

Trade deal to leave women jobless

by Eleanor Brown and Michelle Lalonde

HALIFAX (CUP) — A free trade deal will leave thousands of Canadian women jobless and could allow American companies to dictate the future of day-care services in this country, according to a Toronto-based journalist.

"Women will be disproportionately affected by free trade,

and it has to do with area in which they work. In the manufacturing sector they work in industries which are extremely vulnerable. And most women are concentrated in just a few industries, like textiles and clothing. These industries are going to take a real beating with free trade," said Marjorie Cohen, a professor at the Ontario Insti-

tute for Studies in Education (OISE).

Cohen said the October 3 deal was "Worse than anybody

deal "worse than anyone expected"

expected in their wildest imaginations. The disputes settlement mechanism is just absurd."

Cohen added that there have been no convincing signs that the Mulroney government will introduce adequate job adjust-

ment programmes to address the retraining needs of displaced workers.

Women make up 75 per cent of the labour force in the already-ailing textiles industry, Cohen said. Many of the workers are female immigrants, have less education than the Canadian average, or are older women with children.

"Women are not at all well-served by the training programmes which exist. They are designed for male-type jobs. Most women who will lose their jobs will not have the education or the experience they will need to get into retraining programs. Immigrant women and poor women cannot be retrained easily for these high-tech jobs which (free-trade advocates) say will become available. It just won't happen."

Cohen said an agreement between the two countries will jeopardize the delivery of social services. Even decisions on day care will be taken out of Canadian hands, she charged.

American firms, including large, private day-care companies, are eager to set show in this country, Cohen said. But they are upset over what they perceive to be unfair subsidies to Canadian businesses. Since Canadian non-profit child care centres are given government subsidies, the American firms will want money too.

"So this whole issue," said Cohen, "which is a great debate now in Canada — over whether you should have profit or non-profit day care — will be completely out of our hands. It will be decided by trade law."

And a free-trade deal could have a devastating impact on jobs in the service sector, which has provided the majority of new employment prospects for women in this century, Cohen said.

"These are very important jobs for women — and they are very seriously under threat."

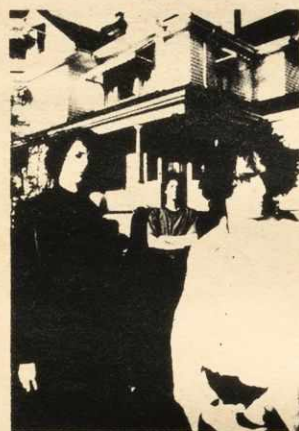
Cohen and three other women were commissioned by the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women (CACSW) to produce three working papers on free trade and its effect on women. While Cohen's paper points to the dangers and disadvantages for women, economist Katie MacMillan said a free trade deal would be beneficial to women as workers and consumers.

"women not well served by training programs"

MacMillan's report concludes, "The more important accomplishment of a free trade agreement would be to give Canadian women the opportunity to leave poor jobs in industries already seriously threatened by world competitive pressures and find new employment and better prospects in growing industries elsewhere in the economy."

"The jobs that these women have and that they don't want to lose seem to be the most horrible jobs," said MacMillan.

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