

# CHALLENGING THE BARRIERS

Spring 1995 Issue

Newsletter of Edmonton Working Women

## EWW Releases Study on Sexual Harassment

*This is a story of a journey — a journey of discovery.*

It began in the late fall of 1991. Edmonton Working Women's Hotline workers were grappling with a series of sexual harassment cases. The women's complaints all had a similar ring and all seemed headed for disappointing conclusions. None of these women were still employed where the harassment occurred; all were picking up temporary work when they could; and all faced the dilemma of whether or not to tell prospective employers the real reason they left their previous jobs. Some were seeing their doctors on a regular basis and were prescribed mood-altering drugs to counter depression and anxiety.

All these women had endured long periods of sexual harassment and were showing the effects. They were emotionally worn down and their self-esteem was seriously eroded. They were distrustful of others and even of themselves. They were disillusioned with their treatment by formal complaint bodies and were questioning why they had even bothered to complain.

Edmonton Working Women shared their disappointment with, and anger at, the apparent ineffectiveness of complaint bodies. So we began a systematic evaluation of the various complaint processing agencies. Our objectives were to document in a well-researched, detailed report cases of sexual harassment in Alberta today and to recommend improvements to the various complaint systems. We wanted to illustrate the experiences of women who had laid complaints with various agencies whose policies explicitly prohibit sexual harassment. We wanted to show how these policies and procedures are enforced.

We interviewed women who complained of sexual harassment and those who process sexual harassment cases. We were looking for descriptive stories — to find the common threads in these stories which would lead to our conclusions.

Each woman interviewed had complained of sexual harassment through different channels. We found that the various complaint routes differ in their definitions of sexual harassment, time limits to lay complaints, willingness to pursue complaints and investigative procedures. The lack of a cohesive approach leads to complications when a woman is trying to proceed with a complaint.

Our report on sexual harassment pinpoints the problems women face when laying sexual harassment complaints and provides recommendations to improve the procedures and policies of complaint-processing bodies.

The report covers the responsibilities and liability of employers, and the roles, and pros and cons, of taking complaints through the Human Rights Commissions, Workers' Compensation Board of Alberta, Unions and the

Courts. It provides guidance both to women who have been sexually harassed and to those who assist them.

Edmonton Working Women will have the Sexual Harassment material ready this spring. This includes the report, a manual for victims/survivors of sexual harassment and advocates for women who have been sexually harassed, a fact sheet on sexual harassment, and a background information sheet on Edmonton Working Women. A limited number of anti-sexual harassment posters are also available for \$7 (\$5 low income), reduced in size from original prints (40" X 60") which we sell for \$150.



If you are interested in receiving these materials, phone our office at **429-3370** and leave your name, phone number and address.

Join in the struggle to make sexual harassment a thing of the past!



# Workplace Abuse

Edmonton Working Women sponsored a workshop as part of the *Global Visions International Festival* January 29, at the Centre for International Alternatives. About 20 women attended the workshop facilitated by EWW members Mary Bell, Catherine Bray, Jo-Ann Kolmes and Jayne Russell.

Catherine outlined a definition of workplace abuse. She pointed out that a worker has a right to:

- \* clear direction from her employer
- \* a safe and healthy context in which to work
- \* healthy and appropriate responses to work

Workplace abuse violates these rights and includes:

- \* lack of direction
- \* inordinate expectations
- \* rules changing
- \* micromanagement
- \* verbal assaults
- \* blackmail
- \* threats
- \* harmful physical environment
- \* invasion of private life
- \* withholding praise or apologies
- \* harsh and unpredictable responses
- \* stealing work and taking credit for it
- \* lying
- \* withholding resources
- \* exclusion
- \* isolation
- \* ignoring
- \* interfering
- \* constant criticism

Mary Bell provided a definition of sexual harassment as an abuse or exploitation of power and an act of violence which includes unwanted sexual behaviour, requests for sexual favours, invasion of sexual privacy, verbal remarks of a sexual nature, jokes, suggestions, leering, physical contact, and acts of retaliation directed at former or potential victims.

*Avenues for Redress and Action* is the title of Edmonton Working Women's report which discusses informal and formal means of dealing with sexual harassment. Mary outlined some of the suggestions in the manual, including (if possible):

- \* be assertive and tell the harasser to stop
- \* don't blame yourself if you are a victim
- \* establish a support network of friends and coworkers
- \* keep a diary of harassment events
- \* safeguard yourself against retaliation if you decide to lodge a complaint

Because of drawbacks to formal procedures, informal actions may be chosen by a victim. These include:

- \* picketing the harasser
- \* requesting a transfer
- \* using the appropriate Human Rights Commission
- \* forming a workplace health and safety group
- \* saving obscene material and confronting the harasser, his spouse or superior with it

Mary discussed the Canadian and Alberta Human Rights Commissions, (CHRC and AHRC). The CHRC covers only federal employees. Case studies show the AHRC has limited influence due to inadequate training and overwork of case-workers, a possible bias favouring employers, and usually demands that complainants do their own investigations. She suggested that the AHRC should not be used without legal representation or a trained advocate. EWW can be used as a resource. Expect a low settlement that may have to be enforced through the courts. The AHRC has no police power.

The criminal courts handle violations of the criminal code. But, you may get unwanted publicity and you are called as a witness. The court is preoccupied with rights of the accused, and the onus of proof is very high: beyond a reasonable doubt. If the victim is successful in criminal court, she may qualify for a crimes compensation board settlement which is usually low.

A woman can also take sick leave or use disability benefits if possible. Under Unemployment Insurance (UI) she can collect 15 weeks of benefits with proper medical documentation. A victim of sexual harassment who has to quit her job has to prove that there was "just cause" in her decision to quit.

Jo-Ann Kolmes discussed formal remedies for sexual harassment, including civil litigation. She cautioned the participants to be aware of the limitations of quasi-judicial bodies with respect to the low awards in particular. She said that taking action through one mechanism may not allow taking further action through a second legal mechanism.

In discussing civil suits, Jo-Ann mentioned that complainants are forced to sign or consider nondisclosure clauses, and accept donations to favourite charities if they win their cases. She suggested that, with documentation, victims can claim back sick leave if illness is proven to be caused by harassment. Recent court cases set new precedents in this field, and provide hope to victims. Tort law may now apply to workplace abuse.

Harassment complaints in unionized workplaces require different procedures depending on whether the harasser is a worker or management. The employer is responsible for maintaining a safe and harassment-free environment.

The workshop participants were cautioned to seek legal advice and to be aware of time limits. Victims should choose their strategies after careful consideration and consultation with hotline workers at EWW or other informed supporters.

Jayne Russell presented statistics on worker abuse collected by B.C. nurses and other bodies. She focused particularly on the abuse of health care professionals. A participant talked of a "code pink" which is a code that nurses in hospitals can use to summon help when they are being abused.

General discussion included stories of personal experiences, speculation that professional associations may provide some assistance or monitoring of their members, and an update from a member of CUPE local 474 on the inaction (to date) on the sexual assault of the custodial worker at an Edmonton school. The CUPE sister urged others to contact the school board. Finally, a member of the emotional abuse at work support group gave information about her group.

# Abuse in the Workplace

## **Harassment is the leading form of violence on the job.**

Percent of workers harassed: 19%  
Number of workers harassed: 16.1 million

Source: Northwestern National Life Insurance Co.

## **More than 2 million workers were physically attacked on the job between July 1992 & July 1993**

Percent of workers physically attacked: 3%  
Rate per 100,000 workers attacked: 2,500

Source: Northwestern National Life Insurance Co.

## **Nearly 7,500 of 100,000 workers were threatened with physical harm during one year.**

Percent of workers threatened: 7%  
Number of workers threatened: 6.3 million

Source: Northwestern National Life Insurance Co.

## **The leading cause of death in the workplace for women is homicide.**

Percent of workplace deaths caused by assaults and violent acts for:  
Men: 18%  
Women: 44%

Source: U.S. Dept of Labor

## **Attacks by customers or clients are most prevalent.**

Percent of workers attacked by:  
  
Customers or clients: 44%  
Strangers: 24%  
Co-workers: 20%  
Bosses: 7%  
Former Employees: 3%  
Someone Else: 3%

Source: Northwestern National Life Insurance Co.

## **Homicide rates remain highest at retail and service establishments.**

Number of homicides per 100,000 per year for:  
Taxicab establishments: 26.9  
Liquor stores: 8.0  
Gas stations: 5.6  
Grocery stores: 3.2  
Hotels/Motels: 1.5

Source: NIOSH

## **Workers most often are harassed by co-workers or bosses.**

Percent of harassment from:  
Co-workers: 47%  
Bosses: 39%  
Customers or clients: 15%  
Strangers: 2%  
Former employees: 2%  
Someone else: 2%

Source: Northwestern National Life Insurance Co.

# The Public School as Sweatshop

***"The Edmonton Public School Board has been actively promoting the exploitation of women working as custodial assistants."***

**S**o says Doug Luellman, President of CUPE Local 474. The union represents over 600 custodial workers in Edmonton's public schools. Half of these are custodial assistants.

A majority of custodial assistants are women who work part-time cleaning our schools. These positions run ten months out of the year and used to vary from four to six, to eight hours a day. Custodial assistants are limited from doing any "heavy duty" cleaning such as washing floors or scrubbing and waxing which is done by custodians.

"Even before the Klein cuts, the school board began cutting the hours of custodial assistants down to three hours a day on an occasional basis. But since the provincial cuts to education, this has become a regular practice by the board," says Luellman.

The union has filed grievances over this issue, demanding that custodial assistants be hired for a minimum four hour shift. But the grievance was rejected by the board and trustees.

Now the board has reduced both the number of work weeks as well as hours of work. Some custodial assistants are being forced to work as little as three days a week at three hours per day. "This is a sleazy tactic to reduce the benefits that these women would be earning if they were working five days a week at four hours per day," Luellman said.

Under the union contract, four-hour part-time employees are entitled to a full benefits package. By reducing them to three hours per day, these workers fall under the Employment Standards Act and are not eligible for benefits.

Three-hour custodial assistants, if they are lucky to work five days a week, will only earn a maximum of \$641.40 per month or \$6,414 per year!!! This is well below the poverty line! Your tax dollars are being used to further the 'feminization of poverty'.

Contact your school trustee and let them know that this situation is intolerable. The board is using the Klein cuts to further their own agenda of union busting and privatization!

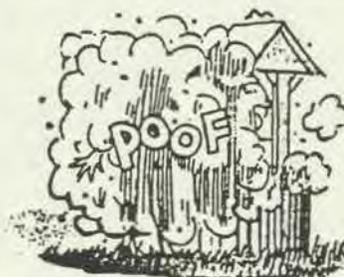
Here are the names and numbers of trustees as well as the wards they represent.

Please contact yours today and tell them to stop exploiting their workers!!

**Public School Trustees:**

Ward One	Esther Starkman 429-8017 Jean Woodrow 429-8079
Ward Two	Rose Rosenberger 429-8086
Ward Three	John Nicoll 429-8087 Terry Sulyma 429-8016
Ward Four	Don Williams 429-8085
Ward Five	George Nicholson 429-8084
Ward Six	Doug Tupper 429-8082
Chair	Dick Mather 429-8083

**For further information call CUPE Local 474 at 424-9696.**



# To Be or Not To Be?

In the next three pages, *Challenging the Barriers* takes a close look at Canada's social programs through the eyes of the National Poverty Organization, Statistics Canada, Action Canada Network, and a paper entitled *Critical Choices, Turbulent Times* by Nancy Pollack, published by the School of Social Work (UBC). Here are the facts and figures — and the fallacies we must overcome to preserve and expand social programs . . .

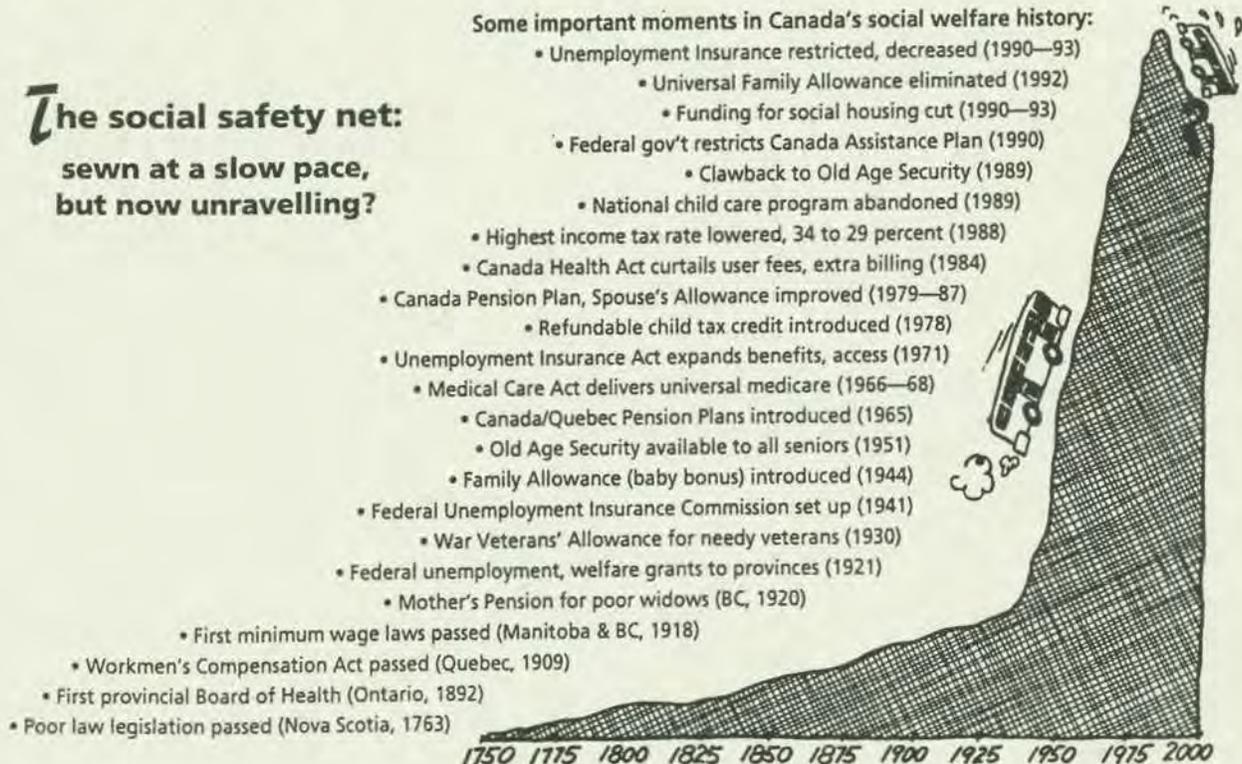
## Sewing the Social Safety Net

Canada's social safety net was sewn at a slow pace. Health and welfare were not high priorities for the founders of Confederation, who designated them as provincial responsibilities. By the turn of the 20th century, trade unionists and farmers, churches and charities, philanthropists and social workers, and popular movements were demanding action on many fronts.

The 1930s and 1940s were pivotal decades. The widespread dislocation and poverty of people during the Depression led to political unrest, which in turn forced governments to act. The years between the two world wars gave birth to the Keynesian social welfare model: the welfare state. John Maynard Keynes was a British economist who believed state intervention in the economy and social matters was good and necessary. In his view, social expenditures were essential to a stable, humane society. This would help shave the edge off class differences and foster a favourable climate for business. But Keynes' welfare state didn't challenge capitalism or suggest there was an intrinsic problem with the ruling creed of private enterprise and individualistic values.



**The social safety net:  
sewn at a slow pace,  
but now unravelling?**



# Some Facts and Figures on Social Programs and Labour Market Issues

Produced by the National Anti-Poverty Organization, 316, 256 King Edward Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7M1

## ABOUT SOCIAL PROGRAMS . . .

### How many people are on welfare in Canada?

There are currently close to three million people on welfare in Canada, an all time high. Among this group, there are about one million children. As well, an increasing number of people are having to move from Unemployment Insurance support (UI) to welfare because of their inability to secure a job.

### How many people are receiving UI benefits?

In May 1991, 898,000 people received Unemployment Insurance benefits. There are, however, many more people unemployed. Indeed, over 1.5 million people were looking for a job during the same period while many of the 2.1 million people working part-time were also looking for a permanent job. The difference between the total number of people being unemployed (1.5 million) and the number of people receiving UI (920,000) indicates that many Canadians (591,000) are forced to rely on welfare and food banks while looking for a job.

### How many Canadians are facing housing problems?

In 1991, there were over one million households in Canada facing housing problems, i.e., they were paying 30% or more of their income for shelter. The average income of these households was \$13,100. Currently, there are about 630,000 Canadian households who have access to housing programs.

### Do our kids have access to a decent child care system?

While between 50% to 95% of children in major European countries have access to publicly funded child care, less than 20% of Canadian children get access to this essential service.

Such a lack of support for families has greatly contributed to the alarming rate of poverty among single mothers. Close to 300,000 single mothers — with whom live 521,000 children — live in poverty in Canada (over 60% of all single mothers). Other countries have been able to substantially reduce the rate of poverty among single mothers. In 1987 (that being the latest data available for international comparison) the poverty rate among single mothers was 8% in Sweden, 30% in Germany, 23% in United Kingdom and 58% in Canada.

In order to reduce poverty in Canada, a national publicly funded child care program should be combined with decent family allowances and an improved child support payment system.

## ABOUT JOBS . . .

### What is the "Canadian labour force"?

From the 21 million Canadians aged 15 and over, 14 million of them were working or looking for work. This 14 million is referred to as the Canadian labour force. In June of 1994, 10.4 million people from this group were working full-time, 2.1 million were working part-time and 1.4 million were actively searching for a job.

### Where are the wage gaps in Canada?

In 1992, women with jobs had average earnings of \$15,500, while men had average earnings of \$25,100. During the 1980s the gap between well-paid and poorly-paid workers increased. For the 20% of workers with the lowest wages, their earnings dropped by about 7% while the 20% of workers with highest wages saw their earnings increase by 9%. The wages considered here are the "real" wages, i.e. the value of wages when inflation is taken into account.

### Can I work at the minimum wage and not live in poverty?

Minimum wage rates vary from one province to the other. There is, however, a trend that can be found in all provinces: since the mid-seventies, the value of the minimum wage — this is again when inflation is taken into account — has constantly dropped. The National Council of Welfare reported that "between 1976 and 1992 the value of the minimum wage fell by 14 to 33 percent for workers under provincial jurisdiction and by 48 percent for the limited number of workers under federal jurisdiction. Accordingly, while it was possible in the mid-seventies to work at minimum wage and not live in poverty, this is no longer the case. In 1992, someone working at minimum wage earned between 55% and 83% of what constitutes the poverty line (depending on the number of people in the family and the city where the family is living).

Social spending doesn't cause debt. According to Statistics Canada:

- 50% of the debt is due to tax breaks for upper income earners and corporations
- 44% of the debt is due to high interest rates
- 4% of the debt is due to general program spending
- **only 2% of the debt can be attributed to social programs.**

Source: Statistics Canada, 1991

# I'm a Social Program Recipient and So are You!

How important are social programs? In a 1990 study 98.4% said they used at least one social program that year.

## Only the US spends less

Canada's social program spending is the equivalent of 18.8% of our national income. Other countries spend much more. The following represents spending on social programs, including education and health, as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), in six industrial countries:

United States .....	14.8%
Canada .....	18.8%
United Kingdom .....	20.3%
France .....	23.1%
Germany .....	28.0%
Sweden .....	33.9%

Source: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

## Is this the way to deliver child care?

The government has been moving away from directly funding child care spaces, and more towards providing deductions for child care through the tax system. But tax breaks for child care only work if you have money to spend on child care to begin with.

The Child Care Expenses Deduction favours wealthy families. In 1993 high-income people were spared \$450 for every \$1,000 they spent on child care, while low income people were only spared \$264.

Source: Critical Choices

## Profile of poverty

In 1992 there were 4.5 million poor people in Canada. Nearly three million Canadians were forced to resort to welfare for survival. Over 1.2 million children under the age of 18 live in poverty almost one out of every five. And the statistics are getting worse.

## Poor kids have parents and they're usually single mothers

Kids living with two parents have a one-in-ten chance of being poor. Kids with a single mom have a two-in-three chance.

- 11.7% of children living with two parents live in poverty, as compared to . . .
- 65.8% of children living with single parents, usually single mothers, live in poverty.

Source: *Globe & Mail*, August 31, 1994

## Space for Rent

The Women's Building Collective, Basement 9930-106 Street, has a partially furnished, windowless but cheery room for rent on a month-to-month basis. Shared meeting room, kitchen facilities and smoking room available. Any offers will be taken into consideration. Good for short-term projects or counsellors requiring an interview room. Call 429-3370 or 421-0306 (ASWAC) to view or for information.

# EDMONTON WORKING WOMEN

Edmonton Working Women (EWW) has been a working women's collective based on feminist principles since 1982. We organized in response to the way women's work goes unrecognized, whether it be in the home or in the paid labour force. Our goals are better wages, working conditions and job security for women.

We hold monthly administration and planning meetings. If you want more information on EWW, wish to join us, or are being treated unfairly at work, please get in touch with us at 429-3370.

## Working Women's Hotline

Edmonton Working Women provides a direct service to women. Trained staff and volunteers provide free information, referral, support and advocacy.

If you are experiencing any type of unfair treatment in your job or want to become a hotline volunteer, you can phone us at 429-3370. Your call will be answered by an EWW member, or it will be returned if you leave a message on our answering machine.

Our mailing address is:  
30, 9930 - 106 Street  
Edmonton Alberta T5K 1C7

Donations are always gratefully accepted.

# New Zealand's Labour 'Deregulation' May Spread

The following article first appeared in the September 1994 Edition of *Labor Notes*, a U.S. labour publication. For a sample issue, you can write to Labor Notes at 7435 Michigan Avenue, Detroit, Michigan 48210. We reprint it in this issue of *Challenging the Barriers* to point out the not-so-coincidental parallels between the situation in New Zealand and that in Alberta. In fact, we are now embarking on a second go-round on the issue of "right-to-work" (sic) legislation in Alberta, another step in "deregulation" and union busting.



Workers in Wellington, New Zealand protested the Employment Contracts Act. One year after its passage, unions had lost half their membership.

By Ellen Dannin

In several countries, including the United States, influential folks are promoting a kind of labour law reform that would "deregulate the labour market". They appear to be gaining ground in countries such as Canada and the Netherlands.

We can see what this would mean by looking at New Zealand, which has already "deregulated" its labour laws. New Zealand is now governed by the Employment Contracts Act of 1991.

Under the ECA, employment contracts are negotiated between individual employees and the employer. Negotiations can be collective, but the employer has no obligation to bargain.

The ECA doesn't mention unions. Representation, even when collective, is authorized only on an individual basis. This means that any time a union wants to negotiate, grieve, strike, or file a lawsuit, it must prove it represents each individual member and must satisfy the employer it has specific authority to take each action.

The ECA gives employers powerful economic weapons, the best of which is the partial lockout. This

does not mean that employers prevent employees from coming to work. Rather, employers can "lock employees out" of their terms and conditions of employment. If an employer wants the workers to take a pay cut and they won't agree, the employer simply pays what it has proposed until they agree.

Once there is a collective employment contract in the work site, its terms control. All it takes to get a collective contract is agreement between the employer and two employees. Studies show there is no real bargaining in most work sites.

New Zealand unions lost 50% of their members within the first year of the new legislation. Several unions have disappeared, unable to withstand the harshness of life under the ECA.

New Zealand unemployment has been about 10% for years. If employees refuse to take two job offers at above minimum wage, they lose unemployment benefits for 26 weeks. There are regular reports of people taking no-pay jobs on the hope the employer will like them and keep them on.

Although New Zealand is a food exporting country, food banks now are a common resource for many newly impoverished residents. Last Christmas,

three church officials announced that they did not consider it a sin to steal to feed one's family, the need was so dire.

The ECA might be of only local interest but for the fact that it has already spread to other countries, and powerful forces are trying to introduce it all over the globe.

The State of Victoria, Australia enacted similar legislation. Alberta, Canada is considering its own ECA.

The Netherlands has formed a committee to study labour law reform along these lines. The *London Observer* expressed confidence that New Zealand's laws would soon be exported to other countries.

The standard-bearer of these changes, former Labour Party Finance Minister Roger Douglas, and other ECA

proponents have been on world tours to spread the message. Douglas' book *Unfinished Business*, has been at the top of the best seller list in Canada, and the premier of Alberta has ordered his cabinet to read it.

Douglas is not a lone crusader. He has powerful friends. The International Monetary Fund and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development have been pumping out glowing reports about New Zealand for months. Deregulate your labour market, they say, and you too can have New Zealand's low inflation, high productivity, and increased workplace flexibility. They never mention unemployment or poverty.

There is, of course, an American angle on what New Zealand has been through. The ECA is based on the ideas of Richard Epstein of the University of Chicago law school. Once Congress' labour reform docket is clear, we may see his ideas come back from abroad.

Ellen Dannin is Associate Professor of Law at California Western School of Law

# Boycott News

## Mac-Blo Boycott Launched

The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) has launched an immediate consumer boycott of MacMillan Bloedel products due to an ongoing strike against the company in Port Alberni, B.C.

CLC President Bob White said in December that the boycott is in response to Mac Blo's union-busting efforts in their dispute with the Communications, Energy & Paperworkers (CEP) union.

White said the full resources of the CLC will be used to publicize the boycott, and if necessary, to expand it internationally.

The campaign against MacMillan Bloedel follows the company's decision to use contractors, whose workers are either non-union or in employer-dominated unions (dubbed "rat unions"), for the construction of a major expansion to its Port Alberni mill.

Unionized building trades have done that sort of work for 45 years. Since September 1994, more than 95 workers have been arrested for blocking the construction gate at the mill.

The situation intensified in November when 850 unionized mill workers walked off the job. The CEP members who work in the mill also fear the company will attempt to cut their work through contracting-out.

In mid-January, 64 union members were found in contempt of court for interfering with rat-union workers going onto the construction site.

In the meantime, the company is defying the labour protest and continues to award contracts to companies with rat unions.

MacMillan Bloedel's B.C. employees are asking you to show your support for unionized worksites by refusing to purchase the following brands:

- *Aspenite* sheathing
- *Cedar Leader* lumber & fencing
- *Classic Coat* bevel siding
- *K3* particle board
- *Kingtrim* mouldings
- *Multiply* plywood

Also, please don't use milled paper products sold under the brand names *Electrabrite*, *Electraheat* and *Electratone*.

## Grapes You can Really Sink Your Teeth Into

Although most California grapes are still on the AFL boycott list, one California grower has signed a contract with the United Farm Workers. Now you can buy grapes produced by the **David Freedman Company**. Their boxes will now carry the Farm Workers' black eagle union label.

## It's Your Hard-Earned Money - Spend It Wisely

Please also boycott the following:

- **Famous Players Theatres** (in support of locked-out IATSE members - the employer is demanding a 60% wage cut)
- **Chatelaine Magazine** (who unilaterally proclaimed Peggy Witte "woman of the year" - what an insult!)
- **Red Coach Lettuce** (in support of United Farm Workers of America)
- **Electrolux** (campaign against plant closing)
- **Hyundai Products**
- **Canada Post Franchise Outlets**
- **Grande Prairie Inn**
- **Staples Office Supplies**

Reprinted from *Labour News* published by the Alberta Federation of Labour, phone (403) 483-3021 for details.

More boycott information can be obtained by contacting **INFACT Canada** (10 Trinity Square, Toronto, M5G 1B1) or subscribe to **Boycott Action News** (\$20 US to Co-op America, 700, 1850 M St. NW, Washington DC, USA, 20036, 1-800-424-2667).



## A Safety Message to All Workers

### Ten Questions to Ask Your Employer

1. What are the dangers of my job?
2. Are there any other hazards (noise, chemical, radiation) that I should know about?
3. Will I receive job safety training?
4. Is there any safety gear I'll be expected to wear? Will I receive training in how to use it? When?
5. Will I be trained in emergency procedures (fire, chemical spill)? When?
6. Where are fire extinguishers, first aid kits and other emergency equipment located?
7. What are my health and safety responsibilities?
8. Whom do I ask if I have a health or safety question?
9. Do you have regular safety meetings?
10. What do I do if I get hurt?

# Good Reading - Book Reviews

## REVIEWS BY ESYLLT JONES

WOMEN CHALLENGING UNIONS:  
FEMINISM, DEMOCRACY AND MILITANCY

Linda Briskin & Patricia McDermott,  
Editors  
University of Toronto Press, 1993

## ORGANIZING UNIONS

By Mary Cornish & Lynn Spink  
Second Story Press, 1994

"Women need unions and unions need women" has become a statement of fact for feminists in the labour movement. These two books contribute to an understanding of why this is true, and what to do about it.

By the turn of the century, half the Canadian workforce will be women. The economic restructuring of the past decade has led to declining rates of unionization, and new jobs are almost entirely in the service sector where low-paid, part-time jobs prevail, and where unions have not successfully organized. *Women Challenging Unions* convinces us that the key to much-needed change and innovation in the labour movement is women's creative energy. At the same time, the many problems faced by women in the labour movement, including sexism, sexual harassment, violence, the double working day, the deliberate exclusion of women from decision making in unions by men, and a lack of acceptance for women's ways of collective action, are clearly documented by the authors.

The articles in this collection suggest strategies for change, including separate organizing by women in the labour movement and integrating women's needs and approaches within the broader labour movement.

The articles in the first section are excellent, using women's storytelling to examine ways that organizing and striking change the lives of women activists. There is great humour in one woman's telling of how a police officer taught her and her co-workers how to run a picket line.

The middle section discusses gender politics in unions, including valuable articles on the experiences of black women, and the challenge facing women as staff members of unions.

The third section deals with women as workers, how collective bargaining has benefitted women, (although progress is painfully slow) and, in "Can a Disappearing Pie Be Shared Equally?" how the economic crisis threatens the possibility of wage equality, particularly given the labour movement's traditional protection of white males.

Other articles discuss women's occupational health, the experience of garment workers as the "DEW Line" for the rest of us, and the efforts of nurses to integrate professionalism and unionism in their collective action.

The analysis in this collection could be strengthened by more attention to the contributions of women to unions over time. With the exception of the final article in the collection, the reader is given the impression that women's involvement in organized labour essentially began with the "second wave" of feminism. We women need to take pride in our historical contributions as well.

*Organizing Unions* is a "reference guide" to union organizing. It isn't specifically directed at women workers, but speaks to the needs and concerns of workers traditionally under-represented in unions: women, gays and lesbians, workers of colour, and workers with disabilities.

The book makes effective use of sidebars in which workers talk about fears and concerns about union

organizing. Written in plain language, it is accessible and attractively designed.

This 400-odd-page book deals with everything from how a union can help workers achieve better pay and benefits to how it can support workers in dealing with racial and sexual harassment on the job. It addresses some common myths about unions, like "Big Union Bosses Only Want Your Money", and gives advice about how to choose the right union, and what questions to ask prospective union representatives. It describes legal rights, and how to conduct an organizing campaign, including possible management response. The role of the Labour Board is explained, how to apply for union certification, and what to do if the employer resorts to unfair labour practices to oppose the formation of the unions. *Organizing Unions* concludes with a section on how to negotiate a first contract, an important topic given that this is where many newly-organized unions fail. The book is based on Ontario labour law, but compares provisions in Ontario with those of other provinces.

Forming a union may be legal, but it isn't easy. Not only do workers have to deal with usually hostile management, they must work closely with a union representative, often male. For women workers, trusting a stranger, and a man, during an organizing campaign, can be difficult. With a resource like *Organizing Unions*, women can work together to build confidence, and learn what questions they need to ask. Most importantly, this book will help women know what to expect as they go through the process of forming a union.

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