

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S AWARENESS WEEK



Graphic: Laurel Braid

Why March 8?

According to *Ms.* magazine, International Women's Day commemorates the women who staged a protest against low wages, the 12-hour work day, increasing workloads and pay inequality in the New York garment and textile industry on Mar. 8, 1857. But the demonstration was interrupted by police, who arrested some women while others were trampled. Three years later, the women formed their own union.

On Mar. 8, 1908, thousands of women in the industry demonstrated for the same changes in working conditions as well as broader social demands: legislation against child labor and the right of women to vote.

PACSH deals with tricky problem

by Pat Sytnick

During its year of operation the University of Alberta's President's Advisory Committee of Sexual Harassment (PACSH) appears to be providing needed intervention and education services to a cross-section of the university community.

The committee was set up to investigate complaints of sexual harassment and increase awareness of the issue through public education.

According to chairperson Leslie Bella, in its first full year of operation (1983-84), PACSH dealt with "about a dozen" complaints from the four groups it has the authority to deal with: graduate and undergraduate students, academic staff and non-academic staff.

The committee has two methods of resolving sexual harassment complaints. Upon first contacting PACSH people are given information about the variety of ways they can deal with the problem. If they decide to follow an informal route they may write a letter to the person bothering them and the committee is not involved further.

Persons wishing to take further action can ask PACSH to investigate the complaint. The committee then conducts a series of hearings to determine if harassment has in fact occurred and to secure a resolution both parties are satisfied with. If they conclude that sexual harassment has occurred but are unable to come to a satisfactory resolution they may ask the university president to step in and impose disciplinary action. Even though the committee has the authority to recommend that disciplinary actions be taken, that action is rarely used. According to Bella "the vast majority of people choose to handle their complaint informally because of the emotional costs involved in a formal hearing." In the 1983-84 year, only two of the twelve complaints handled by PACSH reached the formal complaint stage. All twelve were resolved.

Defining what is and is not sexual harassment is tricky. According to one of the committee's reports, "instances of

alleged sexual harassment are seldom tidy and may overlap with issues of equal opportunity, racial bias, etc." The university accepts the definitions of sexual harassment adopted by the Alberta Human Rights Commission and the Canadian Association of University Teachers.

Essentially these definitions state that sexual advances become harassment when a person is made to feel he or she should submit to such conduct to protect his or her employment or academic status. But the definition used by the committee goes further and holds that harassment can occur even if threats are not made. According to Bella many of the cases dealt with involved situations where people were put in "hostile, intimidating or offensive" academic or work environments.

According to Bella the committee has received complaints from and about every group on campus, indicating that "the

issue goes far beyond the stereotypical situation where a female student is harassed by a male teacher." Proof of this comes from Bella's statement that not all their complaints were heterosexual in nature and some of the complainants were male. While she acknowledged that sexual harassment is most likely to occur in relationships where one person has more power than the other, Bella stressed their complaints do not just come from students and employees. So far, the committee has dealt with several which involved people who were peers. Related to this, Bella said she thinks it's important for people to understand that sexual harassment involves more than just a desire for sex. Ultimately she believes "it is a power issue where someone feels helpless, and somebody else uses power to get what they want."

Students, staff and faculty can contact PACSH by phoning 432-TALK (8255).

U of A Women's Centre changes image

Centre 'not radical'

by Ann Grever

The U of A Women's Centre is looking toward the positive side of women's issues this year.

Women's Centre spokesperson Karen Hurley says she "is tired of always fighting ... trying to improve things by looking at the bad side."

This is quite a change in attitude from the original Women's Centre that formed in 1981 in direct protest to a particularly sexist Engineering Week. The change is exemplified by Hurley's own attitude toward engineers. "Engineers are a group browbeat by what they've done in the past. On the Building Services Policy Committee they realized they had to clean up their act ...

and they compromised. For example, by including an educational forum with the skit nights ... something I give them credit for."

Even the issues today concerning women are less radical and "most men realize [their] importance." For example, the centre is concerned with issues that include fighting sexual harassment, streamlining in educational programs, pornography, and fighting for more daycare, for pro-choice, for equal pay for equal work, for inclusive language, textbooks and lectures and for campus safety.

The Women's Centre is also active in providing "networking" channels, something like the "male buddy-buddy" system, to provide female business and social contacts. One of the services the centre offers is reference files to various groups so "we can refer women to different doctors, lawyers, etc."

Other services include a drop-in centre, a resource centre with a periodical section and the "odd social event to keep us sane." The center also encourages members to serve on various campus committees that want a feminist viewpoint.

Unfortunately, the capability of the centre to work as a drop-in centre was severely hindered when the Students' Union moved them from the second floor into the basement of SUB.

"It was insulting," says Hurley. "But we are now working with the Academic Women's Association for extra space. They and other groups (such as UAYS and WISEST) have been very supportive."

While the reaction of most groups to the Women's Centre is positive, the centre has been avoiding potential conflicts with SPERM, the Society for the Protection of Equal Rights for Men.

"We are trying to avoid interaction that could only cause us conflict. The group is spear-headed by an opinionated group of men not willing to discuss anything."

Hurley quoted Ferral Christiansen, the professor who accredited the group, as having said that anything women say against pornography is rhetoric. "He writes things off as not worth thinking about."

But the Women's Centre members mainly want "to promote ourselves as normal women and to be as accessible as possible," says Hurley. "We are not a radical group ... just normal students who are feminists and who are maybe a bit bonkers."

Women workers need action

by Siobhan Avery

The female component of the work force has dramatically increased, yet women remain concentrated in certain sectors: those which pay poorly with few benefits, such as service, clerical and retail work. The economic recession has decreased what little job security there is and increased the use of labour on a part-time basis. Women's wages are decreasing in proportion to men's: in Alberta, women make 47 cents for every dollar made by a man.

Employers benefit from the isolation of workers from each other as the latter are less able to defend themselves when their rights are violated. Women workers are usually more isolated than men. Unions have traditionally operated as male-dominated establishments with little concern for women's issues. Many women bear a double workload as they work in the home and care for children before and after employed hours at work.

For these reasons Edmonton Working Women was founded three years ago by women who wanted to work together with other women to change the unfair treatment they suffer within the labour force. In March, 1984, they sponsored a conference which was very successful in reaching women in the lowest paid sectors of the economy. The conference focused on the concerns of most working women, including lack of daycare facilities, job lay-offs, lack of job security, wage cuts and increased work

loads. Rather than bringing in "experts", the women spoke for themselves about their experiences, ideas and solutions. The discussions showed clearly that the labour rights of women in Alberta were being abused.

It is on this basis that Edmonton Working Women is organizing and running a campaign with three major goals. The first is to create awareness in women of what legal rights they do have. Thus begun the operation of the Working Women's Hotline, a phone system through which women can get advice and support for their concerns. By working together in this way, women become educated about their rights and what action can be taken when these rights are denied or abused.

Secondly, positive action must be taken to improve labour laws and the enforcement of these laws. Information received through the Hotline will be compiled with particular areas of concern noted, to be used in lobbying the government. Increasing the size and participation of Edmonton Working Women's membership in order to pressure for further change is the third major goal.

The political strength of women workers increases as they become aware of their labour rights and as they organize to work together for change. Readers wishing further information or willing to volunteer for the Working Women's Hotline may call 432-1259.