



The Ontario Committee on the Status of Women

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COUNTDOWN TO EQUALITY

"Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by a State on account of sex."

In mid-October of this year, 4,000 women met in Washington, D.C. at the 1981 National Organization for Women (NOW). The conference, titled "Countdown to Equality", focused on the Equal Rights Amendment ("the ERA"), the first section of which is quoted above. I was fortunate to be able to attend the Conference as an observer and I shall present herein a few thoughts arising from the "experience."

In Canada, women across the country have just finished one year of intense activity focussing on attempts to ensure that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms contains the strongest possible proscriptions against gender-based discrimination in any guise. One year ... and we are just beginning to assess what impact those efforts will have on both law and practice, and on the organized women's movement. The ERA has been in issue since 1923; it was authored by Alice Paul after women won the right to vote. In February of 1970, twenty leaders of NOW (then a mere three years old) disrupted a Senate subcommittee meeting to demand a hearing for the ERA. Since that time NOW has spearheaded the campaign for ratification.

In doing so, NOW has used old strategies, and devised some new ones. One of the most interesting is the ERA Missionary Project. It is modelled on the Mormon Church's missionary program; individual members of NOW, wherever they may live normally, are sent to targeted unratified states to do house-to-house canvassing. They started in Utah, the heartland of Mormon Church.

The recruitment of full-time activists for long and short term projects is an important part of the ERA Countdown Campaign. Members of NOW have been asked to, and are, changing their lives for the ERA. The strength and commitment of the NOW membership was wonderful to watch at this critical time.

One would fail to comprehend the impact which the ERA campaign has had on NOW if one concentrated on discrete strategies. In order to win ratification, NOW has had to become, in effect, a political party. It has to show recalcitrant politicians in unratified states that the majority of their constituents want the ERA and it has to show that they will be defeated unless they support the ERA. It has had to become a real political force. Whatever happens to the ERA, those skills will not be wasted. NOW is already looking ahead to the congressional and state elections to be held in 1982.

NOW's political strength is being tested not just by the ERA, but also by the pervasiveness of New Right policies and practices. NOW and the New Right are not strangers; the New Right did not begin with the 1980 election of President Ronald Regan. According to NOW, parts of the New Right have been organized to fight the ERA since at least the mid-1970's. The New Right forces did not take much of an interest in the ERA until the settlement of the equal pay case against American Telephone and Telegraph put a dollar value on equality; corporate America then took an interest. NOW, like all women's groups in the United States, is currently fighting the New Right advances on a broad front of issues.

It was clear at the Conference that women in Canada and the United States have many common interest and concerns ... reproductive freedom, pay equity, child care, lesbian rights. We also have differences, particularly with respect to our

traditions and political processes. I think that, at the very least, we should be aware of NOW's successes (and failures). We have some hard thinking to do ourselves and some detailed comparisons might be productive, not to say exciting.

Beth Atcheson

SUB-COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

THE CONSTITUTION

The November 5th accord of the first Ministers raised the possibility of losing the hardwon equality and rights and freedoms sections in the Charter of Rights. Under the accord an override could have been applied on these sections by any province. Between November 5th and passage of the Charter women fought for and won the removal of the override from Section 28 -the basic men and women are equal clause. Our voice was strong right across the country from groups and individuals yet we won only a partial victory. The override can still be applied to Equality Rights (Section 15), Fundamental Freedoms, and Legal Rights Sections.

We must continue to press for a strong charter that will guarantee rights for all Canadians and will not jeopardized those rights through possible overrides.

Constitutional change is obviously going to require ongoing vigilance and work if women's rights are to be protected. Patriotism is just the first step in the process.

WOMEN AND PENSIONS: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

On October 17, the O.C.S.W. in co-operation with NAC's Charitable and Educational Trust, co-sponsored a workshop on Pensions for Women. Heather Laing organized the conference for the O.C.S.W. and worked with Lynne Sullivan, Jean Wood, Beth Atcheson and Birgid O'Reilly on the O.C.S.W.'s share of the program.

Seventy women attended the day long session. Jill Stocker of the Canada Life and Health Insurance Association provided an overview of the pension system. Lynne Sullivan and Jean Wood explained the short comings of the system for women; related the need for better pensions to the need for equal pay for work of equal value; and, suggested what women's groups should lobby for in any pension reform. Marie Corbett, Counsel to the Haley Commission, vigorously argued for early vesting as the key to improved pensions. Ross McLellan, MPP for Bellwoods in Toronto and a member of the Select Committee on Pensions pushed for increases to the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) and suggested that the Old Age Security (OAS) be increased to 45% of the Average Industrial Wage (now \$14,000). Christine Forsythe of the Sun Life Assurance Company represented the private pension industry and explained how dramatic increases in the Canada Pension Plan would pull money out of the economy for job creation programs, which, in turn, are often an entree for women to better jobs. Sherry Martin, a Toronto lawyer told the delegates that divorce really complicates the whole pension picture. Lawyers and Judges believe that pensions and survivor benefits are messy and complicated and consequently do not give the needed time and interest to spouse's benefits.

Workshops followed the afternoon session. These were led by Shelley Acheson (O.F.L.) Judy Campbell (Y.W.C.A.) Pauline Green (Toronto Business and Professional Women) and Julia Strickley (Canadian Housewives Register). Suggestions from the workshops included the improvement of pensions for people from abroad who have worked in two countries but lose their pension credits in Canada; consideration of pension plan for housewives; and third more education and seminars on the whole question while the issue of pension reform is being discussed on so many levels.

The NAC Pensions Committee has prepared an excellent kit on pensions. Groups and individuals could use the kit as an educational tool.

Copies of the kit are available from NAC, 40 St. Clair Ave. East, #306, Toronto, Ontario. The O.C.S.W. had financial assistance from the Minister of Health and Welfare in planning the pensions workshop and wish to express gratitude to Lee for her assistance.

EMPLOYMENT

At our first meeting this year we had an open ended discussion on employment issues and decided that Technological Displacement, Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value, Domestic Workers, Day Care, the Human Rights Amendments and Affirmative Action were all areas requiring effort. In some areas, such as Day Care and Domestic Workers, there are other groups we can support in others such as Technological displacement much work needs to be done. A small group will be getting under way in the New Year.

WOMEN AND AGING

This group has been continuing to meet to discuss the preparation of an information kit targeted for pre-retirement aged women. A member was able to attend a very interesting one day consultation on the issue of Women and Aging sponsored by the provincial Ontario Status of Women Council (OSWC). A draft paper covering areas such as income security, pensions, health, housing and other related issues had been circulated before the meeting. OCSW was one of over 50 groups invited to send a representative to discuss these issues and to have an input which would improve the report. The OCSW group interested in this issue prepared a response to this very interesting and worthwhile paper. Recommendations were put forth in Ontario Status of Women Council report, in many areas that OCSW has supported in the past. Anyone interested in receiving a copy of this draft paper could call the Ontario Status of Women Council at 965-1111.

More detailed information about the OCSW group dealing with the topic of Women and Aging, will be in the next report.

GETTING THE WORD OUT THERE ...

Knowing the right answer and getting the right answer are two different things. A small group will be concentrating on strategies for getting the right answer on our issues. More of this next newsletters.

A surfeit of workers is an unknown commodity in the women's movement. We're no exception. If you have the time and the inclination to work on one of our subcommittees please drop us a line or let us know at the next general meeting.

THE REST OF THE NEWS - - -

OCSW has always financed its activities through membership fees and occasionally passing the hat. With increased printing and postage costs we can only continue to do so with increased membership and/or increased funds from our members. Please take a few moments and ask at least two friends to join OCSW.

NATIONAL ACTION COMMITTEE ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN (NAC) MID-YEAR MEETINGS

The NAC mid-year meeting was held in St. John's Newfoundland from October 24-26. Brigid O'Reilly represented OCSW. Saturday's sessions focused on Pensions for Women. Monica Townson covered the pension picture for women in Canada today. Mary Frances Taylor from Treasury Board then spoke on the structure of retirement savings for women followed by Jean Wood and Lynne Sullivan who repeated their Toronto presentation. The Women's Institutes of Newfoundland told the delegates about "The Widows's Handbook", a most useful and sensitive publication which has been produced there. A widow of 84 tells of her struggle to stretch her income from one month to the next; a more compelling example of the inadequate pension schemes in Canada would be difficult to find.

In the afternoon different views of the public and private pension system in Canada were discussed by Denise Bellemaire, Isabel Wegg from the Canadian Life and Health Insurance Assurance and Louise Dulude (a member of the OCSW). Workshop were held to discuss the differing views and the plenary session brought the day to a close.

On Sunday the Status of Women groups of Newfoundland discussed the question of teenage pregnancies and their prevention. Research has been done by public health nurses in the province on the problem and future plans include the spread of more information and clinics on pregnancy prevention.

The Newfoundland women showed us why they have had a reputation for such warm hospitality. None of the delegation left St. John's without tasting screech and cod's tongues and without a few good songs and stories about Newfoundland and the "come-from-aways". We are looking forward to an early return.

MATCH

MATCH is a Canadian Women's Organization formed as an outgrowth of International Women's Year, 1975.

MATCH links Canadian women's group directly with women in developing countries who are working on a local projects. For instance, a women's group in Ontario may raise \$1,000 for child care project in Latin America. The \$1,000 could be matched by \$3,000 of Canadian development and aid money so that, in effect, \$4,000 might be raised. To date twenty projects throughout the developing world have been funded by Canadian women's group. As OCSW member and MATCH Board member Eileen Swinton says, "MATCH helps development money get to the women of the third world". More information on a MATCH group now forming in Toronto is available from Eileen Swinton at 961-8482.

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR DAY CARE COALITION

The Ontario Federation of Labour has organized a coalition of women's groups, unions, teachers and nurses associations, day care providers and other groups interested in the day care field. The OCSW & NAC have joined the coalition. The OFL held hearings across the province in the spring and summer and drafted a brief which was circulated to the coalition for comments. The brief was presented to Premier Davis and members of his cabinet on November 9. Kay Macpherson and Eileen Swinton represented the OCSW at the presentation and joined in lobbying the MPP's after the presentation.

Some highlights of the brief:

- . A taskforce to explore new sources of funding for day care.
- . Several child care services in a neighbourhood for working parents, for student parents, for mothers at home needing short term care and care of children whose parents work in shift.
- . 10,000 new spaces for children in Ontario now.

Copies of the brief are available from André Foucault, P.F.L., 15 Gervais Drive Don Mills, Ontario.

O.C.S.W. SURVEY

Last February and March Naomi Black conducted a survey of OCSW members as part of a research project she was doing. Here is a very brief summary of her findings.

Just under half of the members of the OCSW filled out a short questionnaire about their views relating to the OCSW. Those who answered probably include everyone likely to work actively for the organization; they will be taken here as representative of the members of the OCSW.

The members of the OCSW emerge as a quite homogeneous group, most of them born in Canada and the large majority from Ontario. Most are between 30 and 50 years of age married but with few children in the house, and working full-time in the paid labour force at what are essentially "women's jobs". They are active in women's organizations, responsive to the problems of the majority of women (economics and childcare), and committed to at least a version of feminism. But their view of the world is not confrontational: they are as likely to blame themselves or "society" for women's situation as they are to blame men, and they believe in the democratic process. Their descriptions of the OCSW stress lobbying and education. Their recommendations for the future focus on increasing the OCSW's membership because they think that increased representativeness will mean more influence.

In short, apart perhaps from their labour force participation, the members of the OCSW look pretty much like the members of the women's movement in Canada for the last hundred years. Whether this is thought of as good or as bad will depend on how we assess the impact of the movement in the past, and on what we expect as the likely future for women in Ontario and in Canada.

Some findings of this very unscientific survey are outlined in a short paper. Anyone who wishes more information should please feel free to contact Naomi Black at 966-6406 or 667-2455.

MEMBERSHIP IN THE OCSW

The Ontario Committee on the Status of Women is a Toronto-based voluntary organization formed in 1971 by women wishing to see the implementation of those recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women which fall under provincial jurisdiction (equal pay, social services, education, family law, family planning, etc.). Members of the O.C.S.W. are from a cross-section of backgrounds and occupations.

The Committee holds six general meetings a year. Projects are carried out by subcommittees working on specific issues. Past activities have included taking briefs to government, and educating the public through press conferences or open information meetings. A Newsletter is published three times annually.

Membership Fee -- The OCSW covers its costs solely by means of a fee paid by each member, and other voluntary donations. The membership fee is \$10 per person (\$7 for students, seniors). Donations above the membership dues are always welcome.

To join the OCSW, send the following coupon with \$10 to:

Ontario Committee on the Status of Women
P.O. Box 188, Station Q
Toronto, Ontario M4T 2M1

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