to 90% of net earnings (presently 75% of gross) to provide an "incentive" to return to work.

Secondly, he revamps the present permanent disability award system to pay lump sum awards instead of lifetime monthly pensions; almost every case to which we have applied this proposal results in a net loss for the worker.

It is a fact that more men died from work related injuries or diseases than have women, so the recommendations with respect to surviving spouses and dependents are of significance. Weiler provides for lump sum benefits of 250% of the AIW (currently at \$40,000) and assistance from the Boards Vocational Rehabilitation Department to aid in re-entering the work force. Sur-

living spouses over the age of forty may be eligible for a small supplementary monthly pension. Without exception this results in a net loss for spouses under forty.

Some Positive Elements

The report is not completely negative: Weiler recommends tying benefit levels to the AIW to offset inflation, maintaining CPP and UI contributions, revamp the appeals system to separate the final level from the WCB and to include labour appointees, reforming the Medical Review Panel and forcing employers to take on greater responsibility for rehabilitation.

But these reforms will not offset the impact of the concerns he ignores — doctors will still be on the WCB payroll, benefit levels will still be inadequate, workers will still be forced into low paying, insecure jobs and the Board's discretionary powers will not be limited.

Labour's Role

Weiler's report, (whatever the Labour Ministry likes), will become draft legislation imminently, and his second report, which is expected to address industrial disease and universal accident insurance schemes, is due this summer. These are all complicated and controversial issues in which working people have a direct interest, and organized labour has an obligation to continue to participate in the consultation process and battle for real reforms.

Rosemary Tate is shop steward for OPSEU Local 525. She works for Injured Workers Consultants.

Health and safety hotline

TOHRC, the Toronto Occupational Health and Safety Resource Committee has opened its offices at 717 Pape Avenue. The group is offering an occupational health and safety telephone service. Members are available by phone every second and fourth Saturday of the month to answer questions and deal with problems workers are experiencing around health and safety issues. They can be reached at 461-0576.

Ontario's health and safety act

Bill 70 has shortcomings

By CATHI CARR

Bill 70, the Occupational Health and Safety Act was proclaimed law in October 1979. It covers all workers in Ontario except: farm workers, domestics in private residence, academic staff in universities, elementary and secondary school teachers, inmates of correctional institutions, federal government workers (who are not covered by any statute) — workers under federal jurisdiction (banks, radio and TV, airlines, etc.) are covered by Part IV of the Canada Labour Code (Section 23).

Rights of Workers

This Act provides specific rights to workers, including the right to information. Under section 14 and 15 the employer must inform the workers of any hazard associated with the work. He must provide information and instruction to protect the health and safety of the worker and accurately keep, maintain and make available to the worker records of that worker's exposure to biological, chemical and physical agents as may be prescribed.

The legislation also calls for the posting of the Act both in English and the majority language of the workplace.

Joint Committees

Workers are entitled to a joint health and safety committee if their workplace has 20 or more people employed; uses toxic substances as designated under regulation or has been directed to form a committee by the Minister of Labour. There are, unfortunately, certain workplaces which are excluded from this right. These are offices, libraries, art galleries, museums, restaurants, hotels and motels (only the laundries and kitchens are covered), retail stores, apartment buildings, theatres and private clubs.

This joint health and safety committee must consist of at least two persons of whom at least half shall be workers to be selected by the workers or the union, where



one exists. The committee must meet at least once every three months. It may identify hazards, obtain information from the employer and make recommendations. It must post the names of the committee members and keep minutes of its meetings.

A worker member of the committee may inspect the workplace once each month, may investigate fatalities and critical injuries; is entitled to be paid for all time spent carrying her or his duties and may accompany a ministry inspector during inspection of the workplace (Section 8, 28).

Right to Refuse Work

A worker has the right to refuse work which she or he has reason to believe will endanger herself or himself or another worker. This right does not apply to police officers, firefighters or workers employed in a correctional facility or training school.

Hospital, nursing home, ambulance and laboratory workers cannot refuse unsafe work where

life, health or safety of another person or the public may be in imminent jeopardy. The meaning of imminent jeopardy is undefined and will most likely require a test case for clarification. (Section 23)

A worker must be provided with well maintained protective equipment as prescribed (Section 14). She or he has the responsibility and duty to wear whatever protective equipment has been provided at all times. (Section 17)

Limitations of Act

What Bill 70 does not do is specifically define health and safety. It does not ensure workers a workplace free from hazards. The law does not give groups the right to refuse but only individual workers. There are regulations for only designated substances: asbestos, lead, mercury, noise, isocyanates, silica and vinyl chloride.

The Ministry of Labour has a philosophy entitled "internal responsibility". It believes that workers and the employer should work out problems together. However, if an occupational health and safety problem arises, workers should not be thwarted by the ministry but should insist that it fulfill its responsibilities for immediate action by issuing orders for the correction of unhealthy and unsafe working conditions.

Cathi Carr is health and safety rep for the Ontario Nurses Association Staff Union.



At the conference's plenary session.



— J. Rosenthal

In the women and non-traditional work workshop.

OWW employment conference

One hundred and seventy-five enthusiastic unionists attended the OWW "Women and Employment Conference", Feb. 20-22.

Greetings were brought to the conference by Terry Meager, secretary-treasurer of the Ontario Federation of Labour, Wally Majesky, president of the Metro Toronto Labour Council, Marianne Holder of the Ontario New Democratic Party and Clodhna McMullin of the Secretary of State Women's Bureau.

Keynote speeches were delivered by Dorothy Smith, a professor of Sociology at OISE and Grace Hartman president of the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

Workshop topics included: Equal Pay; Technological Change; Daycare; and Occupational Health and Safety, among others.

Resolutions were passed dealing with support for the hospital workers and for the Ontario Federation of Labour's daycare campaign.

Send us your contracts

An ad hoc OWW committee has been struck to research existing collective agreements in terms of clauses pertaining to women. Maternity leave, paternity leave, affirmative action, sexual harassment, sick leave and other clauses will be under study.

The aim is to compile the best of these clauses to be used as a reference for union negotiations.

Please send a copy of your current collective agreement to:

Janice McLellan,
 Chairperson, OWW ad hoc Committee,
 c/o Communications Workers of Canada,
 33 Cecil Street, Toronto, Ontario.

UPDATE

B.C. labor backs TWU

Thousands of workers rallied in a show of support for Telecommunication Workers Union members, led by president Bill Clark, striking the U.S.-owned B.C. Telephone Company. B.C. labor has also rallied around the 10,000 striking municipal workers on the lower mainland and saw the B.C. Federation of Labour president unveil the fed's four-point "fighting program of economic action" to support B.C.'s striking workers.

Labour's fighting program includes: direct solidarity action, including public rallies throughout B.C., both in the current disputes, and in forthcoming negotiations in the forest industry, fishing, steel talks and the building trades this fall; co-ordination of all strikes and collective bargaining by the federation with a staff member assigned to each dispute; escalated picket line activity with federation-enforced "hot" edicts and total picketing of multi-tenanted buildings; and the boycott by unions of all Labour Relations Board hearings to stop mass picketing actions.

To show it meant to put its program into action the Fed launched a series of rotating general strikes in various areas throughout the province to back demands by TWU for the re-instatement of 22 fired workers.

The re-instatement was the issue preventing solution to the 14-month contract battle which the union waged. This action won a partial victory for the telephone workers who are now back on the job.

The municipal workers strike continues as the Greater Vancouver District Council persists in locking out its workers and refuses to re-open negotiations. Equal pay for work of equal value is a major issue in the municipal workers' strike.

Hospital workers' struggle

The Canadian Union of Public Employees still plans to take the cases of its 2,500 members who were fired or disciplined for the participation in the hospital strike to arbitration.

The hospital workers were hot on the heels of Premier Davis during the last provincial elections criticizing him for allowing the Ontario Hospital Association for forcing the strike and for denying these workers their right to strike.

Grace Hartman, CUPE head will be among 20 top union officers who will appear in court June 8 on charges of contempt of court.

Rallies have been planned and held in support of the workers but mass labour action is required to win these workers back their jobs and ultimately win them their right to strike. There is a struggle for all labour.

Susan shoes strikes for parity with Hamilton

Over 550 women have been on strike against Susan Shoes since March 6 in an effort to win parity with their fellow workers at the company's Hamilton plant. The company which manufactures Cougar brand name shoes and boots has offered workers at the two Toronto plants fifteen cents an hour less. All three plants have the same operations and interchange the work, yet Toronto workers are asked to start at \$4.00 an hour, compared to the \$4.15 starting rate in Hamilton.

Local 233 of the United Food and Commercial Workers have called on the Ontario Federation of Labour to launch a country wide boycott of Cougar shoes and boots. They are also requesting solidarity pickets. The plants are located at 19 Ingram St. (two sets of lights below Lawrence off Keele) and at 30 Dominion Drive (north of the 401 off Markham).

OWW ANNUAL MEETING

Organized Working Women's fifth annual meeting will be held Saturday, May 2.

At our annual meetings the membership reviews the past years' activities, adopts program and policies for the upcoming year and elects its executive council.

Location: 33 Cecil Street (Labour Lyceum)

Registration: 8:30-9:30 a.m.

Social hour 4:00 to 5:00 p.m. (wine and cheese)

All OWW members are urged to attend. Observers welcomed.

IN MEMORIAM

It was with deep regret and sadness that OWW learned of the sudden death of a dear sister — Margie Malone.

Margie was a member of OWW, and contributed her skills and knowledge to OWW activities during her years in Toronto.

Margie worked with a number of trade unions and community legal clinics during her life — CUPE, CUPW, FOCAS, People and Law, and the Unemployment Help Centre.

She was an active union member, and a fighter on behalf of the issues of working people.

She will be greatly missed by all of us.

B.L.

Come to the rally for Tel-Air strikers!

Sisters at Tel-Air, an answering service in Oshawa, have been on strike since November 24, 1980. Members of the Communication Workers of Canada, these telephone operators were certified in March 1980.

Present wages range from \$3.00 to \$4.25 an hour. The company offer is \$3.00 to \$4.68 an hour on signing, and \$3.00 to \$5.15 an hour in one year. The company has said NO to COLA, NO to 50% OHIP; and says one striker is to return on signing, the rest will be laid off.

THESE SISTERS NEED OUR SUPPORT!

Come to a rally in support of the Tel-Air strikers.

May 9, 1981

**UAW Local 222 Hall
Bond Street East, Oshawa**

**Guest speakers — entertainment
— parade and picket**

Transportation will leave the Steelworkers Hall, 25 Cecil Street, Toronto at 9:30 a.m. Return at approximately 2:30 p.m.



CWC workers picket outside Tel-Air.

VDTs a health hazard

By LINDA TORNEY

In the Fall of 1979, four women working on Video Display Terminals at the Toronto Star gave birth to defective babies. The unusual cluster of birth defects among women working in the same area, and within a short space of time, raised the possibility that VDTs pose a far more serious health threat than anyone had previously suspected.

A few months ago, Darlene Weiss, a Provincial Government employee in Thunder Bay, was diagnosed as having radiant energy cataracts, attributable to the use of VDTs. The Ontario Public Service Employee's Union filed a Workmen's Compensation Board claim on Ms. Weiss' behalf, the first ever such claim to be filed in Canada. The claim was recently denied by the WCB. A decision in her favour would have had a significant effect on a new and rapidly expanding industry.

Video Display terminals, also known as Video Display Units (VDUs), or Cathode Ray Tubes (CRTs), have been around for ten to fifteen years, and their usage in Canada is expanding daily. They are presently used in business offices, newspapers, airline and railway depots and also in some union offices across the country. Since their introduction, workers have been complaining of sore eyes, blurred vision, headaches, neck and back pain, irritability and fatigue. These complaints have largely been ignored by management, or attributed to "worker attitude about changing technology".

Now, as a result of the publicity surrounding the birth defects and cataracts, awareness of VDT health hazards is growing daily. Those of us involved in these

cases were deluged with calls from others using VDTs, and the list of victims is growing. From across the country have come reports of spontaneous abortions, miscarriages, deteriorating eyesight, and more recently, a mysterious skin rash which appears after the use of VDTs and disappears when the worker has been off the machines a few hours.

The growing alarm has had some effect on management. For the first time, many companies appear willing to deal at least with the ergonomics of VDT use. Ergonomics, simply stated, is the adaptation of work environment to the worker, instead of the worker to the environment. In terms of VDTs, this means proper lighting, and adjustable chairs, desks, screens and keyboards. As far as the effects of radiation are concerned, there is still no government or management acceptance of the possible hazard. The scientific community is divided on the issue.

In January of this year concerned Toronto trade unionists whose members are affected by the new technology, formed an ad hoc committee of VDTs, under the auspices of the Metro Toronto Labour Council.

The committee exchanges information on the health hazards associated with VDT usage, and is attempting to find some way to educate and protect workers. Although the committee has only been in existence since January, there has been some limited success in improving conditions for VDT operators. The Communication Workers, in what is probably a "first" in Canada, have managed to get an agreement with Bell that pregnant

VDT operators may be taken off VDTs and assigned other work for the term of their pregnancy. One of the bargaining units of the Brotherhood of Railway, Airline and Steamship Clerks has agreed to static reducing improvements in an attempt to prevent VDT induced skin rashes. (There is some evidence that humidity and therefore static, is a factor in these rashes.)

The Southern Ontario Newspaper Guild has been able to obtain lighting tests and adjustable chairs for employees at the Globe and Mail. As well, management is cooperating with the Guild in an ophthalmological survey of VDT users.

The time appears to be right for pushing improvement to working conditions for those using VDTs. In order to keep pressure on management to correct poor working conditions, and on the scientific community and government agencies to conduct adequate research into the hazards, union members will have to make VDT health and safety a priority. The first step is for members to educate themselves about hazards and the methods of correcting them, and seek changes through health and safety committees, grievances and negotiations.

The trouble with VDTs is that the damage to health caused by the machines is gradual. Therefore, many people (including many trade unionists) do not take the problem seriously. It's time we did before these hazards become the new asbestosis.

Linda Torney is business representative for the Southern Ontario Newspaper Guild.

Labour Studies Courses

The Centre for Labour Studies, Humber College is offering four labour education credit courses in their 1981 spring program.

Course

Your Health and Safety

Labour Leadership

Labour History

Effective Communications

For further information contact Centre for Labour Studies at 675-3111 ext. 467, 544 or 414.

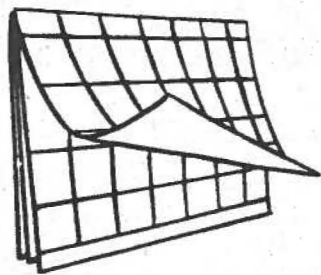
Starting date

Sat., April 25

Tues., April 28

Sat., May 2

Mon., May 25



CLEAR YOUR CALENDAR

- April 11** **OFL Daycare Forum**
Essex Room, Sheraton Centre,
123 Queen St. West
10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
- April 24-26** **Women in Trades and Industry Conference**
Hamilton Public Library, 55 York Blvd.
- May 2** **OWW Annual Meeting**
33 Cecil Street
8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Working people in the movies

The Labour Film Education Committee is sponsoring a film series — Working People in the Movies. All screenings are Monday evenings at 7:30 p.m. at the Rex Theatre, 635 Danforth Ave. (near Pape). Tickets are \$3.00 per screening available at the theatre or \$12.00 for the whole series.

April 28 — **One Man**
— **The Molly Maguires.**

May 4 — **Shutdown!**
— **Temiscaming**

May 11 — **Union Maids**
— **Norma Rae**

May 25 — **A Wives' Tale**
— **Harlan County USA**

June 1 — **Our Health is Not for Sale**
— **Who Will I Sentence**

— **Now?**

June 8 — **The Struggle Continues**
— **Controlling Interest**
— **Our Right to Live**

June 15 — **Now the Chips are Down**
— **Between the Rails**

June 22 — **In White Collar America**
— **Nine to Five**

OWW needs your support

Phase III of our 1981 financial campaign — OWW's Local Union Appeal — is slowly building up. To date OWW has received generous donations from: Canadian Paperworkers Union, Local 304; Canadian Union of Postal Workers, Toronto Local; Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 2189; Communication Workers of Canada, Local 50; International Association of Machinists, Lodge 2113; International Union of Electrical, Radio Machine Workers, Local 544; Labour Council of Metropolitan Toronto; Office & Professional Employees International Union, Local 343; On-

tario Public Service Employees Union; Southern Ontario Newspaper Guild; Toronto Area Coordinating Council UE/CGE; Toronto Typographical Union, Local 91; United Automobile Workers Union, Local 124; United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, Local 2670; United Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers Local 507, United Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers, Local 514; United Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers, Local 537; United Food & Commercial Workers, Retail Council; United Glass & Ceramic Workers, Local 200; United Rubber, Cork, Linoleum & Plastic Workers,

Local 232; and United Steelworkers of America, Local 6500. Thanks for your financial and moral support. Is your local union listed above?

Unfortunately our mailing list to the local unions was limited and perhaps your local did not receive OWW's appeal. You may rectify this and help give OWW the base it needs to continue its exciting program and to reach out to new areas of concern to women. How? By dropping us a line at our office, 15 Gervais Dr., Suite 301, Don Mills, Ont. M3C 1Y8 or phoning 447-7462 and letting us know who and where we can send our letter of appeal.

Thank you very much for any assistance you can give us.

Joyce Rosenthal
Treasurer, OWW

Join OWW!



Membership in OWW is open to all women who are members of a bona fide collective bargaining unit or a bona fide organizing committee of a union. Membership is \$15.00 per year.

To join OWW, send in this application form with proof of union membership to the OWW office, address below.

Name

Address

Telephone

Union Local

Organized Working Women,
15 Gervais Drive, Suite 301,
Don Mills Ont. M3C 1Y8.

If you are not eligible to join OWW, you are invited to subscribe to UNION WOMAN at \$10.00 per year.

OWW has
UNION WOMAN
T-Shirts
for all seasons



Union-made — 50% Cotton
OWW Logo

Summer T-Shirt: \$6.00
Winter T-Shirt: \$10.00

**BUY ONE FOR
YOURSELF!
BUY ONE FOR
A SISTER!**

Available from the OWW office:
15 Gervais Dr., Ste. 301
Don Mills, Ontario
447-7462

Commentary

Commentary is a forum for debate and discussion on issues of interest to trade union women. Opinions expressed are not necessarily those of Organized Working Women.

An open letter to Premier Davis

By PHYLLIS WOOLLEY

On behalf of the working women of Ontario, we take this opportunity to express to you our congratulations on the occasion of your attaining a majority government in Ontario. We are delighted that you now have the power to keep your promises.

In anticipation, after the election dust had settled, we, the working women of Ontario, excitedly turned to an examination of the promises to us that we might expect you to keep. To our dismay, we discovered that there were none!

We did not despair, however, and a thorough search of the pre-election rhetoric revealed that you did address one basic human rights issue which is of interest to women, that of equal pay for work of equal value legislation.

May we refer you to your comments on that subject in an interview which was published in the Globe & Mail on March 16, 1981?

First of all, Mr. Davis, we would like to set your mind to rest on one point. In that interview you expressed a fear that if such legislation were enacted, your job would have to be equitably evaluated. Section 33(4) of Bill 3, the amending bill which would have provided for equal pay for work of equal value, clearly states that "No employer shall reduce the rate of pay of an employee in order to comply with subsection 1." We women are not totally self-interested, and we want to assure you that your pay cheque is not in danger.

Secondly, you stated that, "I don't sort of set the social patterns". This is unequivocally incorrect Mr. Davis. You are the leader of the party in power in the legislative assembly of this province and through the allocative decisions which are made on a daily basis, you do set social patterns!

You use the argument of tradition to support your no change position. Historically, women have been paid less than men for their labour, and have been confined to job ghettos, but because this has always been so is not a good reason why it should continue. Tradition is absolutely the worst argument for the perpetration of exploitation. We reiterate, you are our leader, do not falter, you have a heavy responsibility and you must be strong however frightening the prospect of change may be!

Thirdly, you say that you have debated the issue with your wife and that she understands the complexity of it. As well, you state that the proposed legislation would be difficult to administer. Well, Mr. Davis, the working women of Ontario also understand that the matter is complex and difficult. Perhaps we have an even deeper understanding of it than your wife since we are directly affected by it. Again, the fact that something is complex and difficult is a poor excuse for not attempting it. Give us the rudiments of the legislation we will smooth it out, polish it up, patch it here and there; we women are used to performing those tasks.

Finally, you dismiss the whole problem of compensation for women, saying that the Conservatives have solved it with the equal-pay-for-equal-work law. We are forced to agree, it does solve the problem — for the employer — but not for working women! The existing legislation shackles and controls us while allowing employers to define equal work and to thereby legally create and maintain low paying female job ghettos at their discretion. That bears repeating in case you missed it. The existing legislation is on behalf of and for the protection of the business sector and it is not in the interests of the workers.

We continue to assert that a long injustice to working women exists. We require legislation which will allow working women to enforce the basic right to economic equality and until we have it, we will remain second class citizens. Until equal pay for work of equal value legislation is enacted, and we have the right in law to economic equality, the personhood which was granted to us over fifty years ago is still in name only!

You have the power to enact the necessary legislation. You have the majority you said you needed to properly govern this province. Can you do the job, Mr. Davis?

Phyllis Woolley is secretary of OPSEU Local 525.

Hazards in the office

On March 28 OWW held a very successful one-day workshop on occupational health hazards facing office workers. The meeting also dealt with how Bill 70 could be used to protect these workers.



Peggy Nash formerly with CALEA and now with the staff of the OFL Occupational Health and Safety Training Centre instructed the group. Some of the major concerns raised by the meeting were video display terminals, ozone from photo copiers, ventilation, noise, fluorescent lighting and stress.