

international

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WOMEN'S DAY



Candlelight vigil for Pro-Choice Monday night

photo Bruce Cardave

Free trade a wild card for women

by Suzette C. Chan

At this point, confusion is the only certain thing about free trade. But as politicians, economists, and mystified citizens speculate on the net effect on the Canadian economy of a free trade agreement with the United States, there are questions about how it would affect specific job sectors.

The National Action Committee on the Status of Women wonders if free trade may wind up putting women at an economic disadvantage.

"It seems to me," writes NAC Vice-President Marjorie Cohen in an article responding to the Macdonald Commission Report that advocates free trade, "that both the economic and the social policies advocated would worsen women's position in Canada: the economic changes would increase women's unemployment substantially and would actually leave them in a worse position than they are at present."

Cohen, an economist and professor at York University, expects that free trade will adversely affect two industries in which women are heavily employed: the services and manufacturing.

"The manufacturing industry will really lose out, especially manufacturers of clothing and textiles and toys and games," Cohen said in an interview with the Gateway. "If women don't lose jobs altogether, there will be a tremendous downward pressure on wages. Southern states have very low minimum wages and right-to-work legislation. It will be harder for women to unionize."

Cohen believes that the adverse effects free trade may have on women's jobs in manufacturing will spill into the service sector.

"Women will become a smaller portion of the manufacturing labour force (taking into consideration the high-tech revolution) and may be pushed into service ghettos."

Cohen admitted the effects of free trade on the service sector are difficult to guess — "there has been little study about free trade and the service sector" — but said that the de-regulation and possible privatization of the airline industry and perhaps less string-

'The changes could leave women in a worse position than they are now.'

ent restrictions on banking will put women out of jobs.

"Already Canadian firms are having data processing done in the United States. It's estimated that in the past seven years, 180,000 data processing jobs have been imported."

University of Alberta economics professor, Peter Coyte, does not think service jobs will be jeopardized by a new bilateral trade agreement.

"All products can be divided into 'traded' and 'non-traded' products (that is, imported and non-imported goods)," Coyte says. Services are non-traded. He also de-emphasizes the effects of airline de-regulation and possible changes in Canadian banking rules. "The service sector has not as much to lose as it has not as much to gain."

But he and Tom Powrie, a U of A international trade expert, agree that the Canadian manufacturing industry could face hard times.

"The pessimistic view of free trade is that U.S. production would put Canadian manufacturers out of business," Powrie says. "The first to suffer would be manufacturing. The service sector is relatively sheltered."

Coyte adds that resource industries will bear the brunt of free trade. "If you view it that way, free trade will have not as much effect on women as it will on men. But the idea behind free trade is that free trade is good. It may benefit other sectors, but it will be beneficial overall to all Canadians."

Marjorie Cohen sees free trade as being detrimental to all Canadians and advocates

action against it.

"We're very pleased about the coalitions that have organized against free trade," she says. "The Coalition Against Free Trade (based in Toronto) is made up of labour unions, senior citizens, arts organizations like ACTRA, women's groups, and others."

The coalition will be sponsoring a protest in Massey Hall on Mar. 17, the anniversary of the Shamrock Summit at which Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and President Ronald Reagan decided to go ahead with negotiations for a new Canada-U.S. trade agreement. "It's organized by the arts community and will feature Ericka Ritter, Sylvia Tyson, the Royal Canadian Air Farce, David Suzuki, Bishop Remi de Roux, and me." Cohen says similar events are in the works or have been presented in Newfoundland, B.C., Saskatchewan, Ottawa, and Quebec.

"Ordinary people are mobilizing," says Cohen. "This government responds to pressure. If there's enough of this kind of thing, they'll listen."

Women's collective not 'traditional'

by Anne Watson

After almost two years of searching, several Edmonton women's groups have found a satisfactory location for their operations.

"It seemed to fit," said Amanda Le Rougetel, office manager for the Alberta Status of Women Action Committee (ASWAC). ASWAC is one of four groups located at the Women's Building, 10055-110th Street, formerly the St. John's Ambulance Building.

ASWAC, a provincial group concerned with public education on women's issues, shares the address with the Edmonton Working Women's Association, which deals with the issues facing Edmonton women in the work force, Hecate's Players, a feminist theatre group, Womonspace, a group concerned with issues in the lesbian community and the Friends of Ames, a women's group interested in the welfare of women and children in war-torn El Salvador.

Before the present site was found,

women's groups in Edmonton had been "working in isolation" said Le Rougetel.

"Given the finances of most women's groups, no single group could afford the rent in a prime location. We formed the collective to share rent and resources and thus benefit together."

The building has only one official staff member for administrative purposes. Each group is diverse and functions separately outside the sharing of rent and resources. Due to this diversity the Women's Building is not, in Le Rougetel's opinion, a "traditional" women's center, but she feels there is a definite need for the services of the building.

The building has abundant office space as well as a large number of classroom type areas suitable for the exhibits, workshops, and lectures given by the groups.

Although the Women's Building has only been in operation since late fall, 1985, it is already putting the facilities to work for Edmonton women taking a major role in the

celebration of International Women's Week.

In honour of the first day of this special week, the building will be involved in a march to the legislature Saturday, March 8 at noon, followed by four concurrent workshops at the building. The theme of the march and the workshops will be "Bread and Roses."

"We want bread and roses too!" was the cry in the 1912 strike by women woolen workers in Massachusetts. The slogan has since symbolized freedom for women.

The workshops include the topics 'Bread: Daycare and Equal Pay and Roses: Women's Culture' and 'Popular Education'. Later at 8 p.m., an evening social will be held at the building. More information on all events can be obtained by calling 434-3073. Child care can be arranged by calling 465-7155.

The Women's Building is open Monday to Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Sunday, noon to 4 p.m.