

Ring around the parliament

by Jeff Harrington

HALIFAX (CUP) - Women's groups from across Canada hope to encircle Parliament with a giant banner Oct. 9, to protest federal cuts to women's programs.

"Cutting funding to women's groups and neglecting women's needs and concerns are unacceptable to women. It is time the government took us and our issues seriously," said Stella Lord, Nova Scotia coordinator of the banner project.

This spring, the federal government cut \$1.2 million in operational funding for 78 women's centres. The centres provide information, referral services and public education program, develop community projects, and give women a "home away from home."

After widespread protests, the government agreed to fund the centres for another year, as a "transitional measure".

But the \$400,000 chopped from grants to three women's publica-

tions and five national women's organizations was not restored.

Outside Parliament, women will join together over 100 banners made by groups from every province and territory. The protest will coincide with the third meeting of Commonwealth ministers responsible for the status of women, Oct. 9-12 in Ottawa.

Organizers hope to "wake up Ottawa" to what they call its broken commitment to equality and justice.

Lord said the government promised in 1987 to continue operational funding when it endorsed the Secretary of State's "Fairness in Funding" task force.

The government committed itself to maintaining its level of funding of women's programs, enhancing their mandate and developing "sensitive public policy on women's issues," she said. Funding has since been cut by 25 per cent.

While the federal government says the cuts are part of fiscal restraint that can override any policy, women's groups say the relatively minor amount of money involved proves women are not a priority for the Tory government.

"This government has clearly demonstrated that as long as the corporate elite is happy, everything is hunky-dory," said Theresa Walsh, a member of a St. John's women's centre.

The federal government has indicated it may give the centres some money next year, if the provinces agree to share the cost.

Secretary of State official Len Westerberg said negotiations with the provinces are "ongoing".

Ottawa contends "direct services" such as health and education programs are areas of provincial jurisdiction.

Some provinces, such as Que-

bec and Ontario, already help pay for direct services, but debt-ridden provinces like Nova Scotia and Newfoundland are less likely to foot the bills.

And women's groups say the important political or "advocacy" work needed to address the causes and long-term solutions to the problems of inequality remains the federal government's responsibility.

Stella Lord, of the banner project, said women's centres do their crucial work on a "shoestring" budget, relying heavily on volunteers. The government is getting its money's worth, she said.

"The government should be glad to fund us because community-initiated and sponsored programs are far more effective in creating real change for women than the government can hope to achieve with all its glossy publications," Lord wrote in an unpublished letter to The Globe and Mail in August.

Some of those "glossy" publications have also come in for criticism.

Bonnie Slade, national coordinator of the banner protest, said kits the government has produced for the Commonwealth conference present the situation of women as "exemplary" by quoting statistics that show women live longer than men and "are better educated than ever before."

"They completely gloss over the problems women face and present it as if we've already arrived," she said.

De Wolff said although the kits do mention some negative statistics, they often need to be elaborated on.

"They mention that 82 per cent of single parents are women. They don't mention almost all of them are below the poverty line," said De Wolff.

Gov't cuts

by Jeff Harrington

HALIFAX (CUP) - While cuts to women's centres caught the media's attention this spring, not much was said about the effects of cutbacks to national women's organizations and publications.

Here's a brief rundown of what got cut:

National Organizations

Five national women's organizations suffered funding cuts this year. They were the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIA), the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC), the Women's Research Centre (WRC) and the Canadian Association for Women in Sports (CAAWS).

The first four lost 15 per cent of their government funding while CAAW's funding was cut entirely.

NAC is an umbrella organization of 500 women's organizations. It is in the second year of a three-year cutback that will see its funding fall from \$600,000 two years ago to \$300,000 next year.

"I'm very worried that all equality groups are in danger of being cut off by the Secretary of State," said NAC director Alice De Wolff.

CRIA promotes and disseminates research for, by and about women. For example, it recently produced a reproduction technology kit intended to promote discussion prior to a royal commis-

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