

EDMONTON WORKING WOMEN — WHO ARE WE?

Edmonton Working Women (EWW) became a working women's collective based on feminist principles in 1982 in response to the way women's work goes unrecognized, whether it be in the home or in the paid labour force.

Women make up almost half of the Alberta workforce, and our numbers are increasing every year. However, we only earn 65 cents, on average, for each dollar a man makes in full-time, permanent employment.* The majority of working women are employed in pink-collar job ghettos — those low-paying, low-status service, clerical and retail jobs which have traditionally been seen as "women's work". Very few of these occupations are unionized. As a result, women working in these areas suffer some of the lowest wages and worst working conditions in this province. Immigrant and visible minority women face further problems. In addition, recent economic and social changes have had a large impact on workers, particularly women, making a bad situation worse (cuts in social programs, increased job losses and a rise in unprotected contract, temporary, part-time and home work).

EWW is committed to changing this situation. Our goals are better wages, working conditions and job security for women. We need comprehensive employment laws that provide health and retirement benefits for all, eliminate exclusions and ensure fair wages. We must remove barriers that have traditionally restricted access to jobs and equitable pay. To reach these goals, our equal participation in the workforce must include better support services, such as childcare. Alberta's labour laws must be changed. They do not fully protect workers, especially women, and discourage unionization.

If you wish to join us, or if you are being treated unfairly at work, please get in touch with us.

EDMONTON WORKING WOMEN
30, 9930-106 Street, Edmonton, Alberta, T5K 1C7
phone: 429-3370 fax: 425-3293

* Statistics Canada, 1991



WHAT CAN EDMONTON WORKING WOMEN DO FOR YOU?

Working Women's Hotline

Edmonton Working Women provides a direct service to women. Major changes to a system that undervalues women's work is a long-term objective. In the meantime, women are fired from their jobs, forced to work overtime (often without pay) and experience sexual harassment and other forms of abuse. These problems demand immediate action. In response to this, we established the Working Women's Hotline.

If you are experiencing any type of unfair treatment in your job, you can phone us at 429-3370. We can offer free information, assistance and support. Your call will be answered by EWW members, or it will be returned if you leave a message on our answering machine.

All Calls are Confidential

Our members have a basic working knowledge of Alberta's labour laws, gained through workshops and training that we conduct on a regular basis. As well, local labour lawyers give us free advice on matters on which we are unclear. When you phone the Hotline we will discuss your work-related problem with you, attempt to find answers to your questions or refer you to the appropriate agency. Members of EWW will assist you and offer support should you decide to take action.

Taking Action

In most cases that we hear about on the Hotline, there are no laws to protect our rights. In some situations, the women involved decide to take political action to make their concerns public and to try to better the working conditions for others. Although this does not usually immediately improve their situation, it does help to make society aware of the reality for most working women. EWW helps these women to organize protest actions, write leaflets and contact media. In addition, EWW uses the information we receive from Hotline calls to document how bad the situation is for women. While maintaining strict confidentiality, the information becomes useful in educating ourselves and others, and in pressuring the government to make necessary changes.

file: backgrd_pm4 - updated June/93

Women: Know Your Rights!

Edmonton Working Women publishes a handbook on Alberta labour laws which outlines workplace issues from the time you first apply for work to the time you retire. It specifies some of your legal rights and critiques the gross inadequacies of the legislation. In addition, we have published a condensed booklet version of this handbook which is available in Easy-English, Chinese, Spanish, Polish, French, Vietnamese, Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi. For a free copy of these publications, please contact us.

Stronger Unions for Women

EWW supports the efforts of women to unionize. Most people in the Alberta workforce are non-unionized. Through unionization, we can use the collective bargaining process to fight more effectively for our rights. Membership in a union can offer some protection in the labour force. The wage gap between men and women is narrower among unionized workers; statistics show that unionized women make \$3.50 to \$5.00 more per hour than non-unionized women. Unions provide a grievance procedure which is faster, cheaper and often more effective than formal remedies for employer misconduct.

EWW supports women who are fighting to form or strengthen unions by joining and/or organizing picket lines, conducting forums and referring women to those who are experienced in unionization.

If you are in a union, or wish to form one, give us a call and we will do what we can to assist you.

Other Activities

Women who are interested may attend EWW's regular monthly meetings. Sometimes we invite guest speakers to maintain alliances with other groups, and to continue our education. We sponsor forums and workshops to publicize issues missed by the mainstream media, as well as to educate ourselves and others. Through all our work we encourage women to organize and to recognize the strength in our unity. Through organization, our voices are more powerful against the injustices faced by all women.