



# UNION WOMAN

PUBLISHED BY ORGANIZED WORKING WOMEN

1975-1985  
Decade  
for  
Women's  
Equality

VOLUME EIGHT, NUMBER ONE

JANUARY-MARCH 1985

## BOYCOTT EATON'S

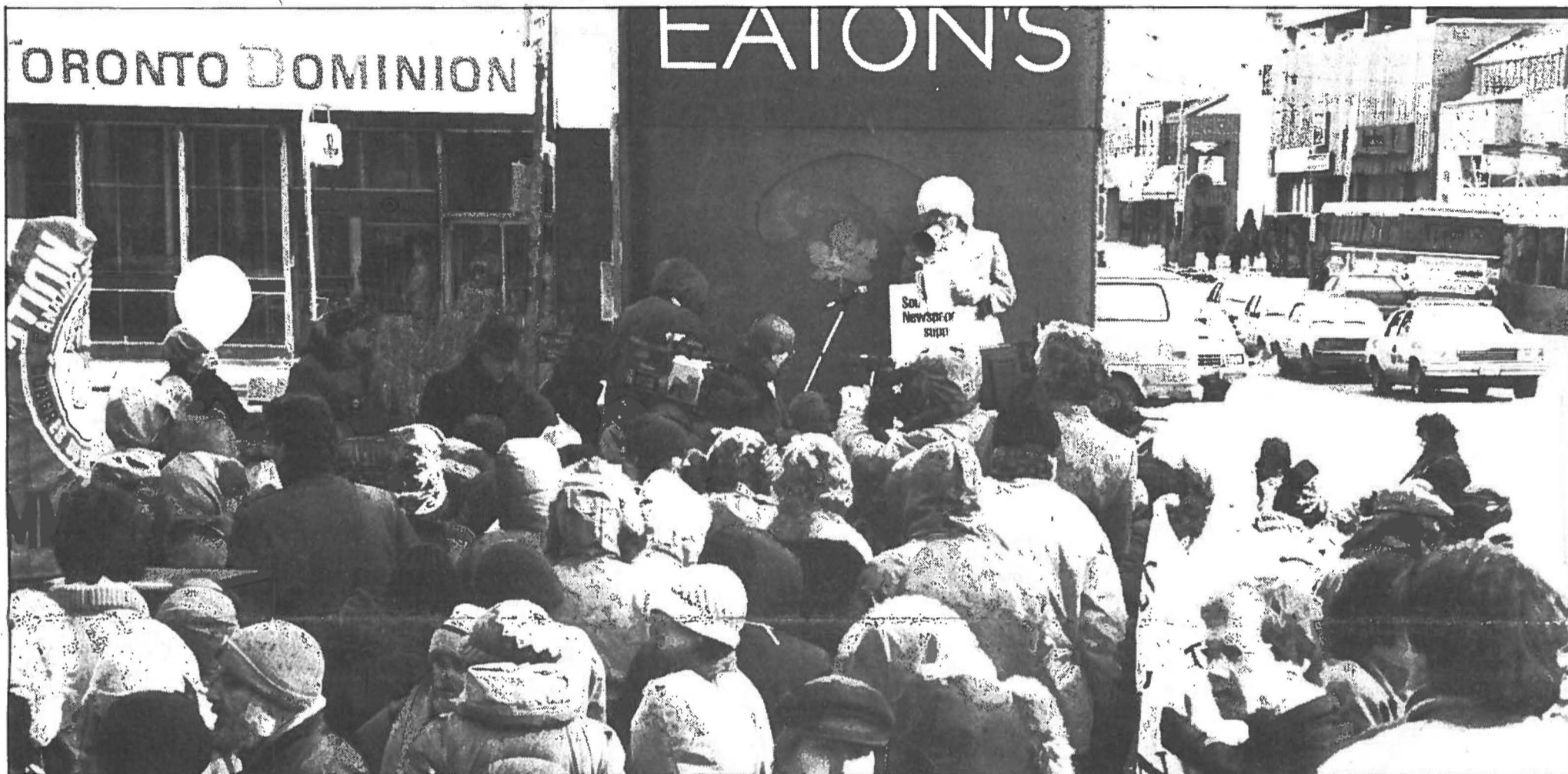


Photo — M. Phillips

OWW president Sue Craig greets supporters outside Eaton's Yonge-Eglinton store. Initiated by the Women's Strike Support Committee, a coalition of women's

groups and trade unions, the action was the largest event held to date for the strikers. More photos on page 3.

By **HOLLY KIRKCONNELL**

"Uncrate the contract! Boycott Eaton's": Modifying the slogan of Eaton's annual winter ad campaign, a thousand strike supporters marched, danced, sang and chanted in bitterly cold weather outside the Yonge-Eglinton Centre on Saturday, February 2. Towards the end of the rally, hundreds of protesters spontaneously entered the mall and gathered outside of Eaton's, at which point police advised management to close the store. The store remained closed for half an hour.

This demonstration and others

across the province (Sudbury, Ottawa, St. Catharines, London, Thunder Bay) and the country were initiated by the Women's Strike Support Coalition. The idea for the coalition and demonstrations began at the OWW weekend educational held in January at the Guild Inn in Scarborough (see story in this issue). Participants there felt that this strike of mainly women workers, in the largely organized and poorly paid retail sector, was being missed. For the boycott to begin to be effective, an appeal to women as workers and women as consumers had to be made.

A committee of women from OWW, different unions, labour council and women's organizations began meeting weekly to organize what was the largest and most effective support rally since the 1,500 members of Retail Wholesale and Department Store Union went on strike for their first contract with Eaton's on November 30, 1984. The strikers, 80 percent of whom are women and two thirds of whom are part-time workers, are fighting for basic rights and dignity in the workplace.

Sue Craig, President of OWW chaired the speakers: Carole Cur-

rie, RWDSU organizer; Susan Ardoino, Eaton's striker; Chaviva Hosek, President of the three million member National Action Committee on the Status of Women; and Lynne Gordon, consumer advocate. Greetings were brought by Cliff Pilkey for the Ontario Federation of Labour, Don Collins for RWDSU, Bob Rae and Marion Bryden for the Ontario NDP, and Ken Signoretti for the Labour Council of Metro Toronto.

All speakers urged Canadians to support the strikers and to participate in the boycott of Eaton's.

In a symbolic gesture, a giant Eaton's credit card was cut in two.

The struck stores are at: Shopper's World, Yonge-Eglinton Centre and Scarborough Town Centre in Toronto; also in Bramalea, St. Catharines and London.

Make a point of dropping by any of these locations anytime to walk with our sisters. The fight on the Eaton's picket line is a fight for all Canadian women.

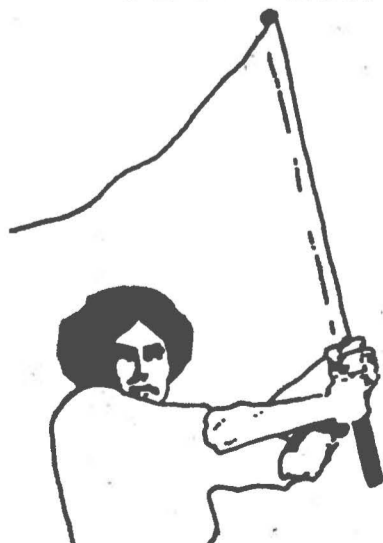
Holly Kirkconnell is President of OPSEU Local 512.

## 75th anniversary of International Women's Day

Toronto women will celebrate International Women's Day (IWD) with a full week of activities, March 2-9. The theme for the week is "Still Ain't Satisfied! Organize for Change!" The March 8 Coalition, which is co-ordinating the week's activities, sees IWD as an opportunity for women to find out how to become involved in ongoing activity in the many fields in which women are organizing.

The problems of working women are a central focus of IWD '85. The week's activities will begin with a large picket-line at Eaton's, and Eaton's strikers have been invited to lead the march and speak at the major rally on March 9.

The need for Affirmative Action legislation is addressed in the brochure which calls on women to demonstrate on March 9. "Affirmative Action" is defined as including: equal pay for work of equal value; free, universal, publicly-funded or employer-funded day-care; job security and re-training provisions related to technological change; legal protection from sexual harassment in the work-place.



Other themes of the week include "organizing for choice" (abortion rights) and "organizing for peace and international solidarity".

The March 8 Coalition and International Women's Day are endorsed by a number of labour organizations, including CUPE Local 1528, FASWOC, CUEW Local 7, the Confederation of Canadian Unions, the Union of Unemployed Workers, the Ontario Federation of Labour.

Volunteers are still needed to help with postering, leaflet distribution, and other organizational tasks. The Coalition meets on Wednesday evenings at 7:30 in the Metro Library (Bloor and Yonge). For further information, call Ryerson Women's Centre 598-9838. For posters, brochures, buttons, press releases, call Diane 591-1434, Cherie 922-5652, or Laurie 960-3647.

See IWD events listing page 3

## UPDATE

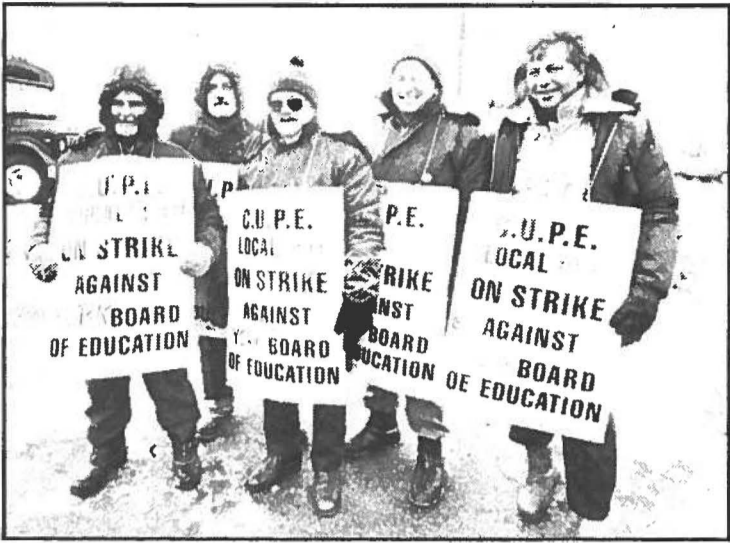


Photo — M. Phillips

Although only seven of the over 300 CUPE members who struck the York Board of Education in February were women, but closing up the wage gap between men and women was a major item in the strike. As one striker told reporters, "ten years ago I wouldn't even have thought of equal pay, now I realize it's important enough to strike for". The union settled for an across the board settlement, which although it did not win complete pay equality for the women cleaners, did narrow the wage gap.

### Rally for choice draws 7,000

Supporters of Dr. Henry Morgentaler rallied 7,000 strong outside Queen's Park Feb. 22 to demonstrate that a fanatical fringe does not have last word on women's right to choose. Protests urged the government to drop the appeal of a jury decision which acquitted Morgentaler and two of his associates on abortion-related charges last November. In December, Morgentaler and Dr. Robert Scott were rearrested when the clinic reopened. They will not be tried until the outcome of the appeal, which is to be heard April 29.

The rally which was organized in less than a week followed weeks of picketing outside the doctors' Harbord Street clinic.

The crowds were swelled when separate school students were bused in. Spokesperson for the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics, Judy Rebick, vowed that the clinic would "stay open no matter how many school children they bus down to Harbord Street". She said the clinic is seeing 14 patients a day, with many coming in from outside the city.

Organizers later expressed anger with the Toronto media who in many cases drastically underestimated the numbers who showed up in support of women's freedom to choose, in order to compare unfavorably with the anti-choice crowds outside the clinic. Choice-activist Norma Scarborough queried whether the Catholic church hierarchy which was set on imposing its narrow religious views on society was also applying pressure to editorial boards.

### Harassment ruling appealed

Bonnie Robichaud, the feisty cleaner who has been engaged in a five year battle to win justice as a victim of sexual harassment has lost a round in the courts. The North Bay woman will appeal a ruling handed down Feb. 18 by a Supreme Court tribunal which absolved her employer of liability for sexual harassment.

In a 2-1 decision handed down by Chief Justice Thurlow, foreman Dennis Brennan was found guilty of harassment, but Thurlow said he could find no law or precedent which held an employer responsible for an employee's actions. Further, he said that Brennan's superiors had no knowledge of his actions. For the Department of Defence to be held responsible, Thurlow claimed, the defence minister would have to be personally aware and condone an incident of harassment.

In his dissenting submission, former justice minister Mark MacGuigan cites a confidential memo by the base commander which stated Robichaud was to be made an example of and a separate file kept on her. He also noted that the base management had launched no investigation into Robichaud's complaints of harassment.

Sister Robichaud said she was prompted to launch the appeal after receiving many calls from union locals and women's groups who have pledged continued support for her struggle.

The court ruling overturned a decision reached two years ago by a human rights tribunal which found both Brennan and the Department of Defence liable for damages on the grounds it had created a poisoned work environment. It was the first time the question had ever been tested and would have set a favorable precedent for other sexual harassment victims.

## You can make history!

If you have any historical data (stories, documents, photos, buttons, posters) on women's labour struggles in the past decade, please contact the OWW office. These will form part of a display at the May 11 Decade Celebration, and will be returned after the event.

Also, any union women who are interested in being part of a theatre production on the same theme for this event, call Jill Jones at 536-0478 or the OWW office.

# Ottawa forms OWW chapter

By NANCY PORTER

"We're Getting Organized" was the theme of the Feb. 12 meeting of union women in Ottawa to found a chapter of OWW. Twenty-seven women from eight unions elected officers, adopted by-laws and decided on a plan of action.

Plans to organize the Ottawa Chapter began in March, 1984, when participants at an International Women's Week skills-building conference expressed an interest in a local union women's organization. In September conference organizers invited union women to a "Yes We Can" meeting to talk about what we would want from such an organization. As OWW had almost ten years' experience pursuing the goals and activities that interested us, we

invited OWW speakers to a "Let's Get Organized" meeting Dec. 3. It was decided to form an OWW chapter, to support the Eaton's workers' strike and boycott and to hold International Women's Week skills-building workshops on March 9. Since December we joined and organized solidarity rallies at Ottawa Eaton's stores and organized a conference called "Taking Control" to help women unionists develop public speaking, grievance and workshop presentation, newsletter production and stress management skills.

Elected officers of the Ottawa Chapter are: President — Nancy Porter (PSAC), Vice-President — Deborah Bourque (CUPW), Treasurer — Linda McLaren

(PSAC), Secretary — Jackie Desrochers (CULE), Executive Council Board Members — Pamela Fitzgerald (CUPE), Ruth Scher (CUPE), Jane Stinson (ATSU), Claire Guilbeault (OPEIU), Paige Cousineau (PSAC), Sandy Howell (ATSU), Catherine Craig-Bullen (PSAC) and Claudine Pyke (PSAC).

We plan to keep busy from February to June organizing an OWW membership drive, skills-building workshops, a benefit for women strikers and Ottawa representation at the OWW annual meeting in Toronto.

We look forward to writing a regular Ottawa section in *Union Woman*.

Nancy Porter is President of the Ottawa Chapter of OWW.

# OWW sparks support action

By SUE CRAIG

Although the residential seminar convened by Organized Working Women the weekend of Jan. 3 to Jan. 6 was billed as action-oriented, no one expected the immediate and dramatic results that followed.

The headline-grabbing demonstration Feb. 2 in support of striking Eaton's workers was, however, only the most palpable result of the conference.

Fifty-seven women registered for the conference that snowy weekend at the Guild Inn on the Scarborough Bluffs. The ideal number for an intimate atmosphere in which participants were able to get to know each other. Most participants reported the opportunity to meet people as one of the most worthwhile aspects of the conference.

Arriving Friday night, participants faced a jammed agenda and a list of questions to consider on the conference's theme of the relationship between equal pay for work of equal value and affirmative action as avenues toward the achievement of equality for women.

Within this context most of the participative workshops focused on areas of immediate concern — such as the Eaton's strike (two of the organizers, Donna Johanson and Geri Sheedy, were conference participants) and how to prevent, or cope with, burnout.

OWW executive member Cathi Carr remarked afterward that the conference was "experiential rather than substantive."

The acceptance of a male keynote speaker — economist Samuel Bowles — on the opening night signalled a new maturity in the women's movement. And the women tackled Bowles on the details of his theory of a democratic economy (an economy that could "afford" and indeed would require the equality of women) with a confidence I don't think we

would have shown a decade ago.

The conference actually showed some results before it began in winning the support and co-operation of the Ontario Federation of Labour Women's Committee and a number of unions.

A sense of a new solidarity grew throughout the weekend.

Saturday night was a celebration, with labour lawyer Kathleen O'Neill pointing in her speech to the continued willingness of women to fight in the face of growing right-wing sentiment.

An uproarious evening of song — and dance — with Arlene Mantle's delectably subversive music followed.

Although some participants were disappointed with the failure of the conference to advance the

theory of achieving women's equality, I think it attained most of its aims: I think it did begin the process of assessing what we've achieved in the Decade of Women and how far we have to go; it certainly did begin a new network of union women; it did give us an opportunity to let our hair down and frankly discuss the problems we face within our unions; it did serve to recharge a lot of batteries.

And the demo at Eaton's was nothing if not a practical demonstration of our determination to fight on together until equality is won.

Sue Craig is President of OWW and wishes to gratefully acknowledge on behalf of OWW the financial contribution of the Ontario Women's Directorate toward the conference.

## Financial appeal—

OWW has received donations from the following

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| Trish Blackstaffe, Ottawa                    | Ontario Public Service Employees Union:    |
| Lois Bedard, Toronto                         | Sean O'Flynn                               |
| Canadian Paperworkers Union, Local 305, Tor. | Ev Sammons                                 |
| Canadian Union of Postal Workers,            | Local 512                                  |
| Toronto Local                                | Kenneth Rogers, ECWU                       |
| St. Catharines Local                         | Joyce Rosenthal, Toronto                   |
| Canadian Union of Public Employees           | Donald Stockdale, LCSMT                    |
| National Office, Jeff Rose                   | Sunnybrook Hospital Employees Union (SEIU) |
| Local 5 Hamilton                             | Local 777 Toronto                          |
| Local 134 Toronto                            | United Auto Workers, Local 1915 Bramalea   |
| Local 167 Hamilton                           | United Electrical Workers:                 |
| Local 207 Sudbury                            | Central Office                             |
| Local 791 Kitchener                          | Local 504 Hamilton                         |
| Local 1287 St. Catharines                    | Local 520 Hamilton                         |
| Cathi Carr, Toronto                          | Local 555 Hamilton                         |
| Communications Workers of Canada;            | United Food & Commercial Workers:          |
| Local 42 Hamilton                            | Local 293 Peterborough                     |
| Local 44 Guelph                              | Local 1000-A Toronto                       |
| Local 50 Toronto                             | United Rubber Workers                      |
| Francine Cosgrove, Toronto                   | Local 232 Toronto                          |
| Energy & Chemical Workers:                   | Local 733 Brantford                        |
| Ontario Council                              | Local 818 Owen Sound                       |
| Local 29 London                              | United Steel Workers of America:           |
| Local 593 Oakville                           | Local 3767 Toronto                         |
| Local 774 Ingersoll                          | Local 3813 Toronto                         |
| Local 914 Sarnia                             | Local 4605 Cambridge                       |
| Grace Hartman, Toronto                       | Local 8747 Corbeil                         |
| Mary Hodder, Toronto                         | Brampton-Mississauga Labour Council        |
| Int'l. Assoc. of Machinists:                 | London & District Labour Council           |
| Local 235 Oshawa                             | Sudbury & District Labour Council          |
| Local 756 London                             | London & District Labour Council           |
| Letter Carriers' Union, Local 1, Toronto     | Metro Toronto Labour Council               |
| London & District Service Workers Union:     | University of Guelph Staff Union           |
| Local 220                                    | Upholsters International Union             |
| Peggy Nash, Toronto                          | Toronto Area Council, PSAC                 |
| Nurses Association, Wellesley Hospital       | Ontario Nurses Association, Local 34       |
| Office & Professional Employees Int'l.:      |  |
| Central Ontario Council                      |  |
| Local 225 Ottawa                             |  |
| Local 343 Toronto                            |  |
| Local 468 London                             |  |
| Maureen O'Halloran, Toronto                  |  |

Bro. Jeff Rose, National President of CUPE, is sending out a special appeal to all the CUPE locals. Perhaps your union might like to do this too!

## END CRUISE TESTING



END the Nuclear Threat - Peace is a human right.

PLEASE GET INVOLVED! We need volunteers to help with rallies, press, fund-raising, and office work. Help make your voice heard! Write a letter to your M.P. or M.L.A. or your local newspaper. Involvement in the nuclear arms race.

**DEMONSTRATE Saturday, April 27**

A project of the **AGAINST CRUISE TESTING COALITION**  
370 Queen Street East, Toronto, M5A 1T1, 362-0224

# IWD events

**Saturday, March 9**

**11 A.M. Rally** at Convocation Hall, University of Toronto.

**Noon March** (a feminist walking-tour) begins: Convocation Hall ends: Ryerson P.I.

**3-7 P.M. Women's Fair** at Jorgenson Hall, Ryerson Poly-technical Institute, includes workshops, information booths, performances, and more! Sponsored by Ryerson Women's Centre.

**8 P.M. Women's Dance** at St. Lawrence Market Hall. Organized by Lesbian Phone Line.

**Saturday, March 2**

**Eaton's Picket** at Yonge-Eglinton Eaton's Store. Noon. Organized by The March 8th Coalition and the Women's Strike Support Coalition in cooperation with RWDSU.

**Monday, March 4:**

**The Reproductive Rights Movement and the Struggle for Abortion Clinics**, a public forum at Trinity-St. Paul's Centre, 427 Bloor St. W., 7:30 P.M. Donation: \$3. Sponsored by Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics. Childcare provided.

**Tuesday, March 5:**

**Every Woman's Voice: A Cultural Evening** at Trinity-St. Paul's Centre, 427 Bloor St. W. Sponsored by Women Working with Immigrant Women. Endorsed by the Coalition of Visible Minority Women. FASWOC workers will sing songs from the picketline.

**Wednesday, March:**

**7:30 P.M. Video By Feminists** at A Space Gallery, 204 Spadina Ave. Donation: \$4 non-members; \$2 members. Organized by A Space Gallery and Community Arts. 8 P.M.

**Thursday, March 7:**

**5-Minute Feminist Cabaret** Organized by Women's Cultural Building, 1079 Queen St. W. in The Salon, 8 P.M. Donation: \$8 employed, \$5 unemployed. Proceeds to Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics.

**Friday, March 8**

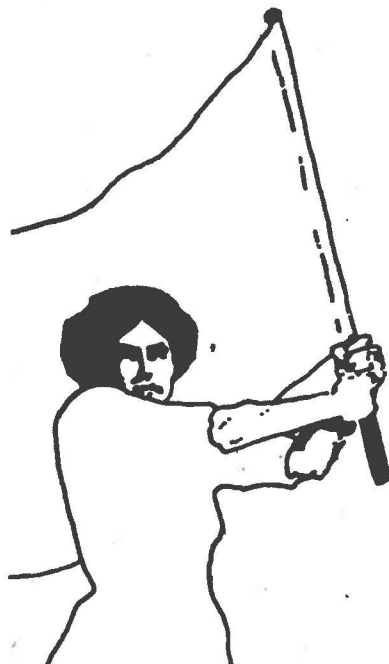
**Angela Davis Speaks** at Convocation Hall, University of Toronto, 7:30 P.M. Donation: \$3. Organized by Committee for March 8. Childcare provided.

**Sunday, March 10:**

**How to Love this Planet**, a day-long conference for peace. 9:30 A.M.-3:30 P.M. at Castlefrank High School. Sponsored by the Survival Committee of the NAC. Call: 699-7619 to arrange childcare.

Come out to as many events as you can. **Be sure to join us on March 9 and bring your friends!**

*Cherie MacDonald, OPSEU member; member, Co-ordinating Committee of March 8 Coalition.*



## Eaton's shutdown



Photos — M. Phillips

Eaton's strike supporters flood into the Yonge-Eglinton mall Feb. 2, to take the Boycott Eaton's message right to the company's door. Eaton's has pressured mall managers to prohibit strikers from picketing in front of the retail giant. The action called by the Women's Strike Support Committee was the first time a store was actually forced to close its doors in response to the strike.



Holding the line: strikers at the Scarborough Town Centre demonstrate their opinions of scabs crossing their picket line.

## Ida Dale, 50, has a few words about FAIRNESS

"I've worked at Eaton's for 17 years. My husband, Dennis, has been there for 31. We're both on strike now for lots of reasons. For one thing, we need to know we'll have decent pensions when we retire.

We know Eaton's employees don't. When my friend, Vera Sumka, retired after 26 years at Eaton's, her pension was \$115 a month. Clara Boone's was \$70 after 16 years. Thousands of people have the same problem. And young people don't want that to look forward to.

You can help cut into Eaton's unfair control over people's lives. We're striking for fairness. Please don't buy from Eaton's."



If you want to show your support for fairness for Ida, Dennis, Vera and the young employees who could be in their position, somebody, please shop elsewhere. If you have an account card, cut it up and send it with this coupon to the Ontario Federation of Labour, c/o Committee for Fairness at Eaton's, Suite 202, 15 Gervais Drive, Don Mills, Ont. M3C 1Y8. That way, you'll receive a letter of appreciation and a special button.

To explain why you won't shop at Eaton's until the company helps settle the strike with a fair agreement, write to Fred Eaton, President, T. Eaton Co. of Canada Ltd., 19th Floor, Eaton Tower, 1 Dundas St. W., Toronto, Ontario, M5B 1C8.

Even if there's no Eaton's near you, you can cut down a few lines of support for the employees.

### Fairness for Eaton's employees

Encouraging the Eaton's Associates and other supporters of people like Ida and Dennis Dale.

Please send me a button saying "I've cut into Eaton's."

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

Produced by the Ontario Federation of Labour Committee for Fairness at Eaton's in conjunction with the Canadian Labour Congress. For more information, contact your local labour council or the OFL at 426-441-2711.



## EDITORIAL

# Law needed for first contract

The fact that the strike by 1500 members of Retail, Wholesale, Department Store Union, in six certified bargaining units, against the T. Eaton Co. Ltd. is now entering its fourth month is a clear signal that it is time to introduce in Ontario legislation to endorse the third party settlement of first collective agreements. Such legislation has been in force in B.C. since 1974, in Quebec since 1977, in Manitoba since 1982 and in the federal jurisdiction since 1978. Arbitration of first collective agreements has been established as effective in preventing employer obstruction of the right of employees to form unions.

The remedies provided by the Ontario Labour Relations Act — permitting the Board authority to issue cease and desist orders, to order the parties to negotiate, to prosecute the parties for failure to comply, and even to issue compensatory awards to unions to cover excessive representational costs which are a direct result of persistent bad faith bargaining by employers — are simply not adequate to protect the right of free collective bargaining. The stated intent of all labour legislation is to protect the right to freely negotiate despite differences in the economic power of the parties. Now that the majority of certifications are occurring in the white collar field, particularly involving the representation of women, unions are fighting all over again for the basic principle of union recognition.

The amendment of the Ontario Labour Relations Act to provide for compulsory dues check-off (the Rand formula) as a minimum union security provision of all agreements was an important gain for labour, but is obviously ineffective if no first contract is achieved. Only 75 per cent of all certification applications are successful at the Labour Board, and of these, only 75 per cent result in negotiated first contracts, providing a success rate of just over 60 per cent for those who desire union representation. The failures often result in union decertification.

The quality of the first agreement, however it is arrived at, is of key importance to the union's authenticity. Where labour boards arbitrate first contracts, it is important, in addition to establishing basic union recognition, union security and employee protection provisions, that they award a fair monetary settlement as a deterrent to employers using unfair labour practices to prevent the development of a genuine collective bargaining relationship.

Another factor of key significance to the protection of employees' rights is the ability to negotiate equal protection and benefits for part-time workers. Particularly in times of economic instability, employers argue for the right to retain work force "flexibility" to protect the viability of the enterprise. They also argue that many employees, particularly women, prefer part-time employment in order to fulfil family responsibilities. The recent study of "Part-Time Work in Canada" by Joan Wallace, commissioned by Labour Canada, indicates that 72 per cent of the part-time labour force in Canada are women, and conservatively estimates that part-time work is expected to increase by the end of the century to between 15 and 19 per cent of the labour force. Particularly in the retail and service industries, employers are using systematic separation of part-time from full-time workers to protect their profit margins by paying part-time workers lower wage rates and avoiding payment of benefits and pension protection for them, while avoiding the payment of premium overtime rates for full-time workers. Both Eaton's and Simpson's are flagrant users of this practice.

The Ontario Labour Relations Board has consistently rejected the notion that applications for certification of full-time and part-time workers for the same employer should be recognized as one bargain unit, on the grounds of their different "attachment" to the work force. In an era in which employers are willfully changing the composition of the work force to serve their own special interests, it is necessary for the Board to recognize that workers have a right to parity in their negotiations and that this can be achieved only when this artificial distinction is relegated to the waste-basket of history. Many part-time workers would prefer full-time employment if it was accessible, and in any event, it is repugnant to labour to distinguish differences in rates of compensation based on hours of work.

Arbitration of first collective agreements has never been introduced anywhere in Canada by the Progressive Conservative Party. It is time the Tories recognized their responsibility to uphold the principles of labour legislation by enforcing them. If Frank Miller is interested in establishing credibility with ordinary working people in advance of the coming Ontario election — if he is prepared to ensure the corporate responsibility of large economic players like Eaton's — let him show his colours by introducing in the Ontario Legislature amendments to the Act to allow for the settlement of first contract disputes and the rights of parity between full-time and part-time workers.

## 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.

# Health and safety low Tory priority

By STAN GRAY

Women in the workplace today are exposed to many substances that can damage their potential children. The Ontario government's remarkable disinterest in protecting them there reflects a class-biased double standard.

Nineteen-year-old Saskia Post worked for eight days at English Plastics in Brampton. The air was thick with fumes given off by the various machines. Later, her son Timothy was born blind, with other physical and mental deformities.

Our Hamilton Workers' Occupational Health and Safety Centre researched the case and showed that these defects were caused by the toxic chemicals at the plants, such as styrene and polyvinyl chloride. We helped Saskia launch a suit on behalf of the child for \$7 million damages against the employer and the suppliers.

The Ontario Ministry of Labor repeatedly inspected that factory but never tested for the harmful emissions, never mind putting any control orders on them. When the case became public, it invented elaborate apologies for the company.

This is the same government that spends enormous energies and resources prosecuting abortion clinics. But it's doing nothing to protect wanted fetuses from damages caused by corporations in the workplace. It has moved to restrict women's freedom to control their own bodies . . . but not to restrict employers' freedom to control their factories and thereby pollute women employees and their potential children.

Styrene is a chemical that has been linked to birth defects. In 1984 the Ontario government removed styrene from a list of "designated substances" to be specially regulated. Labour Minister Russell Ramsay openly stated this was because the plastics industry had lobbied for exclusion. Compliance with the safe standard, they said, would be costly for them.

Obviously the financial interests of plastics manufacturers take precedence over the rights of women and their children to be protected by health and safety laws.

Our Hamilton centre has seen many other cases of workplace reproductive damage. One male construction worker we are treating had become sterile from over-exposure to lead at a refinery site.

We were consulted by Sharon Clarke, union rep for the workers at the reservations office of Canadian Pacific Airlines in Mississauga (Brotherhood of Railway and Airline Clerks). The company was to use an oil-based paint in their poorly ventilated area. Several pregnant women had letters from their doctors warning that this would be dangerous.

We researched the paint and found that it had some aromatic hydrocarbons. These have the capacity to cross the placenta and cause embryo damage. The paint would also be harmful to the other

workers, and, in fact, many employees ended up going home sick.

CP Air ignored this and pressed on with the job. They called in a federal government inspector who quickly pronounced the area safe on the company's say-so. He came back later when the job was almost over and tested with unreliable equipment, using unprofessional methods and for an ingredient he wasn't sure was even in the paint!

All seven of the pregnant women stayed away from work and lost money or benefits as a result. This is clearly discriminatory. The women all had to pay a price for protecting their future children's health. These individual women rather than society had to bear the cost of their child-bearing capacity. And the government officers did nothing to require the employer to ensure safe working conditions.

There are other situations that cry out for protection.

Our centre helped a woman who quit her job in a pesticides plant. She was exposed there to a number of reproductive toxins such as captan and diazinon. The boss, however, refused to give her alternative work, in a safer environment. She had to resign her position, lose her seniority and benefits because of her desire to conceive a healthy child.

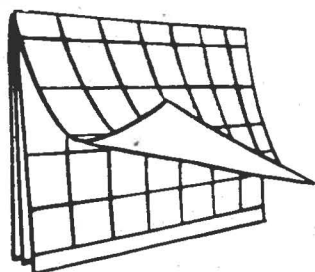
The law in Canada supposedly guarantees women a right to a job and have children at the same time. But this right can be a reality only if the concrete protections are there to ensure it.

In Quebec, women have the right to transfer to a safe workplace during pregnancy, or, failing that, to be off on compensation. We need this in Ontario, as well as some form of "conception leave", to cover situations like that of the pesticides worker.

Our centre has looked at many other cases. There are women who may have miscarried as a result of oxygen deprivation during an asthma attack, the asthma being caused by reaction to workplace chemicals such as isocyanates. There are men whose children may be deformed as a result of factory solvents which mutated their sperm cells.

Men and women need protection from reproductive damage in the workplace — protection from toxic exposures, protection against loss of income and benefits. The finger ought to be pointed at the corporations responsible for deformities, miscarriages, sterilities and infertilities. This is an issue common to the women's movement and to labour's health and safety movement. Focusing on it would provide a class perspective to the current debates around reproductive choice and related topics.

Stan Gray is co-ordinator of the Hamilton Workers Occupational Health and Safety Centre funded and directed by Local 1005, United Steel Workers of America.



## CLEAR YOUR CALENDAR

### Catch: Upcoming Events

<b>March 2</b> 12:00 noon	<b>Solidarity picket at Yonge-Eglinton Centre</b> to kick off International Women's Week
<b>March 9</b> 11:00 a.m.	<b>International Women's Day Rally and March</b> (including march past Eaton's Centre)
<b>March 16</b> 10:00-1:00	<b>Rally at Scarborough Town Centre</b>
<b>EVERY SATURDAY</b> 12:00-4:00	<b>Solidarity pickets at Eaton's Centre and Yonge-Eglinton Centre</b>

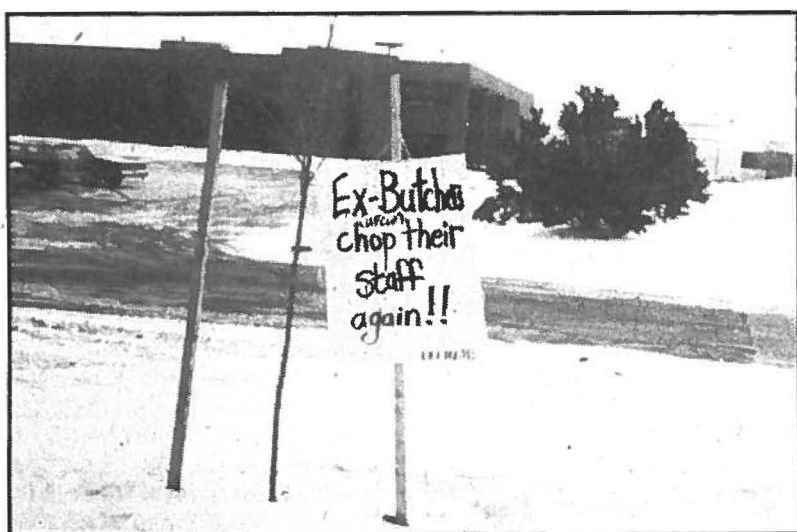
Show your support — lawn signs, buttons, bumper stickers are available from RWDSU and the Labour Council of Metro Toronto.

# Foodworkers' union struck

What a cheerful way to start off a new year as a group of six female members of Office Professional Employees International Union Local 343 went on strike against their employers at United Food and Commercial Workers Ontario Retail Council office at 61 International Boulevard, Rexdale, Ontario.

On January 4, these six employees started what is the longest strike in the history against UFCW. We turned down an offer that would cause a two-tier wage and hours of work system. This meant that two employees would do the same job with the same qualifications and the newer employee would have to work more hours at a lesser rate of pay even at top rate. New employees hired after September 19, 1984 would also be cut short in benefits and the flexibility of hours enjoyed by the present employees for the past ten years.

At 7:00 a.m. Jan 4, our battle began. Other sisters of OPEIU Local 343 from other union offices at 61 International Blvd. joined us with enthusiasm, only to have been cut short in their support by threats on their jobs. By 5:00 p.m. we were faced with a cease and desist order filed with the OLRB by the UFCW Building Corp. because it was felt that we



Strikers leave their message in the snow

were discouraging other tenants and their employees from attending their work.

The order for the cease and desist was removed for Jan. 4 only to have been brought about again on Jan. 8. A hearing at the Board was heard on January 11. We decided at the hearing, to picket our employer's door inside the UFCW Building. This decision allowed us to seek out management's offices held at different locations.

An attempt was made to picket the home of the President of the Ontario Retail Council, Bill Han-

ley, in Windsor. The Windsor Star Newspaper was notified and fellow OPEIU members were to join us. Unfortunately these members never showed up nor did a story materialize. The lack of support was enraging.

Members of UFCW were informed of the strike by OPEIU but to no avail. Management had poisoned their minds with the proposed new wages at a 32 hour work week. The highlights of management's proposals enforced their own support. UFCW members were outraged that the office staff was on strike. Union principles were not their cup of tea. UFCW-ORC has over 21,000 members across Ontario.

A second mediation meeting held on Jan. 18, brought about the same offer as previously presented to OPEIU, as well as the option to extend the expired two-year contract with no alterations for another year. Both offers were rejected and the strike continued another four weeks. Some of us sought jobs to help each other financially.

A third mediation meeting was held on Feb. 15, at the Labour Board. A tentative settlement was reached — an extension of the expired collective agreement. Results of the ratification meeting were 80% in favor but upon notifying management of the result, management decided that we couldn't start until it was ready for us — a week, so that it could dismantle the offices set up. This obviously affected our decision to continue strike action.

A Striker

Editor's Note:  
Four of the six strikers are single parents.

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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 \$20.00 per year.

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Toronto, Ontario M5A 3K9  
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If you are not eligible to join OWW, you are invited to subscribe to UNION WOMAN at \$10.00 per year.