

# Working Women fight labour laws

by Linda Atchison

With the recent rash of strikes in Alberta, labour laws have become a target of criticism in the media and the public. Edmonton Working Women (EWW) is dissatisfied with some of the provisions of the Employment Standards Act. To ensure that concerns of women in the work force are addressed, EWW is preparing a brief to present to the Labour Legislation Review Committee.

The committee, headed by Labour Minister Ian Reid, will begin hearings in December to fully review Alberta labour legislation.

EWW feels that the Employment Standards Act, which sets minimum standards in Alberta, does little to protect women in the work force.

Edmonton lawyer Chris Farkas, who is preparing the brief, says that the Act does not contain sufficient remedies for workers who have complaints, nor does it sufficiently protect part-time and domestic workers.

Farkas states the fact that workers can be fired for any reason as long as they are given sufficient notice or pay in lieu of notice. If an employee is fired without notice, their only recourse under the Act is to claim the money they should have earned had they been given enough notice. The Act cannot force employers to give them their job back. If the worker took the employer to court, the legal fees would most likely exceed the amount they are claiming.

Another problem cited by Farkas is that there is no guarantee in the Act that an employee won't be fired for making a complaint. The Labour Relations Act provides this protection, but since many women work in occupations that are non-unionized (less than 30% of women working in Alberta belong to unions), they often cannot benefit from it. These women must rely on the Employment Standards Act for protection.

EWW is also concerned that part-time employees, many of whom are women, are given fewer benefits than full-time employees. They may also need to work at two or three jobs in order to support themselves. Thus they may be working the equivalent of split shifts in full-time jobs which normally violates the Act.

"There has to be some way of

encouraging employers not to go in the direction of hiring more part-time workers," said Farkas.

Domestic workers who live and work in private dwellings are exempt from almost all protection. Employers of domestic workers are not bound by any regulations other than they must pay workers and give them the same notice of termination given to non-domestic

workers.

There are no provisions for things such as overtime, vacations, hours of rest, and so on.

"In other words, these workers basically have no rights," says Farkas. She added that, once again, most of them are women.

Finally, according to EWW, the minimum wage of \$3.80 an hour is inadequate. Two-thirds of all min-

imum wage workers are women and EWW feels that this is insufficient for many women who may be supporting not only themselves, but their children on these wages.

EWW will be presenting their recommendations to the Labour Legislation Review Committee on December 12th.

## Center opens in spring

# Pigs provided with place

by Jini Patel

Construction has begun on a \$1.3 million Swine Research Facility at the Edmonton Research Station (University Farm).

The new facility will replace the oldest of the Farm swine facilities which was in poor condition and in need of modernization and expansion.

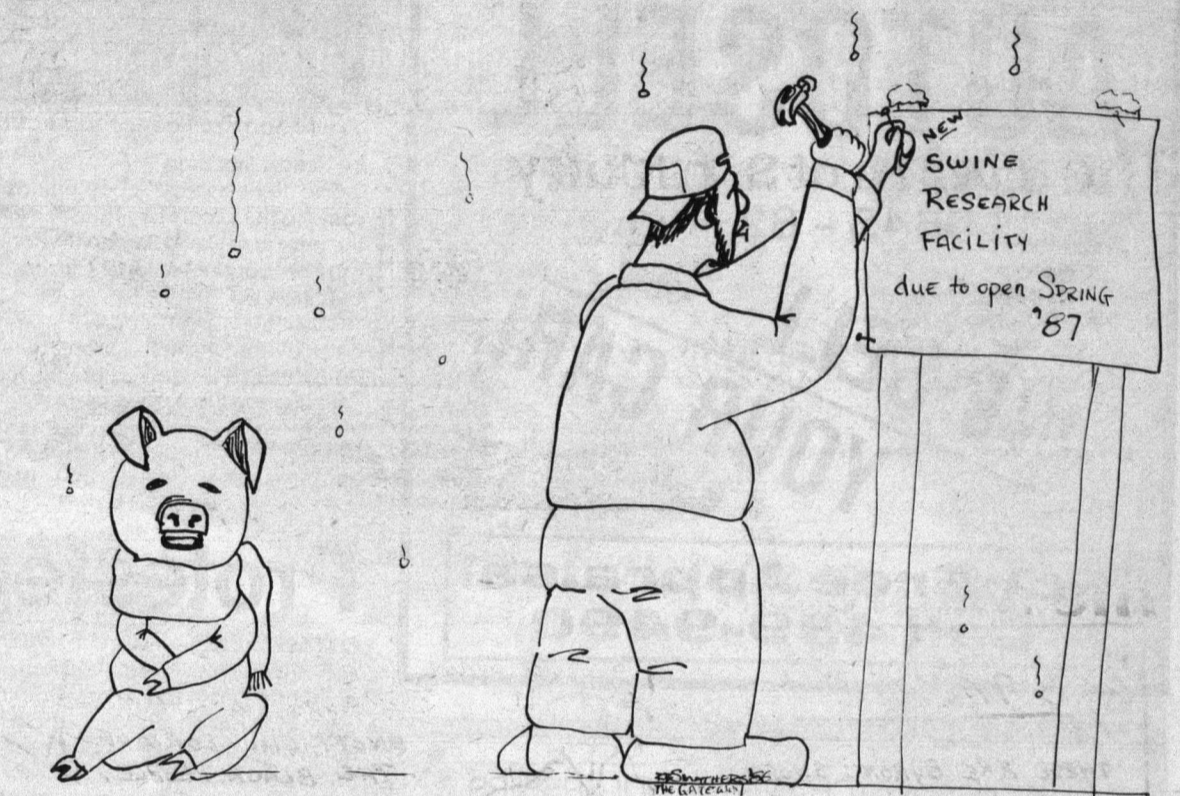
The Alberta Pork Producers Marketing Board (APPMB) has contributed \$310,000 to the facility. This was matched under the Alberta Advanced Education matching grant program, as was an additional \$100,000 of miscellaneous donations.

The department of Advanced Education and the University also donated \$200,000 each towards the facility.

The facility will continue research on swine nutrition, development and production.

According to Frank Aherne, Chair of the Department of Animal Science, a main objective of the research facility is to evaluate feed. For example, if a new variety crop is developed, the research facility would evaluate its nutritive value through feeding trials.

"One group is fed the standard protein source. A second group is fed the new protein source." The



two groups are observed and differences between the two recorded.

The facility will house 100 sows,

thus "doubling its capability." However, the facility is still relatively small compared to Saskatoon's research center which houses 300

and Guelph's facility which houses 500 sows.

# American reactor may be the next

VANCOUVER (CUP) — An aging nuclear reactor 300 kilometres south of the B.C. border at Hanford, Washington could become the world's next Chernobyl, according to a Portland activist.

"The reactor is 23 years old and the graphite core is warped and aging," says Joanne Oleksiak, director of the Hanford Clearinghouse.

"It has valves that are so worn away that they look like rusted out scrap metal," she said. "There is

serious concern that this could result in an accident similar to the one at Chernobyl."

Oleksiak said the Hanford reactor has a graphite core, like the one which burned and damaged the fuel rods at the Chernobyl facility April 26. And because of fuel failures, the plant has been shut down six times since January, she said.

Experts at a May 19 federal hearing in Portland criticized both the reactor's graphite core and metallic

uranium fuel as making the plant potentially more dangerous than its Soviet counterpart.

Another major worry was the plant's confinement structure, designed to withstand pressure of only five pounds per square inch, while the Chernobyl facility was made to withstand more than 25, and American commercial reactors commonly call for 60.

An additional strain on the reactor, said Oleksiak, was its modifica-

tion in 1980 to produce nuclear weapons grade plutonium.

And in the period from January 1985 to June 1986 there were 16 "unusual occurrences" at the N reactor. In November 1985, for example, a set of bolts attached to valves in the plant's primary cooling system came loose, rattled through the reactor and were never found.

Oleksiak said the N reactor was one of three plants still operating.

The complex manufactured the plutonium for the Nagasaki bomb and more than 60 per cent of the nation's plutonium since then, she said.

Oleksiak has documented a number of other accidents at the Hanford complex, including the release of plutonium oxide in 1984 and the leak of more than 1,500,000 litres of radioactive fluid during a single spill in the plutonium-uranium separation process in the 1970s.

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