

June 1998

## CONFERENCE ON WORKPLACE SEXUAL HARASSMENT TO BE HELD IN NOVEMBER

A coalition battling the issue of workplace harassment will be holding a conference in London, Ontario on November 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>. The conference is being sponsored by the London Coalition to End Workplace Harassment.

"Workplace harassment is a day to day reality for many women. This conference is another building block in eliminating harassment," said OFL Secretary-Treasurer, Ethel LaValley.

The forum will bring together top experts to share expertise and ideas. It will be an opportunity to rethink the problem and explore non-confrontational and creative approaches to preventing and resolving complaints. Time will be spent developing inter-sectoral strategies for sharing information and resources, and strategic thinking about how best to address workplace sexual harassment.

The conference was endorsed by the OFL Executive Board at their June meeting.

Registration is \$100. For more information or to register call Barbara MacQuarrie at: (519) 439-0844.

## CONFERENCE ON WOMEN'S HEALTH: OCCUPATION, CANCER & REPRODUCTION

At the International Conference on *Women's Health: Occupation, Cancer & Reproduction* held in Reykjavik, Iceland in May, scientists, researchers and policy specialists gathered to share information about the effects of work on reproductive health and the development of cancer among women. Some of the sponsors of the conference included the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (USA), European Commission, National Cancer Institute (USA) and the International Commission on Occupational Health. Neither the Canadian Federal government nor any provincial governments chose to participate.

The researchers reported that exposures to organic solvents might be harmful to reproductive health including increased rates of spontaneous abortions and delayed conception.

Other researchers reported higher rates of pre-term births among women required to work long hours and required to stand for 6 or more hours each day.

Breast cancer was a major focus of the research. The findings about the role of electro magnetic fields are unclear. Much of the research also examined the cancer rates among health care workers. Some of the studies found high rates of leukemia and breast cancer. Swedish researchers reported that their data, together with animal research, indicated that "organic solvents are a risk factor for cancer of the cervix uteri."

It is expected that all the papers will eventually be published.

## STRIKE APPEAL

Employees of a Trenton company are asking consumers not to buy men's and women's socks with the labels J.B. Fields or Vagden Mills, manufactured by their employer, J.B. Fields Inc.

The production workers, all of them women, have been asked to accept further pay cuts of 20 per cent. Incentive rates have already been cut by up to 38 per cent. In contrast, the nine men at the plant, who are considered 'skilled' workers, have lost less than 4 per cent of their pay.

The company's 'final offer' to the workers would gut the collective agreement's seniority, union representation and job security provisions, says the union. J.B. Fields wants the right to unilaterally set arbitrary production quotas and fire employees who fail to meet them, says UNITE.

Sister Ethel LaValley, OFL Secretary-Treasurer has visited the picket line to offer support and solidarity to the UNITE sisters. At a recent rally Sister LaValley urged union locals and women's groups to throw their full support into winning this strike. "Walking the line, letters of support and financial donations can, and will, win victory for our sisters," said Sister LaValley.

Financial support: UNITE, Local 1764, 3 - 63 North Murray St., Trenton, Ont. K8V 2E5.

Other support: Write or call the company and tell them to treat their workers fairly: Kris Murthy, President, J.B. Fields Inc., 390 Sydney Street, Trenton, Ontario K8V 5R7. Fax: (613) 394-0278 or phone 1-800-233-9842.





## WHO'S CARING FOR THE KIDS?

Canadian children will only receive high quality child care when child care workers get improvements in wages and working conditions, and measures to improve education and training. These are among the major findings of a groundbreaking human resource study of the Canadian child care workforce recently released in Ottawa.

*Our Child Care Workforce: From Recognition to Remuneration* is the product of two years of research conducted by representatives of a wide range of child care providers and funded by Human Resources Development Canada. The study combines original research, reviews of existing studies and extensive interviews with caregivers, educators, employers, government and sector officials.

The child care sector is calling for a national commitment to quality child care and the caregivers who are critical to its delivery. The report's major recommendations urge governments to:

- Provide sufficient funding for child care and related early childhood services;
- Set minimum training and education requirements for all caregivers working in regulated settings and invest in accredited public and non-profit training and education institutions to increase the skills and education of caregivers.

The report also calls on post secondary and other training institutions to review and revamp education programs to ensure caregivers acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to reflect our changing social environment.

A national public opinion survey conducted by Environics Research and released along with the study, revealed Canadians overwhelmingly agree with its recommendations. Canadians want to see child care providers well-trained, adequately paid and doing a good job for children, and they want action in the form of increased government funding and a coherent plan to improve child care.

- Eighty-one percent agree that caregivers are the single most important factor that determines the quality of child care;
- Eighty-nine percent agree that good wages, benefits and working conditions for caregivers are necessary to ensure that child care is high quality;
- Ninety-three percent agree that training in child development and care should be required for all caregivers working in licensed settings;

- Seventy-eight percent agree that governments should spend more than they do now on child care to ensure high quality care at fees that average families can afford;
- Eighty-one percent agree that while parents and caregivers have important roles to play, governments should develop a plan to improve child care.

Even though the child care workforce is the single most important ingredient determining the healthy development of children in child care, its important role is not reflected in public policy or funding.

"When it comes to quality care, the caregiver makes all the difference. But caregivers are among the lowest paid in Canada. Many don't have any pensions, are not covered by health and safety legislation and are not protected by provincial employment standards laws," Ms. Chud said.

The Canadian child care workforce suffers from low wages, high turnover rates and inconsistent training and education requirements – factors which affect quality.

- In-home caregivers earn just over \$12,000 annually; caregivers in child care centres earn an average of less than \$19,000 annually;
- Most caregivers are not protected by provincial or territorial employment standards laws;
- Child care regulations in every province and territory "covering maximum child to staff ratios, minimum caregiver education requirements, and other factors" fall short of ensuring top quality care.

The child care sector has grown by leaps and bounds in the last 30 years and has now reached an impressive size. The study reveals, for example that:

- 1.4 million Canadian children attend some form of paid care today, a whopping 400% increase since 1967;
- More than 330,000 Canadians are employed caring, educating and preparing our children for the future.

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