

Shootings "a blessing in disguise"

by Jeff Harrington

The Dec. 6 massacre of 14 women "may be a blessing in disguise", a prominent graduate of L'Ecole Polytechnique of the University of Montreal said Monday night.

Claudette MacKay-Lassonde, founder of the group Women in Science and Engineering, told about 175 people attending a forum on violence against women that the tragedy has pushed engineers "to the top of the public agenda". She said being in the spotlight might help avert a looming shortage of engineers.

"I feel some small measure of the horror of that day," said MacKay-Lassonde, a director of Northern Telecom.

"But we cannot turn back the clock. The onus is on us to create something positive, something useful out of this tragedy."

Her remarks surprised many in the audience, who did not expect to hear about "the larger issues of global competitiveness".

King's College student Elizabeth Kilvert told MacKay-Lassonde her description of the shootings was "rather shocking".

"It almost seems as if you're using the massacre instead of seeing it as a greater social problem, or dealing with violence against women — now engineers have a forum for promoting their

trade," said Kilvert, a member of the King's Ad Hoc Committee on Men, Women and violence.

Another woman told MacKay-Lassonde her rationale for getting women involved in engineering was "dangerous".

"It sounds like the same thing as all along. We've been a labour reserve pool, and when you need us, you pull us out," she said.

When the applause died down, MacKay-Lassonde admitted she has similar concerns.

"However, (maximizing the labour pool) is a language business understands," she said.

"Maybe we should be defining our own language," replied another woman, to more applause.

MacKay-Lassonde said the three per cent of the 135,000 engineers in Canada who are women "cannot make a major difference" if they are "isolated".

"If we talk at all about women in engineering, we are immediately seen as feminists," she said.

In an interview after the discussion, she said women engineers have to work within the system, with engineers.

"It's bad enough we have to live up to the expectations of the people in the profession. If we have to be heroes, by declaring openly that we are feminists, that's too much to ask," she said.



MacKay-Lassonde said if a feminist is someone who believes in social, political and economic equality of the sexes, then she is a feminist.

"But until it (the word 'feminist') becomes a gender-neutral

word to the extent that both women and men (use it to describe themselves), its imputed meaning will be the equivalent of the "rowdy engineer", she said.

MacKay-Lassonde was the keynote speaker at the forum, which

was part of the Week of Reflection on violence against women organized by the universities in the Metro area. Other speakers included sociologist Blye Frank of Acadia University and Barbara Harris, Dalhousie's Status of Women co-ordinator.

Panty raids spur anti-sexism policy

WATERLOO, Ont. (CUP) — Public outcry over "panty raids" at Wilfrid Laurier University has prompted the university to take action against sexism on campus.

Laurier president John Weir recently announced the start of a program to promote positive gender relations.

"The panty raids prompted us to review a number of our policies and, where appropriate, changes will be made," Weir said.

The announcement follows the recommendations of a joint faculty, student and administration committee's report, released recently.

Weir said the measures will include:

- A standing committee on gender relations, appointed by the president

- A review of employment equity at the university

- Hiring a "Human Rights and Employment Equity Officer" to develop programs to promote equity, tolerance and fairness

- A draft policy on sexual harassment, to be brought before the board of governors for approval before the end of 1990

- A style-sheet for gender-neutral language

- Emphasis on sex and sexually transmitted diseases during orientation

- An attempt to increase the number of women employees in counselling, security and housing services

- A screening procedure for posters and publications on campus

Women "disadvantaged" in engineering faculties

by Jane Anson

MONTREAL (CUP) — Gender equality is a myth in the engineering faculty, the president of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women told Concordia students and faculty recently.

Glenda Simms also said women's acceptance into the engineering faculty was no indication or guarantee of equal treatment.

"Despite the many and tangible gains [women] have made, they are still in a disadvantaged position," Simms said.

Statistics Canada figures show one in eight engineering students are women, an increase from one in 10 in 1985. But that's not enough for mechanical engineering professor Jaan Saber.

"The enrolment of women in engineering is not normal," he said. "Normal is 50 per cent."

Saber called for the elimination of sexist posters, literature, and

"The enrolment of women in engineering is not normal."

textbooks from the engineering faculty to create a healthier environment for women.

"What the women say they feel may be terribly hard for us to

acknowledge," he said.

A fourth-year mechanical engineering student, Terrence Knee, said faculty could add courses like women's studies and philosophy to its curriculum to raise "the awareness of its students."

Engineering and computer science student council president Dawn Wiseman said inequality doesn't exist in the engineering department.

"There is not a problem between male and female students [in engineering]," she said.

Two Concordia students took the engineering student paper to the university's disciplinary board last year for an issue that hurled homophobic and sexist abuse at them.

The editors were assessed fines and forced to do community work.

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