

The union breaks through at Eatons

By CAROLE CURRIE
and DONNA JOHANSEN

On February 10, 1984 the first application for certification was submitted to the Ontario Labour Relations Board on behalf of the employees in Eaton's Brampton Store. In a short and secret seven days, the union was in a very comfortable position for automatic certification for both full and part-time employees.

Since that date, we have had successful applications for automatic certification in St. Catharines' Eaton's, Scarborough Town Centre, Eaton's at Shoppers World Danforth and on Friday, May 11 automatic certification will be achieved for the Yonge & Eglinton Eaton's store.

In a few short months approximately 1,000 Eaton's employees have worked together and won

the right to collective bargaining. The future only looks brighter as the campaign spreads into many other department stores and warehouses.

The reasons they are organizing? The company in the past 2-3 years has really jumped on the recession bandwagon. Many of their employees have been waiting that long hoping to find a decent increase. When they finally

got one increases ranged between 0 to 4%. Some employees were reclassified and given no raises.

In the warehouse, the company used what seemingly is their version of equal pay for equal work — they simply cut the male rates back to what the women were getting (\$71 to \$91 difference weekly).

Cathy Walker from the Eaton's Brampton store states, "in the past two years the commu-

nication from management to employee has been poor and our self esteem has been trampled on. We are not being allowed to utilize our talents. Since certification, the communication has improved in some cases and so have the wages and working conditions. The morale between employees has never been better, and it's the most fun I've ever had for a buck".

• Continued on Page 2



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**Peace
Petition
Caravan
Campaign**

Get involved!

EDITORIAL

It's time for the shorter work week

By HOLLY KIRKCONNELL

Reducing the amount of time workers spend at their paid jobs without loss of pay makes sense in a situation of high unemployment, and is possible because of increased productivity due to the use of microtechnology.

As a labour movement we are concerned about the quality of life. Increased leisure time in which to pursue other human activities certainly would contribute to improving the quality of all our lives.

Ten of the resolutions submitted to the 15th Biennial Canadian Labour Congress Convention, May 1984, deal in whole or in part with reducing working time with no loss in pay. The resolution numbers are: L-7, L-31, Ec-51, T-1, T-5, T-7, T-9, T-13, T-14, and T-15.

There has been no overall reduction of, nor any concerted attempt to reduce, working hours since the 1940s. For the seventy years prior to that time there had been a progressive trend to reduced working hours starting with the Nine-Hour Day Movement in the 1870's.

There presently exist different methods of arranging work hours which result in less than full-time work. The government's program of work-sharing plans (the scheme pays workers unemployment insurance benefits for a portion of their week in an attempt to prevent lay-offs; in practice it has merely postponed them) have affected very few, mainly male production workers.

Job-sharing (where two workers "share" one full-time job including pay and benefits) is a concept which has been around for a decade or so. This affects very few, mainly female professionals.

Part-time work, which in Ontario is defined as 24 hours per week or less, is performed by large numbers of mainly female workers. Part-time jobs often pay less, and rarely provide benefits. This type of work arrangement is increasing as the economic crisis deepens.

All of the above involve a loss of pay and benefits. What we must demand is less work time with **no loss of pay or benefits.**

A reduction in working time could take a variety of forms. A shorter work day, for example a 6-hour day, 5 days a week (24 is divisible by 6, so this would work for those operations requiring shift work); a shorter work week, for example the 4-day week; or a shorter work year, with increased vacations and paid time off. The option of a shorter work life — earlier retirement with good pensions, or paid extended leaves during a working life — could also be considered.

Reduced working time should not be seen primarily as a women's demand in order to provide some relief from the burden of the "double day" of paid work and home/family responsibilities. This would only serve to reinforce the notion that reproductive work is women's work. While the winning of reduced working hours for all workers, male and female, will not in itself break down the sexual division of labour, it certainly will contribute to providing the conditions within which this equality can be realized.

Holly Kirkconnell is President of OWW and President of Local 512 OPSEU.

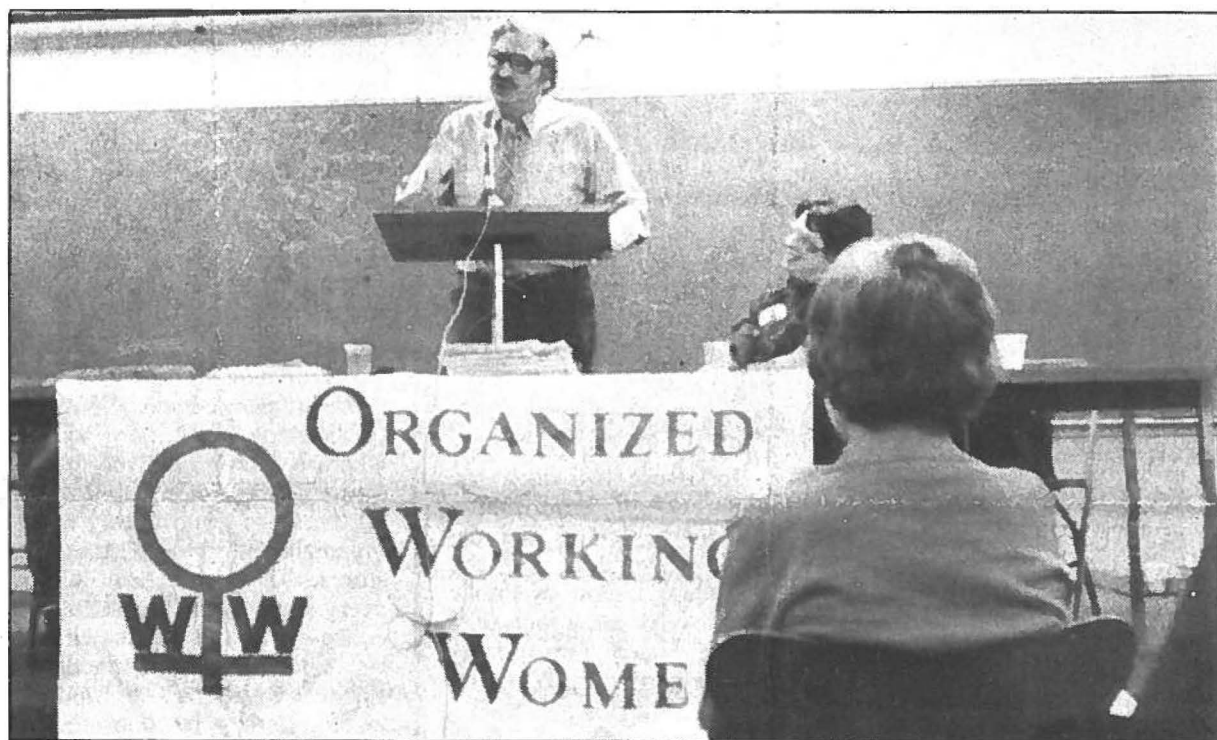


Photo — Joyce Rosenthal

BOB SASS, former head of the Saskatchewan health and safety department, takes OWW conference delegates through the intricacies of bargaining for their lives in the workplace.

Economic survival today

By KERRY McCUAIG

The labor market is undergoing a massive transformation. Since the mid-seventies unemployment has steadily increased despite some improvements in the economic picture. On the horizon, the technological revolution threatens to displace one million additional workers.

The above developments have made working women their special target. Already experiencing higher unemployment levels than men, it is "women's jobs" in the service sector of the economy which will fall prey to the new technology.

Comprising one of the most vulnerable sectors of the labor force, women have fewer financial resources to fall back on, are less mobile and on the bottom of the rung when it comes to company or government retraining schemes.

It was on this background that 200 trade unionists gathered in Toronto, Feb. 24-26 at Organized Working Women's annual conference, "Women and Economic Survival".

Economist Monica Townson outlined for delegates the changing composition of the Canadian family which will have profound

effects on women's economic status. The single parent will soon lead the majority of households, explained Townson. One-quarter of these families headed by women, subsist below the poverty line. Rather than "until death do us part", "one-quarter of women having children during the 80s can expect to raise those children for some period on their own," said Townson. Unemployment will force many of these mothers into welfare offices.

The disintegration of the workforce, has made the competition for jobs extremely fierce. "As traditional male jobs are threatened, women will be set in competition directly with men for the few remaining jobs", warned Townson. This is a unique occurrence since the development of female job ghettos, prevented men and women from directly competing with each other for work.

The scramble for jobs, plus the onset of a new cottage industry, ushered in by the advent of the home computer, "increases the potential for exploitation of the worker, on par with what has traditionally been seen in the garment and textile industries," said Townson. "It will move

women behind the first frontier, back into the home."

Townson offered a solution in the "gender gap", an untapped power that women possess. It has been demonstrated in U.S. elections that women vote differently than men on issues, and will break with traditional voting patterns to support candidates who take a stand on certain issues.

This realization has sent politicians from the left to the right of the political spectrum, scrambling for the women's vote wooing them with programs and promises.

But the test will be in the overall policies of the parties and to what extent they can be pushed into picking up labor's alternatives to the economic crisis.

"Despite their lipservice to women's issues neo-conservative governments bring with them the spectre of restraint", warned Townson, and women are the first to suffer. She advanced instead the shorter work week, as a means of workers sharing in their increased productivity and mandatory affirmative action programs for women and youth in education and training programs

• Continued on Page 2

Women and economic survival

• From Page One

and in access to and mobility within the workplace. In addition she called for consolidating the multitude of family programs into a guaranteed annual income package.

Workers should also be fighting for more control over their working environment, Robert Sass, former head of the health and safety program of the Saskatchewan NDP government told delegates.

Health and safety, he said, is a social issue, involving the right to know and monitor working condi-

tions. Workers should define health and safety in broader terms, he urged. Citing statistics from a John Hopkins University study he told delegates that for every 1% rise in the unemployment rate, death by heart attack rises 1.9%, criminal convictions rise 4% and homicide rates rise 5.7%.

The health of the workplace involves pace, monitoring, repetitiveness, and sexual harassment. Important says Sass, is the deskilling of work which "robs the worker of his dignity

and pride in a job".

In an impassioned and sometimes humorous address, Sass exposed the role of the medical profession who "see silicosis as a problem of the lung, not hard rock mining"; the industrial engineers who "break down work into jobs", building in repetitiveness and monotony; and the government which resists pressures to legislate safer healthier working environments.

Sass reserved his harshest words for the "vindictiveness of employers... who humiliate and punish workers". He urged unions to take full advantage of existing legislation, to educate their members on the hazards in their working environment and to push for more worker control on the job.

Kerry McCuaig is a member of the Southern Ontario Newspaper Guild.

Eaton's drive

• From Page One

In the department stores the ratio of full time to part time is 25%-75% on average. Being in a sales sector, department stores employ a lot of women, although relatively few women are represented in the higher pay areas of middle to upper management or "hard" commission sales.

What is inspiring in this case is that all classifications of workers male and female are unifying their efforts to collectively bargain for equality for all workers — male, female, full and part time. These people are real trade unionists with a definite social conscience.

We are pleased and delighted to be working with these women who are getting involved in their futures, who along with their brothers are contributing to the organizing efforts in all the other stores. They come out almost every night with us and help us educate other workers with regards to their rights under the Labour Relations Act and are inspiring others to choose collective bargaining. It's a cause that they are willing to spend their time and effort on.

They themselves have grown as individuals, their families and customers are supportive as they anxiously await the negotiations with their company and RWDSU. They are a contribution not only to this organization, but to the entire labour movement.

Carole Currie is an organizer for the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Workers Union, Local 414, Donna Johansen is a member of Local 414.



Photos — Joyce Rosenthal

Over 200 delegates attended OWW's "Women and Economic Survival" conference.

Rose heads OWW fundraising campaign



Jeff Rose will chair the 1984 OWW fundraising campaign. Jeff is the national president of the Canadian Union of Public Employees and a long time friend and supporter of Organized Working Women. Prior to being elected President of CUPE Jeff was president of Toronto Local 79 where he had been a member for seven years. During that tenure, we were pleased to have him act as a resource person

at the 1983 OWW conference on "Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value".

Jeff is a strong believer in fighting for economic and social justice, he states: "Our job is to protect the interests of our members, but it is also to fight in the public interest. Because the ideals that we are defending in these tough times are the values we cherish not only for ourselves, but also for our children, our neighbours and our communities".

UPDATE

Labor and peace

The Canadian Labour Congress has issued a new pamphlet called "Labour and Peace". In an attractive and concise way it explains the stake trade union members have in becoming activists in the movement for disarmament and peace.

The CLC is a major sponsor of the Peace Petition Caravan Campaign. This countrywide effort will canvass voters riding by riding asking their support to endorse making Canada a nuclear-weapons free zone; annulling the cruise testing agreement; funding human needs not the military and putting the above to a free vote in parliament.

A caravan will collect the signatures and they will be presented to parliament on Oct. 20. Volunteers are urgently needed. Contact your local labour council for both the CLC pamphlet and information on how you and your local can become involved.

Morgentaler trail update

The constitutional challenge of Canada's abortion law recently ended in the Supreme Court of Ontario. It could be several months before Chief Justice William Parker brings down a decision. Morris Manning for the defence in his marathon summation outlined how women are brutalized by the lack of safe, legal abortions. The federal government's view was the law was working adequately and it wasn't meant to "create in any way the right to have an abortion."

The legal decision now rests with the courts. If Judge Parker makes an unfavourable decision, Drs. Morgentaler, Scott and Smoling's case will go to trial and they will face the original charges of "conspiracy to procure a miscarriage". If the decision is favourable and the court agrees that Section 251 of the criminal code violates the Charter of Rights, the government will appeal to the Supreme Court.

In either case, the process will be long, and it is crucial that public support and agitation continue for the legalization of free-standing clinics and the principle of women's right to choose.



Taking the floor

On March 3-4 in Ottawa, 60 trade union women attended a highly successful Skills Building Workshop, sponsored by the Ottawa District Labour Council, the Area Council of the Public Service Alliance and Organized Working Women. In mock meetings and conferences delegates became familiar with Robert's Rules of Order and other procedures which will help them become more effective at union meetings.

NAC lobby touches bases with Ottawa

By SHEILA McNEILL

NAC held its annual meeting in Ottawa, March 16-19, in a very successful week-end attended by 450 women. The lobby session, held on Monday, was chaired and orchestrated by Laurel Ritchie of Toronto with 250 women present.

The lobby preparations were exhaustive but well worth the effort. We left the Chateau Laurier en masse and marched to the Parliament Buildings. We were a pretty impressive group.

The lobby held in the PC Caucus Room was soon filled to overflowing. The eleven topics prepared were; abortion, day care, pensions, native women, pornography, Canada Labour Code, peace and disarmament,

Charter of Rights, job creation, Canada Health Act and divorce.

The questions were phrased differently for each party caucus and geared to past policies or attitudes taken by the respective parties. We had little or no dissent with the NDP, other than their attitude towards pensions for homemakers the NDP agreed with NAC's positions. Ed Broadbent chaired this session, which was well attended by NDP Members of Parliament.

Brian Mulroney led the PC session (which was not well attended) and I personally was not impressed by either the leader of the PC's or the lack of interest shown in women's issues by other PC's. If this is the party that is courting the "women's vote",

heaven help us after the wedding.

A couple of the questions rattled Mr. Mulroney and he did not handle things very gracefully or intelligently. The real test came on the abortion question when Mr. Mulroney was actually booed by the women present. He did not fill us with any degree of confidence. One example was when he blamed the unions for the poor record of private pension plans in the area of survivor benefits.

The Liberals were led by Marc Lalonde and enough Liberal MPs attended to indicate that they were at least interested in hearing what we had to say. We had few areas of real dissent but the ones we had were serious. The questioners on day care for instance, had to pursue Mr. Lalonde with

unrelenting vigour until he gave us, word for word, what the Liberal commitment is to day care. He had merely answered "yes" to the question on day care and the questioner was not satisfied with that.

The most hotly contested question with the Liberals was on abortion. Mark McGuigan had a heated exchange with these questioners, but Norma Scarborough had the last word and effectively put across the views of the NAC women. "No government interference in a purely personal decision is warranted."

Another point of contention in the Liberal lobby was Judy Erola's annoying habit of stating over-and-over again, that all of our concerns would be dealt with

if we could only get more women elected to Parliament. Kay MacPherson pointed out that at the present rate, it would take over 800 years to get equal representation in the House — not soon enough for those of us involved in the struggle right now.

The lobby session was well-run, the time-table adhered to (very important) and the positions of the women within NAC very clearly communicated to all parties. If the politicians of this country do a Sigmund Freud and ask, "What do women really want?", they were either not at the NAC lobby or attended with their hearing aids turned off.

Sheila McNeill was OWW's delegate to the NAC conference.

The ordeal of a sexual harassment victim

By KERRY McCUAIG

Bonnie Robichaud's ordeal is not over yet. The Federal Court of appeal adjourned its May 1 hearing because her harasser submitted his written arguments so close to the beginning of the hearing, the other parties did not have sufficient time to prepare their responses.

For Robichaud, it means more time tacked onto the four and a half years she has spent trying to win justice as a victim of sexual harassment. During this period she's taken on no less an opponent than the Department of National Defence; has mortgaged her home to pay for legal fees and endured non-stop intimidation and provocation on the job. Except for the support given her by husband Larry and her five children, it's a battle she's fought mostly on her own.

Robichaud's story goes back to the spring of 1979. An employee at the armed forces bases outside North Bay, Ont., she beat out 14

male applicants to become the first woman lead hand of a cleaning crew.

Switching jobs meant Robichaud began her six month probation again. Her supervisor Dennis Brennan utilized her tenuous position to assault her sexually.

Robichaud bided her time, when the probation ended she launched grievances against Brennan. When her local union failed to support her, she took the case to the Human Rights Commission.

Then the waiting game began. Four months went by before the Anti-Discrimination Board decided she had a legitimate complaint. Meanwhile she continued to be badgered and hounded, complaints about her work flooded in, five of them from Brennan. A petition was drawn up calling for her resignation. Still on the books is a \$30,000 slander suit he filed against her.

It wouldn't be until July 1982,

that a one-man independent tribunal comprised of Carlton law professor Richard Abbot, in an unbelievable decision dismissed Robichaud's claim. Despite what he called "a severe credibility problem", with Brennan's testimony.

In the meantime, Public Service Alliance Representative, Marie McNeely, battled the local union and got Robichaud's grievances to third level, where they were dismissed by the deputy minister of National Defence.

Most people would have quit, but Robichaud appealed, requesting a woman to sit on the review panel. She was given two. Lois Dyer and Wendy Robson, were joined by Paul Mullins and in Feb. 1983 they overturned the original decision to find both Brennan and the Defence Department guilty.

It was a short lived victory. Within 10 days the Treasury Board, on behalf of National Defence announced it would appeal.

"Progress has been slow, be-

cause I was alone", Robichaud said in her brief to the Ontario Federation of Labor's Affirmative Action Forum in Ottawa. But with the help from other locals and women's groups, she's beginning to feel that even if the government wins this round many valuable lessons will have been taught about boss-worker, male-female power relations in the workplace.

Fifteen years ago Robichaud's complaints would have met an incredulous reception. "Sexual harassment" was not part of everyday vocabulary. But even though we've come a long way, it's not far enough. Like the rape victim, women subjected to harassment on the job are viewed with suspicion. She is either not believed, or brushed off as somehow being responsible for her own predicament.

No union member should have to battle this kind of a grievance on her own. No worker should be forced to undergo such humiliation in order to keep a job. Such injuries must not go unanswered. Ultimately it is the employer

who has the prime responsibility for safety in the workplace and it is government's job to enforce it. The OFL brief on affirmative action has called for the stress of sexual harassment to be a compensable illness under the Worker's Compensation Act. Robichaud stands to win about \$10,000 if the Review Tribunal decision is upheld. It would be small compensation for what she has endured.

Bonnie Robichaud represents the new woman in the labor force. She has fought to retain her dignity as a worker, a trade unionist and a woman. A victory for her will be shared by other women who will have a little more leverage if subjected to similar circumstances.

That makes her fight, our fight. Take up the Robichaud case at your local union, write Herb Gray at the Treasury Board and Jean Jacques Blais at National Defence. Tell them to drop the appeal and issue Robichaud with an apology and a cheque.

Kerry McCuaig is a member of the Southern Ontario Newspaper Guild.

Bargaining for equality



Working Together for Equality was the theme of a women's conference sponsored by the CWC's Ontario Region which took place from February 8 to 10 in Toronto. The 68 participants represented a substantial cross-section of the CWC membership in the province.

Opening speaker, Bob White, Canadian Director of the United Automobile Workers, emphasized that with over two million Canadians unemployed, the main issue must be jobs. The fight to improve the rights and conditions of women workers is inextricably interwoven with the fight for jobs and increased employment opportunities.

Trish Blackstaffe, National Representative provided the conference with an analysis of the representation of women in various jobs within CWC bargaining units, with an emphasis on wages, transfer, training and promotion rights.

Laurel Ritchie, Executive Vice-President of the Canadian Textile and Chemical Union and Deirdre Gallagher of the OFL Women's Committee participated in a panel on Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value. Ritchie termed the current Ontario legislation for equal pay for those who do substantially the same work as virtually useless as most women work in distinct job ghettos. Gallagher stressed the need for both mandatory equal pay for work of equal value and affirmative action legislation.



By PENNI RICHMOND

The Canada Employment and Immigration Union, Ontario Region, (one of the components of

the Public Service Alliance of Canada) held its first women's conference in Toronto, March 23-25. Organized by the Women's Committee of CEIU, the conference brought together over one hundred participants, mostly women, from across the province.

From the opening address on Friday night to the singing of the final verse of "Solidarity Forever" on Sunday afternoon ("We are the women and we've just begun to fight" ...) it was clear that this opportunity to debate and strategize together was being met with energy and commitment.

Each of the three keynote speakers — Joan Kuyek, Madeleine Parent and Linda Briskin — proved provocative and stimulating. Madeleine Parent gave an inspiring overview of the role of women inside (and outside) the union movement since the '30's. Many sisters commented on how listening to her gave them a vibrant sense of their history for the first time.

Kuyek and Briskin complemented one another in talking about practical ways of organizing ourselves and, more generally, about the need for the union and women's movements to work together. They were particularly challenging in stressing how crucial active women members are to the union movement and how important it is for unions to seriously begin to do something about those barriers which have traditionally operated to keep women from active participation.

Joan got a warm response when she talked of the legitimate place of "women's" values — the ability to listen, warmth, parenting, and so on — within union structures.

Generally, it was felt that the conference was quite successful. One sister has written in our union newsletter, "Over the weekend (my) enthusiasm and excitement was constructively channelled and the resulting experience ... was one of joy in the realization that by working together, progress will be made toward a better tomorrow."

Working together. That's the thing. All sisters left the con-

ference realizing our work within CEIU is just beginning: that we must debate the issues within our locals, that we must be prepared to attend our regional and national conventions, and, most importantly, that we stay in touch with one another and extend our network to women activists in other unions and the women's movement.

Penni Richmond chairs the PSAC's Women's Committee, CEIU Ontario.



The first National CUPE Women's Conference was held in Winnipeg from March 22 to 24. There were over 200 delegates attending from Cape Breton to Vancouver.

The opening address was given by National President, Jeff Rose. Other keynote speakers were Grace Hartman, past President of CUPE; Margaret Mitchell, MP; Shelagh Day, Director of Saskatchewan Human Rights Committee; and Carol Robinson, Chairperson of CUPE Quebec Division Women's Committee.

The two topics chosen for workshops were equal pay for work of equal value and technological change.

It was stressed that as long as women earn 60 cents for each \$1 earned by men for full-time work, it was necessary to press for equal pay for work of equal value legislation. As a result of the present economic conditions, more and more men are taking jobs in the women's ghettos; and it is to the advantage of both men and women to have this legislation.

Unions could negotiate for equalization of the base rate for both men and women. Members in the Municipality of Vancouver have succeeded in obtaining this, after a 6-week strike.

Some of the problems discussed around technological change were stress, job loss, depersonalization and inadequate notice.

There will be a Second National Women's Conference in 1986.

Dorothy MacKinnon and Lynda Giffen, CUPE 79.

YOU KNOW YOU NEED A UNION



WHEN YOU FACE SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT WORK!

Unemployment Insurance update and changes as of January 1984

Insurable Earnings

The new rules are as follows: To be eligible you must make \$85 on any earnings payable for 15 hours of work. Earnings are insurable up to a weekly maximum of \$425. Maximum benefits payable are \$255 gross.

Maternity Benefits

For women whose claims started on or after January 1984 all that is required to receive benefits is 20 weeks of insurable earnings. You no longer require the "magic ten". (For claims starting prior to January 1, 1984, you needed an attachment to the labour force of ten weeks during the period between the 30th and 50th week preceding your expected week of confinement.) You may still collect benefits as early as eight weeks before the birth of the child, or end as late as 17 weeks after the birth. But, you now may claim in the first 25 weeks of your claim (previously you could only claim in the first 15 weeks). You still can only collect 15 weeks of benefits in total.

You now may collect regular benefits before and after the baby is born. To qualify you must prove you are ready, able and willing to work and must be actively seeking employment. You can be paid for every week of benefit you can prove you were looking for work.

Under no circumstances will benefits be paid for the week you give birth or the following week, unless you fight for it!

Adoption Benefits

In claims starting on or after January 1, 1984 you may now collect benefits during the adjustment period when you adopt a child. Either parent may claim the benefits, however, only one may claim the entire period — it cannot be split between two parents. You must have 20 weeks of insured earnings, and you collect for a period of 15 weeks, but, only after the placement of the adopted child in your home. The child must be legally adopted. This does not include a stepparent adoption. You must prove that it is necessary or encouraged by the adoption agency that one parent stay at home with the child.

Prepared by: Coral McIntee is a member of OPEIU 343 and worked with Unemployment Help Centre until government funding was withdrawn May 1, 1984.

CRITIC'S CORNER

'Cloud 9'

Outrageous humour brings serious message

By VALERIE HUNNIUS

Caryl Churchill's "Cloud 9" now in its second 10-week run at Toronto's Bayview Playhouse is an incisive dramatization of the world of sexual politics. For many, it cracks the thin veneer of sophistication which covers our Victorian roots but the reverberations are vital for those of us facing feminist alternatives.

Underlying the play's outrageous humour is a serious message; reclaiming our identity and validating our reality as women can be a sensuous, even erotic, experience!

With overstatement appropriate to farce, the first act portrays the white, male, supremacist system controlling, defining and objectifying all realities external to it.

The play opens in Africa, 1880 and culminates in the second act in London, a full century later, though the principal actors have aged by only 25 years. The dramatic liberties taken by the playwright in distorting the dimensions of time, race and sexual identity create a magic lantern which permits the audience to suspend belief and engage in the critical motion of the colonization of female culture.

The production is faithful to this intent in form as well as substance. If male superiority is not innate, then it must be learned through role playing, as indeed must female inferiority.

The inclusion of racial oppression as a stark parallel is deliberate and effective. Joshua, the Black African houseboy played by a white actor, proclaims "though my skin is black, my soul is white" and the audience turns a page, enters a space where the fine line between reality and illusion has been craftily obliterated. The technique is a truly revolutionary one for it casts aside the presumption that any one system of knowledge can describe oppression or confine identity.

While this is a feminist play which repudiates oppression, it is not anti-male. In it, white male supremacism, as a culture victimizes men more successfully than it does women.

As the patriarchal lead of the first act, Clive is "the white man's burden". Ultimately, he is responsible for all moral order and must suppress the "dark mysterious continent" that the needs of women represent. By definition, Clive's very existence depends upon the exclusion of any other reality.

In the second act, this colonized continent is explored and Clive is reduced to a reference. The tone of humour is no longer farcical, but tinged with grief. On stage appear the casualties of sexual oppression struggling within their different sexual identities for liberation.

The strongest of these is women. The strength of the bond between Victoria and the lesbian, Lin, is not derived from the search for domination which characterizes the tension between homosexuals, Edward and Gerry.

As they discover joy in each other's differences, the notion of domination achieves theatrical absurdity for which the only appropriate response is redeeming laughter.

The play's climax arrives when Clive's estranged wife, Betty, poignantly confronts her own identity as a person, independent of him and her mother, refusing the full bloom of her self-love and self-acceptance.

On May 31, Organized Working Women invites friends and supporters to a benefit performance of "Top Girls", another highly acclaimed play by Caryl Churchill. Those of us who experienced her brilliant feminist wit in "Cloud 9" are awaiting this performance with eager anticipation.

Valerie Hunnius is a member of Office and Professional Employees International Union, Local 343.



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BY CARYL CHURCHILL
DIRECTED BY BILL GLASSCO

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Telephone 364-2161**

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

Commentary

Viva Nicaragua!

By FERN VALIN

At 6:30 a.m. February 8, 1984, 35 bleary-eyed women and men gathered at the airport in Toronto. We were about to depart for what would prove to be a unique and moving experience as the first Canadian work brigade in free Nicaragua, our small part in a large international brigade movement showing solidarity with the Nicaraguan Revolution.

The "brigadistas" came from diverse backgrounds and political experiences. We were construction workers, students, teachers, solidarity activists, journalists, artists, with the common goal of experiencing life in Nicaragua first-hand and learning about the reality of a poor, revolutionary society.

Once in Nicaragua we joined a group of British Columbians to form the Hugo Paiz Brigade. As we travelled from Managua to the Hugo Paiz State Farm to begin work as cotton pickers, our sense of uncertainty was only overshadowed by our excitement.

The state farm from which we took our name, is itself named in honour of a student, killed during the final days of the insurrection. His father lived and worked on the farm. Prior to liberation in 1979, this farm, owned by a paternalistic American, John Spencer, had few hygienic facilities and no electricity. It did have a private security force to keep the campesinos "safe".

One hundred families live permanently at Hugo Paiz and their lives are shaped by traditional roles, the women working in the home with responsibility for the children while the men (joined by the children when they are not in school) work in the fields. All the farm workers are members of the agricultural workers union, the ATC.

The roles of women and men on the farm are slowly beginning to change. Some women are now receiving technical training in agriculture so that they can take a more active role in running the farm. In addition, since the revolution a support structure is being built to ease some of the burden the women have to shoulder. A nursery and day care centre are operating. There is a basic health clinic staffed by a nurse with periodic visits by medical students as part of their training. The children are taught in a one-room school house.

Since 1979 there have also been additions like new latrines which may seem mundane but have had a dramatic impact on the quality of life for residents of Hugo Paiz. There is now electricity in all the houses and there are many new buildings and some new showers.

In addition to our work in the fields, brigade members worked on two other projects, one was moving the health clinic to a newer building with plumbing, renovating it and stocking it with medical supplies brought from Canada. The other was digging four dry wells to help alleviate problems of sanitation and disease caused by pooling of water underneath the taps.

The experience of living and working alongside Nicaraguan workers and peasants meant something different to each of us. I felt very lucky to observe the revolution in progress, a process which is sometimes uneven and necessarily slow.

Young people participate at all levels of this changing society and contribute a tremendous amount of energy and creativity to it. The vitality of the society is evident and the Nicaraguans are determined to defend the gains they have struggled to achieve.

Lastly, I came to understand the importance of international solidarity, as I worked with many hundred of internationalists, along with the Nicaraguans.

Nicaragua is a poor country whose limited resources are being strained by the need to defend its borders. The Nicaraguans will defend their right to determine their own way of life — we in Canada, the United States and Europe must help them defend that right.

Today the strongest threat to Nicaragua is an American-led attack. We must do our part to ensure the achievements of Nicaragua are well understood. We must counter the propaganda coming from American based media.

We can do this by building links between our organizations, women's groups, trade unions, church and community groups and the solidarity movement. In this way we can work together to build a better more equitable society in Canada while defending that same kind of society in Nicaragua.

Fern Valin is a member of the Latin American Working Group.

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