

# FORUM

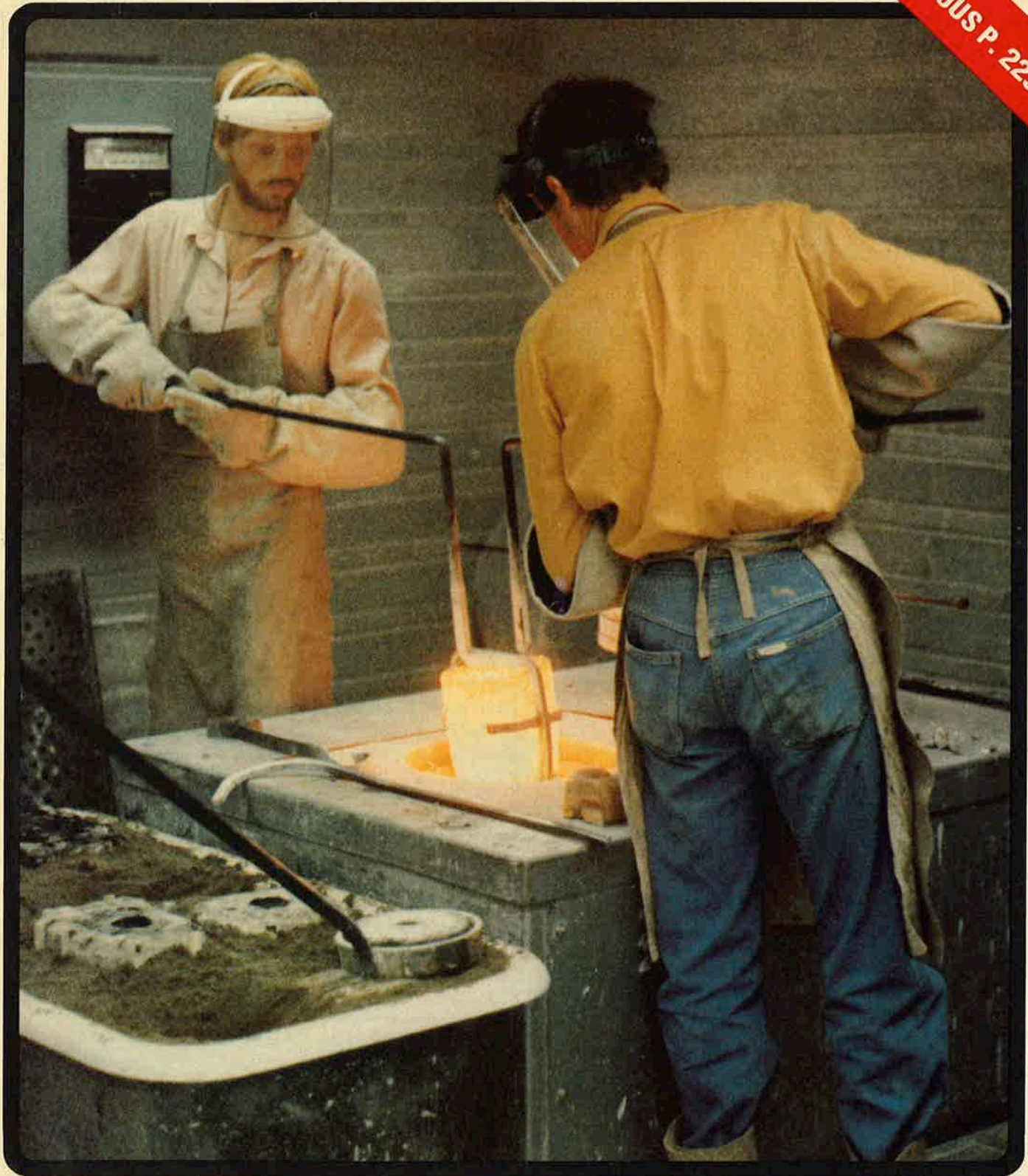
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## REFLECTIONS OF AN EX-STATUS OF WOMEN COMMITTEE MEMBER

# THE WAY IT IS



By Mike Miller

The 1981 Provincial Assembly created a new O.S.S.T.F. standing committee—one dedicated to assist our female members to realize truly equal opportunity in the teaching profession of Ontario. I applied to become a member of the Status of Women Committee and soon found myself its only male member. A most interesting year had begun.

The issues confronting the Status of Women Committee (SW) were, and remain, enormous in number and scope. We had to select a very few issues to work on and set the rest, no matter how important and worthy, aside.

Over the year I have come to see each of these concerns in quite a different light.

The average woman secondary teacher in Ontario makes about \$3500. less than her average male colleague. Teaching is probably the most accessible profession to women and yet in O.S.S.T.F. men outnumber

ber women by over two to one. The percentage of women principals, vice-principals, science, math or geography heads is, in each case, a single digit number. If women have equal opportunity, as we (men) all keep piously telling each other, the disparity between male and female realities is truly remarkable.

It had become clear to me that the basic response must be an Affirmative Action programme that the large majority of both sexes will accept. It cannot be coercive (no quotas) or threatening (no rotating headships to "clear the deadwood"). Instead it must primarily be a serious lobbying of women to encourage them to apply for promotion and keep on applying until they are successful. In the long run, career development seminars for our female members will likely be the most important output that SW might deliver.

A second most formidable task must be to address the use of language and sex-role stereotyping—the very bedrock where the vast inertia prohibiting women a truly equal role persists. From a position of almost total indifference 18 months ago, I now see that nervous ridicule with phrases like "person-hole cover" masks the fact that even today as the twentieth century nears an end, this profession still puts before Ontario's youth materials that cue and reinforce a world view of men shouldering the responsibility of government, business and the professions while women stay at home or accept support roles in our society. O.S.S.T.F. is as bad. A year ago this very publication published the infa-

mous cartoons; the September 1982 Provincial Executive Memo portrays Bill Davis as a scantily clad Salome in a front page cartoon. The honour and dignity we provide our female colleagues!!

A third task concerns collective bargaining. Provincial government employees in Ontario now have 17 weeks of paid maternity leave; surely it is time for Ontario teachers to have it too. Much subtle discrimination against women would vanish with some minor tinkering with seniority provisions—full seniority for part-time teachers or teachers on leave and the use of aggregate rather than "continuous" seniority.

These are issues that will be won at the District/Division level and so SW's real job, as I see it, is to encourage District SW's to be formed and then to nurture them, provide resources and training and set them to work all over Ontario. That role began this October 2 past with a very successful first provincial Status of Women Workshop.

Finally, somehow, there must be addressed the spectrum ranging from petty annoyance to individual tragedy that goes by the term 'sexual harassment'. For the first half of my tenure on SW I kept asking exactly what that was; by the end of my year I needed to hear no more. Closing one's ears doesn't improve our collective behaviour as a profession, however. Alas! So many of my male colleagues still think, as I may once have done, that such things exist almost exclusively in the mind of the victim.

The issues before SW are not for a few dedicated individuals in the warrens of 60 Mobile. They are important matters of social justice that should be priorities for each one of us right now. The next time you are involved with a discussion on women's rights or concerns, please listen and interact. ●

