

# Looking Back and Moving Forward

The day a young man of 26 decided that the feminists must be punished for opening access to university education for women, who would have thought that this decision was going to cost fourteen young women engineers their lives?

It is perhaps time that we put our energies into **concrete action** rather than into

moral condemnation of such acts. To sigh over violence is one thing, to find the proper solutions to correct the situation is an enormous challenge.

If violence has become ever present and its victims numerous, the latter are more often than not forgotten and their rights trampled upon, whereas the killers get all the

legal protection, they are glorified, immortalized by the press, by literature and by the movie industry.

The December 6th, 1989 tragedy has cost the lives of fourteen women. These young women had built dreams, they were ambitious and talented. Blossoms they were, mowed down before they were allowed to fulfil

these dreams.

Our mandate is twofold: The first ensures the continuation of the December 6th commemoration in the framework of the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women; whereas the second focuses on prevention of all forms of violence and in particular, the violence directed

to women and children.

The parents of the December 6th victims would wish that the tragedy never be forgotten, lest it may repeat itself. We remember so as to learn from past experiences and take corrective measures for the future.

— the December 6th  
Victims Foundation Against  
Violence

WOMEN'S ISSUES FROM ACROSS CANADA

## Resisting violence against women is a challenge in Harris' Ontario

BY MEG MURPHY

TORONTO (CUP) — On Dec. 6, 1989, Marc Lepine walked into a university and killed 14 young women for being women — shot point blank.

His act speaks to many underlying issues in our society regarding women and the hatred and contempt men often feel towards them, as evidenced by the rapes and domestic beatings which are a daily fact of life for women across Canada.

In Ontario, the provincial government is worsening this violent climate and women are becoming more vulnerable to abusive relationships because the Tories have cut funding from shelters for battered women, legal aid, and welfare benefits, says a report recently released by a provincial group which represents 97 such shelters in Ontario.

Eileen Morrow serves as lobby coordinator at the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses, the umbrella organization

that recorded the wellbeing of its member groups and came out with the report.

"I think the [Progressive Conservative government] has really sealed the fate of a lot of women who needed the supports that were in place, as inadequate as they already were, to get out of a violent situation."

The Tories have trimmed the budget on emergency shelters by 5 per cent and eliminated all provincial funding for programs in second stage shelters for women and children recovering from domestic abuse.

These second-stage shelters have now become more like temporary housing units with very few hands-on staff. Security has also suffered at these facilities as a result of the cuts.

Many recovering women have found this low level of security alarming because they often use the service for the first few months after leaving a violent partner, during a time when women are often stalked, har-

assed, assaulted, and murdered by ex-partners, says the report.

The province has arranged for \$153 million to be pulled from Legal Aid over the next three years and have cut 21.6 per cent out of welfare recipients' monthly assistance cheques.

"If you can't feed your children and you can't find affordable housing and you are sitting in a shelter because you can't afford the legal fees to reclaim your possessions and you can't go home to a violent situation, you begin to feel pretty hopeless and helpless," said Morrow.

The Ministry Responsible for Women's Issues, though refusing to be interviewed, did provide, by fax, a formal response which they compiled to respond to the gist of the report.

"The government presently spends approximately \$100 million for programs and services including shelters, counselling support in sexual assault centres, and sexual assault treatment centres for women who have been victims of violence.

"While government cutbacks are affecting everyone, we have maintained support for commu-

nity safety, which includes violence against women prevention programs and services," reads the statement.

But Morrow says the cutbacks to emergency shelters for battered women and second-stage shelters, combined with the poverty many of these women are experiencing as a result of welfare rollbacks, have left them in dire straits.

A woman, who used the name Phyllis, offered a personal testimony in the report of her experience during the year after the Mike Harris government implemented the cuts.

"I think the worst came when my son reached his thirteenth birthday this September — usually a time of great excitement at the entering of teens. I could not even afford a birthday card, let alone a gift. Ordinarily, we would have said, 'Okay, we can't afford it this week so we'll celebrate next week.' But not this time. I will never forget the look on my son's face, nor will the pain of it ever go away," she remembered.

Phyllis has left an abusive husband and is now raising two sons on \$828 a month. She talks of her shame about not having enough money to cook them a decent meal and how she cringes when she must bring them to the local food bank for meals.

She has stopped going to counselling about the abuse she has survived because the service has been cut.

"Each of us are flowing deeper into despair and hopelessness. I used to tell my children, 'It will get better, you'll see, we're over the worst,' and they would look at me, nod and seem to agree.

"Now, they just look at me. They don't disappoint me by saying, 'No, it won't, mom,' but I see it in their eyes. But frankly, I know I don't say it with any conviction anymore, because I don't really think it will."

Cuts to social assistance were the primary factor leading women to stay in an abusive relationship for 66 per cent of the respondents surveyed for the report. They were also the major reason why women who did leave a scene of domestic violence decided to return to an abusive partner, with 63 per cent citing cuts as the deciding factor in their decision to go back.

Morrow adds that rationalizing away this economic violence against women by pointing to places or times where conditions are worse than Ontario today is a lame means of avoiding the issue.

"This is not a race to the bottom," she said. "This is a human rights issue. You cannot argue about who is closer to death."

## Date rape pill pops up at McGill

BY M-J MILLOY

MONTREAL (CUP) — Brad Millson knew it wasn't just beer that was making his girlfriend see giant neon daisies as big as traffic lights.

They had been at Gert's, a McGill University campus bar, for only half an hour when his girlfriend started stumbling, slurring her speech and feeling ill — all the signs of a big night at the bar.

"I took her outside to get a taxi and she couldn't even stand. She lay down on the pavement and that's when she started hallucinating."

It was only two days later — after she had woken up the next morning with no memory of the night before — that Millson realized that she must have been slipped a spiked beer.

"I was reading about this new drug in Vice [a local alternative weekly] and I realised that all the symptoms they were talking about happened to my girlfriend," he said.

The drug he's referring to is called roofies on the street, but is also known by its commercial name, Rohypnol. Manufactured by Swiss pharmaceutical multinational Hoffman-La Roche, the

drug is prescribed outside of North America for extreme insomnia. It is illegal in Canada and the United States.

On college campuses across the United States it is known by another, more ominous term — "Easy Lay", or the date rape pill.

Rohypnol is chemically related to Valium, but ten times stronger and causes victims to first lose all inhibitions, then black out, and usually lose all memory of the ten to twelve hours it takes to work through their system, according to the American Drug Enforcement Agency.

Because of these effects, it has become a popular way for people, usually men, to drug and then sexually assault women on American college campuses. This is what Millson suspects was attempted at Gert's last week, since his girlfriend had just accepted a beer from a stranger.

Another woman was approached that night by the same man. She suffered the same symptoms as Millson's girlfriend, according to McGill's Sexual Assault Centre.

Millson is worried that this drug might spread to other campuses.

"If you want to attack someone like this, it's the perfect drug,"

he said.

The first reported case of Rohypnol use in Canada occurred in Ottawa. The Ottawa police immediately released a report on the incident to law enforcement agencies across the country.

"It is not on the streets of Metro, or if it is it's not in any quantity," said Constable Gary Martin of the Halifax Regional Police Department.

Martin says that though the drug is reportedly available in metro high schools, the drug squad, who are keeping a look out for the drug "everyday," have not turned up any hard evidence of its use.

It is Martin's feeling that some people are selling a drug that they are identifying as Rohypnol, but in fact is some other substance.

Barbara Timmins, the external coordinator of the Sexual Assault Centre, is not sure of the best way to respond to the attack. However, she is concerned that the drug may soon spread to McGill, and believes that some response is called for.

"Awareness is always the key in these situations, particularly when someone wakes up the next day and doesn't realize what might have happened," she said.

## Sexual harassment policy still a no go

BY MARTHA MACDONALD

MONTREAL (CUP) — It has been 10 years since McGill University first attempted to introduce a comprehensive sexual harassment policy, but it could be years before the university has one that works.

The university will have a full policy only after a new "disciplinary procedures policy" becomes official and the sexual harassment policy is revised for conflicts.

To correct procedural weaknesses in McGill's 10-year-old sexual harassment policy, the McGill Association of University Teachers and McGill lawyers have developed a new disciplinary procedures policy.

Five years in the making, the new policy still must clear four separate levels of bureaucracy before becoming official.

Jacob Kalff, president of the teachers association, feels the

discussion "has gone on far too long." He says the association is "really keen to get this out of the way. We will be very happy if (the disciplinary procedures policy) is passed through (Senate this fall)."

To assist complainants, members of the university's sexual assault centre created an Accompaniment Team last year. Trained volunteers educate themselves on McGill's sexual violence policies to offer assistance to anyone trying to navigate the bureaucracy.

According to Stephanie Dutrizac, coordinator of the Accompaniment Team, "We created the Accompaniment Team in response to the inadequacies of the system."

She feels the absence of a comprehensive sexual harassment policy "is a reflection of the university. It simply doesn't want to deal with (sexual harassment)."