

Working Woman



Vol 1 No. 1, April/May, 1979

A Publication of Saskatchewan Working Women's Association.

CUTBACKS HURT WOMEN

The Canadian economy has the worst record among industrial countries as measured by price increases, a large trade deficit and high unemployment. Ten per cent inflation, an 84¢ dollar and eight per cent unemployment cause incompetent governments to turn on the victims and blame them for the mess. Women are increasingly becoming both the scapegoats and the victims of government fiscal restraint programs and cutbacks.

- Recent changes in the unemployment insurance act are based on the false notion that women are only secondary wage earners - we don't really need to work. The slashing of unemployment insurance benefits to 60 per cent of wages from the

previous 66 2/3 per cent is a heavy blow at a time of rising prices.

- Those of us who work part-time will have to work 20 hours a week to continue to qualify for unemployment insurance. This new restriction will remove thousands of workers, most of them women, from the country's unemployment insurance rolls since the average part-time job involved 17 hours a week in 1977. Women made up more than 70 per cent of Saskatchewan's part-time work force in 1977. More than one-fifth of Canadian women in the labour force work part-time.

- The cutback of monthly family allowance payments to \$20 per

child comes at a time when we need more, not less money each month to clothe and feed our children. The monthly payments will be indexed to allow for cost of living increases starting only in 1980. The excuse for the family allowance cutback is that the money saved can be given as child tax credits of \$200 per child to low income families. But the credit isn't even automatic, guaranteeing that many low income people who are intimidated by forms will never even apply for money that's rightfully theirs.

- Canada Employment and Immigration Outreach programs no longer identify women as a target group to assist in finding work, although our average wages are

less than half those of men and although we're drastically limited in the kinds of work we get. In 1978, 80 per cent of Saskatchewan women in the labour force worked in only four occupational areas: clerical, service, professional (mostly teachers and nurses) and primary occupations.

- This Outreach cutback threatens the continued existence of Women In Society Today, a Saskatoon group that has been helping single parents prepare for and find work so they can get off welfare. It's hard to understand why Ottawa no longer sees the employment needs of this group as important.

Introducing

SASKATCHEWAN WORKING WOMEN

The Saskatchewan Working Women's Association has grown out of two working women's conferences held by the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour in 1977 and 1978. Concerned about getting beyond the formal boundaries separating women in unions affiliated to the SFL from those in non-affiliated locals, and union women from those who don't have the benefit of unions, the 1978 meeting decided to proceed with the formation of the SWWA. It is open to all women workers - unionized and non-unionized, employed and unemployed, paid and unpaid.

SWWA in no way sees itself as a rival with existing trade unions. Rather, we see unions as the only vehicle that can help women win their struggle for equality in the labour force. At the same time, we know that many women are inactive in their union locals. We think that by organizing around issues of direct concern to working women - unequal pay, lack of advancement opportunities, inadequate child care and so on - we can encourage women to take their rightful place in

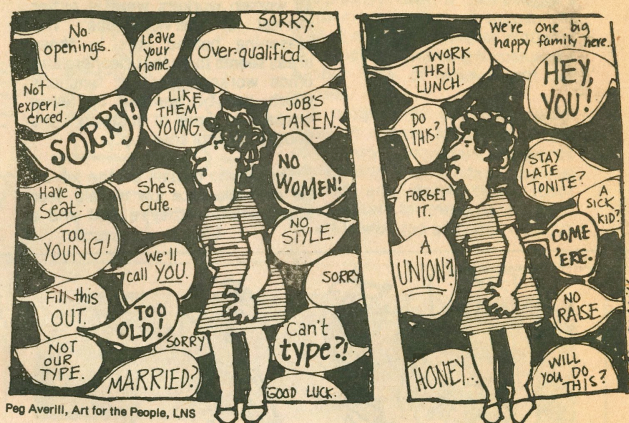
the trade union movement. The women's movement over the past 10 to 15 years has shown us that by joining together to discuss our situation and by working out ways to solve problems, women develop tremendous determination and strength.

The trade union movement has traditionally shown strong concern for unemployed workers, knowing that a large pool of unemployed people helps keep wages down. Bosses can refuse wage increases and other improvements, secure in the knowledge that dissatisfied workers can be replaced by desperate job seekers. The rights of unemployed women deserve special attention now, as the federal government, through Employment Minister Bud Cullen, has suggested the matter is not that serious since women are only secondary wage earners. Because of this serious attack on women's rights to work, SWWA believes it essential that its membership be open to unemployed women and homemakers.

The SWWA is funded by the

BEFORE...

AFTER...



Peg Averill, Art for the People, LNS

Secretary of State, as well as by donations from unions, labour councils, union locals and individuals. The financial support from unions is an important indication that they see the need for a group such as SWWA.

SWWA currently has active locals in Regina, Saskatoon, and Prince Albert. A group will be starting up soon in Moose Jaw. Members of our Regina local have been active on the Regina Plains Community College picket line.

Our steering committee members are Anne Harmsworth, an SGEA member who works in Regina; Joyce McCall, CUPE, Saskatoon; Daphne Boyer, who is currently unemployed, Saskatoon; Karen Templin, CUPE, Prince Albert; Shelley Young, CUPE, Saskatoon; and Noele Hall, CUPE, Regina.

SWWA's founding convention will be held May 11 - 13 at the Vagabond Motor Inn, Regina. All women are welcome. (See Page 4 for more information).



CUTBACKS
DOUBLE IMPACT

Women in the Workplace

Politicians and business people alike are clamouring for cuts in government spending and fiscal restraint, pretending these will solve the twin problems of inflation and unemployment. While the most drastic steps are being taken at the federal level, the axe is wielded by the Saskatchewan NDP government as well.

Provincial government employees are apprehensive about the government's election promise of a three per cent cutback in the public service. The recent budget indicates

this is one campaign promise we must fight to ensure the government doesn't keep!

Women are particularly fearful of threatened job cutbacks, as they are concentrated in the service and clerical sectors, where the axe often falls hardest. 1978 Saskatchewan statistics show that 48 per cent of all women workers were in either clerical or service jobs. The reasoning behind cuts in these areas seems to be that cleaners and office workers perform functions which can be handled by fewer workers in times of austerity - it's another form of speedup.

Those who remain on the job after cutbacks face low morale, fear about whether they're next and a

heavier workload. Those working directly with the public such as hospital workers are especially concerned about their inability to provide satisfactory service.

The fact that public servants face a growing workload is evident from Finance Minister Walter Smishek's budget day boast that Saskatchewan shows the lowest growth rate in public sector jobs but the highest growth rate in public sector programs. We have fewer people to do more work!

The Unemployment Commission has defined women and young people as being in a "high abuse" category - they think many of us claim unemployment insurance without really needing it. Even though we've paid into the fund and are entitled to benefits, the assumption seems to be that we can and should just return to home and family until the economy needs us again.

At the Bargaining Table

Employers know the propaganda value of urging restraint when contract negotiations begin. Although workers need at least 10 per cent increases just to keep pace with the annual rate of inflation, these just

demands are met with howls of protest. At the same time major corporations are reporting profit increases of up to 80 per cent over last year.

The Anti-Inflation Board has left an especially unfortunate legacy for women workers. By tying contracts to percentage settlements rather than across-the-board increases, the board guaranteed that women's wages would fall even further behind those of men.

Now that the AIB has been replaced by the Total Compensation proposal, ACTC for short. The idea is to link public sector workers' salaries to those of people doing similar work in the private sector. This will affect all public employees since their wages would always lag a year behind those of private sector workers. But the effect is even more serious in areas of work where women predominate, such as the clerical and service areas. Since few private sector clerical and service employees are unionized, public employees in these areas earn far more than their private sector counterparts.

ACTC is a blatant attempt to deny women workers the benefits that come with unionization by tying their wages to those of non-union women doing similar work.



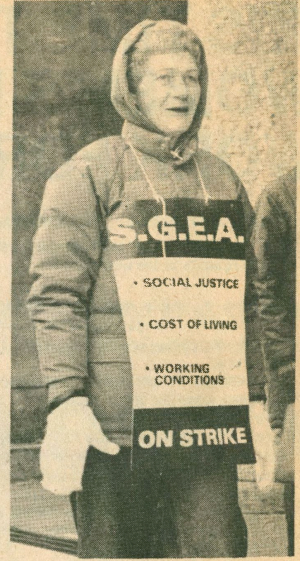
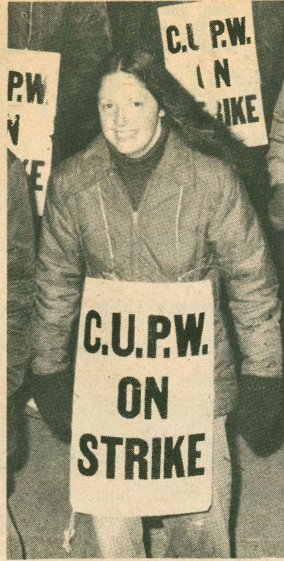
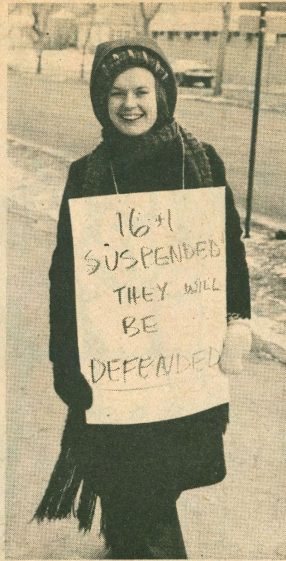
WHO SAYS WOMEN DON'T

The suggestion that unemployment among women isn't a serious problem because we're "only" secondary wage earners is a serious threat to our basic right to work. If we fail to defend this right, we lose our basis for financial independence and thereby suffer a severe setback in our fight for equality.

* No one would suggest unemployment isn't serious for a man if his wife is working, regardless of her salary. And yet the reverse assumption is commonplace.

* The argument about whether women need work seems to suggest the working woman is a rarity. This is no longer true. In fact, 1978 Saskatchewan labour force statistics show that 48 per cent of the adult female population work in the labour force. This doesn't include the large number of farm women who are statistically excluded from the labour force. More than half (57 per cent) of Saskatchewan women between ages 20 and 54 are in the work force. When will our inevitable presence in the paid work force be recognized?

* While economic need has no valid place in determining whether people have a right to work, it's easy to show that the vast majority of women work out of economic need. In 1975, one-third of the women in the Saskatchewan work force were single, widowed or divorced. They could look to no one else for financial support. The balance, or two thirds, were married. Their needs are evident from the fact that in 1974, half the working women in Canada were married to men



Women in the Home

When governments start to slash spending, social services are among the first to be hit. This is already evident from spending cuts made at both the federal and provincial levels. And it's not just a matter of cuts. Unless budgets allow for at least a 10 per cent rate of inflation, cuts will inevitably have to be made. While Ottawa is opting for dramatic and obvious budget cuts, the Saskatchewan NDP government is making less visible cuts by failing to increase spending in some areas to keep pace with inflation.

One reason why social services seem to be a favourite target of

credit based on income is a step away from the fairer universal programs that go to everyone regardless of income. If we had a fair tax system, we could rely on the fact that child tax credits to the very wealthy would be taxed back. Instead, wealthy people have many tax shelters to protect them from their just share of taxes and less wealthy people get caught in a financial squeeze.

It's also important to note that the \$200 per child won't be indexed to the cost of living, so its value will drop rapidly as inflation continues.

that recipients of social services such as family allowances, child care and other socially necessary programs aren't in much of a position to protest cuts. Individual housewives and other consumers of government services find it more difficult to get together and protest inadequate services than do businesses facing cuts in government subsidies. And so, programs that would help women defend their rights are particularly vulnerable.

Family Allowances

The introduction of the federal child tax credit is no valid substitute for cuts in the monthly family allowance cheques. Often, these monthly payments are the only money that comes directly to the housewife.

The introduction of the child tax

The province's drastic cuts in legal aid budgets last year saw legal aid clinics forced to put criminal cases ahead of civil law suits. This was an especially hard blow to women, since we often have no independent source of funds with which to obtain legal services, and our needs are often in the civil law area (separation and divorce),

rather than the criminal area. The shift in emphasis back to criminal cases may have forced many women to continue in intolerable marriages because they couldn't afford legal services. It's not yet clear whether the increases in the legal aid budget for this year will restore women's rights to legal aid.

Child Care

Limited government spending on child care ignores the fact that more and more young mothers are entering the labour force. It is estimated that in 1973 there were 13,000 pre-school age children with

working parents in Saskatchewan. This did not include the large number of one-parent families. And yet there were only 43 child care centres providing less than 1,500 spaces for these more than 13,000 children.

Despite plenty of lip service to the International Year of the Child, our provincial government has ignored an important opportunity to make

dramatic improvements in child care for Saskatchewan youngsters.

Those child care centres that do exist report severe financial problems that threaten their continued existence. We need great improvements in existing child care services as well as an increase in child care spaces.

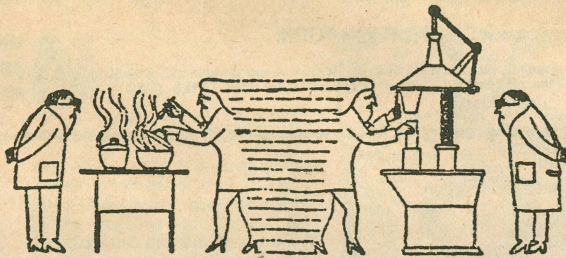
Keeping Us In the Home

Recent government initiatives to encourage senior citizens to remain in the community rather than entering institutions appear to be motivated more by financial con-

home care than about greater social opportunities for people who remain in the community.

They also include some hidden assumptions about who will care for these people when they can no longer take care of themselves. They may go largely without care. Or if paid nursing home care is to be replaced by the unpaid and unrecognized care of daughters and daughters-in-law, it represents a further exploitation of women. As well, it may mean further cutbacks in spending on nursing homes and a further loss of employment for women.

A program to encourage older people to remain among us in the community is important and worthwhile. But the hidden financial savings and assumptions about who will care for these people must be acknowledged and dealt with.



NEED WORK?

earning less than \$8,000 a year. As housing, food, heat and clothing bills rise with alarming speed, married women find they have no choice about whether to join the labour force.

* Many more of us want paid work than unemployment statistics show. Unemployment statistics include only those who are now actively seeking work. They exclude those who have given up or who can't seek work because of factors in the job market, their home or personal situation. This would include people who don't have adequate training, women who can't afford to pay for child care and so on. A 1973 University of Regina study estimated an unemployment rate of 20 per cent for Saskatchewan when it included people who said they wanted a job, but were unable to find one because of the above factors. The official unemployment rate at the time was 1.9 per cent! 87 per cent of the potential workers excluded from official statistics were women, and 25 per cent of them were in their twenties. The large number of women of child-bearing age in the group would seem to indicate that lack of adequate child care is a major reason for inability to find work.

With so many of us among the hidden unemployed, it's no wonder Employment and Immigration Minister Bud Cullen is trying so hard to suggest that we are only secondary wage earners! If our basic right to work were recognized and if child care conditions were improved so that we could seek work, the already shocking unemployment figures would more than double.



Above Saskatoon SWW meeting on International Women's Day, March 8th. SWWA contact in Saskatoon is Joyce McCall - 373-8328; in Regina - Dorothy Knight - 527-2129; in P.A. Diane Chabot - 763-2544; in Moose Jaw Martha Tracey - 692-6710.

This issue of WW is a special publication from Saskatchewan Working Women's Association designed for SWW's founding Conference, May 1979. Working Woman will be published on an occasional basis in future. This issue is available free of charge from SWWA, Box 4154 Regina.

Production this issue: Martha Tracey/layout by volunteer labour/printed by W.A. Print Works Ltd.

Statistics about working woman are based on various reports by the Women's Division, Saskatchewan Department of Labour.

IT'S TIME TO DEFEND WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN THE WORK FORCE

How can we oppose government cutbacks that are challenging women's right to equality in the workplace?

- * If you're a union member, get active in your local. Raise issues such as the changes in unemployment insurance that discriminate against women. Get your union to take a stand publicly and in bargaining.
- * Help women in non-union workplaces join a union. This is the only way they can be in a position to fight for job security, just wages and equal pay.
- * If you know of women who have been unfairly treated by the Unemployment Insurance Commission, encourage them to appeal. Work with them to publicize the commission's unfairness.
- * Support striking workers in your community. Donate funds when possible, find out about the strike issues, talk to your friends about it, do what you can to bring community pressure to bear on the employer.
- * Send letters to federal politicians protesting the cutback of Employment Outreach programs for women. Demand that funding for the Saskatoon project Women In Society Today be reinstated.
- * Join SWWA so you'll be doing all these things with other women, not just on your own.



ATTEND SWWA'S FOUNDING CONVENTION

A working conference to develop organizing skills for women.

Theme: Government cutbacks and their effect on women.

Dates: May 11 - 13, 1979

Time: Opening session 7:30 p.m., Friday, May 11.

Keynote Speaker:

Deirdre Gallagher, organizer, Organized Working Women, an Ontario group of union women that works closely with the Ontario Federation of Labour.

Detailed agenda: Will be mailed when people register.

Social: Saturday night, featuring Saskatchewan's own — Connie Kaldor

Child Care: To be provided free of charge
Registration Fee: \$10 (Includes \$5 annual membership fee)

REGISTRATION FORM

Conference arrangements will include luncheon on Sat./Sun. at approximate cost of \$9.50 for both days.
Please indicate if you will be taking meals at the Hotel YES NO

- I cannot attend the SWWA founding convention, but am enclosing the \$5 membership fee. Please put me on the mailing list.
- I will attend the SWWA founding convention.

NAME:

ADDRESS:

PHONE:

OCCUPATION:

UNION AFFILIATION (if any)

CHILD CARE

I will require child care at the convention: Ages of children coming:

ACCOMMODATION

Please find me a billet.

Please book me a room at the Vagabond (check one of the following)

- Single (1 person) \$22 per night
- Double (1 bed, 2 persons) \$25 per night
- Twin (two double beds, 2 persons) \$28 per night.
- Twin (two double beds, 3 or 4 persons) \$30 per night.

Please do not enclose registration fees.
We will collect these at the convention.

Dates for which I want rooms or billets booked:

Time of Arrival:

Mail to: Convention Co-ordinator
SWWA
Box 4154
Regina, Sask. S4P 3W5