

# FORUM

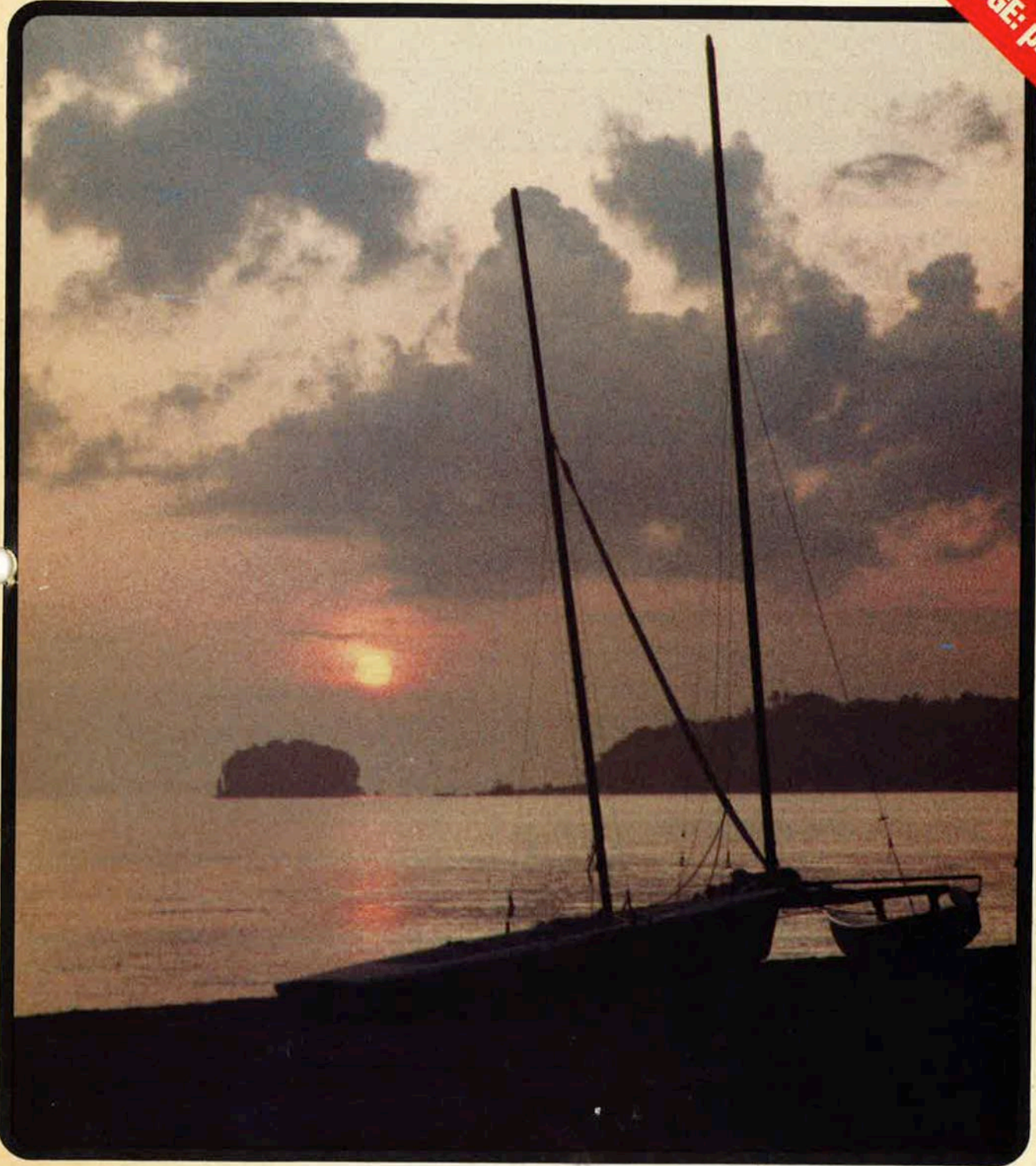
Vol. 9

No. 3

Oct./Nov. 83



FROM THE BRIDGE: p. 120



**NUCLEAR SILENCE: 110**

**Bicentennial Books: 135. Ill-Omened Goddess: 105**

**It Won't Put You in the Driver's Seat! 114**

ONTARIO SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' FEDERATION

LIBRARY

# THE WAY IT IS

**Shelagh Luka**

*At the turn of the century in Canada, 13% of the work-force was female; in Ontario, about 175,000 women held paying jobs. Those women were concentrated in certain fields: clothing, office work, food industries, domestic service and teaching. They were almost exclusively young single women, except in domestic service where the few married women who worked predominated. Almost invariably, working women were non-unionized; they worked longer hours and received lower pay than men doing the same work; and they were subject to provisions such as fines for "... laughing, talking, or using toilet-paper hair curlers" while at work*

*(Honest Womanhood, W. Roberts).*

In 1895, the Toronto Board of Education prohibited the employment of married women who had husbands to support them, and the hiring of women over thirty. With starting salaries for women one-half those for men, it took a woman teacher fourteen years to achieve the initial pay level of her male colleague. By 1901, women teachers were agitating as a result of their lower pay rates, and the lack of opportunity for professional advancement, and made strong cases for fairer treatment by their employers. From time to time, their efforts succeeded.

At the start of the Second World War, some forty years later, women comprised about 20% of the total Canadian work-force. 10% of the women who worked were married, 10% were separated, divorced, or widowed, and the other 80% were single. These women were concentrated in eighteen principal occupations, of which the top five were: domestic service, office work, teaching, the clothing and textile industry, and sales work in stores. The average annual

wage for women was \$490, and for men was \$993; many occupations were still closed to married women, and to women over 30 or 35 years of age; very few women were members of unions.

During the war years, the percentage of the labour force which was female mushroomed from 20% to just over 30%, only to decrease again by the 1951 Census to 22%. Women, in spite of skills, experience and interest in almost every imaginable kind of work, were forced to leave their jobs as servicemen returned to reclaim them.

Women teachers in the forties still received lower rates of pay than men, and if married were still not permitted to teach in many areas. There was even a case in a western city where a married woman seeking supply teaching work was hired only because she could prove that she was destitute. During the war, of course, women, even if married, were not permitted to leave their teaching jobs, whether to seek better-paying jobs in industry or in the Armed Forces, or for other reasons.

Today, another forty years later, over 40% of the Canadian work-force is female. In Ontario, nearly two million women work. They are clustered in clerical, service, sales, nursing and teaching jobs, but now about 61% of these women are married. They earn about 58% of what men earn, and 18% of them belong to unions. Less than 5% of Ontario's working women hold management or administrative positions, and they remain greatly under-represented in many occupations, particularly the skilled trades.

Women teachers in Ontario do most of the classroom teaching and very little of the administrative work; their average salary is about \$3,000 lower than that of men; and covert discrimination on the grounds of

marital status or pregnancy (particularly when unmarried) still occurs, although now forbidden by law. Systematic discrimination, the product of inappropriate employment policies and practices, continues to adversely effect the working life of women teachers, in many cases unintentionally, but nevertheless most effectively, barring them from certain positions or promotions.

We are now eighty years into the twentieth century, but light years away from equality in employment. During those eighty years, the relative economic position of women in the work-force has remained almost identical, in spite of a dramatically increased participation rate, major changes in family structures, and important developments in the area of industrialization.

Setting the stage for equality through improved human rights provisions, anti-discrimination laws, and voluntary equal opportunity or affirmative action programs has failed to effect real change. The efforts of women, individually and collectively, to break down the barriers to equality have resulted in minimal gains, often quickly lost. In no other area are we content to expect that equality will evolve naturally through good will or a sense of justice. To ensure equality, we pass laws which insist on the desired changes in behaviour.

This fall, members of OSSTF are urged to participate actively in a series of eight public forums across Ontario on Women and Affirmative Action, organized by the Ontario Federation of Labour. The purpose of this campaign is to raise awareness of the problem of discrimination against women in the province's labour force, and to develop support for mandatory affirmative action legislation.

As educators, our voice must be heard both on behalf of ourselves as influential, highly visible role models, and on behalf of the students we teach, half of whom face a restricted economic future unless drastic change occurs in the labour force structure. Mandatory affirmative action is essential if employment equality is to occur for women in this century. ●