



The Ontario Committee on the Status of Women

Newsletter, May 1982
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MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL TIME!

Attached to the newsletter is a renewal form. Please complete it and return it to us with your cheque before June 1st.

Where does your \$10.00 membership fee go?

- Postage, printing and envelopes for newsletters and meeting notices
- Maintaining a P.O. Box
- Bank Service Charges
- Exchanging 25 newsletters with women's groups across the country
- Membership in N.A.C. and other organizations
- Donations
- Special Events, e.g., the Constitution Campaign

In the past we have carried members who have not paid up for the year. Unfortunately, we shall not be able to do this in the future because of increased costs in maintaining each membership. Many volunteer hours are spent in maintaining our membership records and organizing our programs. In this way we can keep the membership to \$10.00 but we do need your renewal now to carry on. We also need members to help with some of the work. If you can give some time to telephoning members once or twice a year on important issues, or working on the newsletter, or on programs for meetings, please indicate your interest on your renewal form.

WOMEN AND THE CHIP

When, as women, we face the microchip, we have to keep reassuring ourselves that technology, per se, is not the issue. The issue is the way that technology is mobilized to

serve the interests of one group or another. In our case, we would like to see the chip technology serve the interests of women in particular. It is, however, highly unlikely that it will serve the interests of women. The power to change the nature of machines through the installation of microprocessors, memories, etc., and therefore the power to change the nature of our working lives is not in our hands. So, for most of us, the issue is one of maximizing our negotiating power and maximizing the benefits through a variety of means to see that this technology, at the very least, does not work against our interests.

We could begin by seeing this new type of information processing as similar to the arrival of the Pill some years ago. You will recall that testing and experimentation was carried out on politically weak groups of women "offshore" from North America. Side effects were gradually located. The Pill's introduction was accompanied by a strong ideological movement to reduce the rate of population growth. It is not at all clear that any of this was established in the interests of women, although we might agree that having control over our own reproduction in a highly effective fashion has been, on the whole, to our benefit. I think the same is possibly true for the new technologies which are affecting our work behaviour, our consumer behaviour, and our access to general information about our society. That is, we are not in the driver's seat on the introduction or the format of these technologies although they might, on the whole, work to our benefit.

Let's take a common task for us all, and a favourite example of many engineers. If a memory and microprocessor is put into our washing machines so that we can get the

machine to remember how to wash our coloured clothes versus our white clothes; how to do the wash after we have left the house, and how to tailor its behaviour to our particular forms of dirty clothes we may be better off. We are less tied to the machine. We may save on electricity, soap and that most precious of all commodities, time. There is the distinct possibility that we have much to gain on the routine work of our daily lives from these new technologies. You will have heard about the automobile that reminds you in a polite, and female, voice that you have left the keys in the ignition and forgotten to turn off your lights when you open the door to get out. One can look forward to the day when the refrigerator inquires in the language of your choice whether you have added lettuce to your shopping list because you have just taken the last one from the crisper.

But such devices are not going to be the major thrust of this new technology. They may be fun but they'll cost us more money. The real impact, as we all know, will be on our workplace and on our information sources. For the latter, the effects are already here. You can now find out the arrival and departure times for flights on your cable television. But the real information impact is on access to records and information not previously available except on a time-consuming basis. This affects the public libraries, now beginning to face the competition of private-sector providers of information who can serve the needs of many quickly and efficiently. Computer-based information systems are changing the nature of work in libraries of all kinds used by students and by the general public, and the question is whether the general citizen will retain access to the information available to those attached to commercial, educational, or government institutions. The OCSW is built upon the "informed citizen" approach. That is, we believe that by writing briefs and approaching government with our information that we can influence their policy-making behaviour. One of our objectives must be to see that we retain access to data bases which may not be kept in hard format.

The most crucial impact for us, however, is probably what will happen to women working in factories, offices, and service jobs. Already the nature of those jobs has changed dramatically but there is little knowledge

yet of what the full impact of robots, of office automation, and of new cash and inventory control registers in stores and other service industries may bring. Political scientists always tell us that the best prediction is "no change." The evidence so far of actual social change, as opposed to speculation about change, supports the political scientists. That is, although these new microprocessors can do incredible things that bring about changes in almost any workplace, in fact few appear to be installing such equipment. Is this because we are in a recession and so, while people are being laid off, and while firms are collapsing, employers are not investing in new technology the way they will when the economy picks up? Are most employers not aware of the potential of the new equipment? Or are employers reluctant to introduce change? My own review of the literature and the investment picture suggest it is the latter. That is, change is coming (has come in some cases) but slowly and cautiously enough so that there is time for interest groups to interject their own concerns and interests into the process.

For example, the OCSW can argue that the introduction of new technology should be negotiated with the staff association, union, or simply the group of women working in the office. We can establish certain standards of health and safety (thinking not just of radioactivity but also of stress, monitors, repetition, and other such concerns). Alison Roberts, Director of the Women's Bureau, Ontario Ministry of Labour, talks with great effectiveness about the design problems of the new automated cash registers in supermarkets that cause back problems for the women who run the machines. Quick, before we lose the chance, let's think about these issues. We can--and I believe should--argue fiercely for new wage rates to be associated with the use of word processors, and other new forms of office automation and their equivalent machines in the factory, hospital, social service agency, and classroom. We can argue for a relative upgrading of wages, working conditions, promotions, and all that goes with mastering a new way of work.

One of the major reasons why we haven't been looking at such condition-of-work issues in detail is because majority opinion seems to be that we're going to lose jobs and therefore we should fight the new technology wholesale. Some argue that the hiring in

office staff is already showing the impact of office automation. The historical and contemporary evidence raises cautions. Our economy is in rough shape. Hiring is down and unemployment is at record highs. How much of that is attributable to technological change is anyone's guess. Historically, at the introduction of each new form of technology people have predicted the "end of work." When Ira Hoos wrote her famous article in the late 1950s about the impact of office computers on Bay-area firms in San Francisco it was to predict major downturns in employment, but the evidence suggests that the proportion of office workers has increased. The same phenomenon appeared in the 1960s as office automation advanced. Jobs have changed; women have not necessarily benefitted; but the major questions of overall employment tends to be easy to speculate about but hard to prove. Its major drawback, however, is that it diverts us from the areas in which we can have some real impact, such as those I have described above.

Therefore, I would urge us in the OCSW to look at employment-standards questions, occupational health and safety questions, wage-rate questions, retraining issues, re-entry issues, educational opportunities, and the advancement of women into the control of this area of technological change. These are areas in which we can win gains.

--Lorna Marsden

ACTIVITIES

Pensions Forum

Three hundred people attended a public forum on Pensions: Everywoman's Issue at the St. Lawrence Centre on May 4th in the evening. The forum was co-sponsored by the OCSW and the Forum Department, Toronto Arts Productions. Marie Corbett, Counsel to the Royal Commission on the Status of Pensions in Ontario, and Bob Baldwin, Research and Legislation Department, Canadian Labour Congress, were the panelists. Nancy Durham of the CBC chaired the evening.

OCSW member Anne Spencer gave a slide presentation on the state of pensions for women today in Canada. The facts are grim: single elderly women in Canada are poor; few part-time workers are covered by private

pension schemes; pension benefits are earnings-related and women still earn too little to guarantee better pensions in the future.

Changes to the Canada Pension Plan, earlier vesting, lobbying for pension benefits to be considered family assets in Ontario, and better coverage for all women were among the issues addressed by the speakers.

The question period ran until 10 p.m. at the form and provided the audience with more information on pensions today.

The event was organized by Patterson Higgins of Toronto Arts Productions and the OCSW pension committee: Lenore Davidson, Brigid O'Reilly, Audrey Orr, Jocelyn Page, Anne Spencer and Lynne Sullivan. The committee is pleased to hear from anyone who wishes to work on the issue of pensions. If you are please call Brigid O'Reilly at 533-2194 in the evenings.

Day Care--We Need Help

The OCSW is a member of the Ontario Coalition for Better Day Care--an organization spear-headed by the Ontario Federation of Labour.

The Coalition presented a brief to the provincial cabinet in November, OCSW members Kay Macpherson and Eileen Swinton attended this session on behalf of the organization.

The Coalition has a program of action to follow up on the brief. Meetings are held monthly during the day, usually in the Bay-Bloor area. If you could attend these meetings on behalf of the OCSW please call Brigid O'Reilly at 533-2194 in the evenings.

Inequality of Work

Inequality at Work is a booklet that deals with women's place in employment today and the options available to improve their position. It is handy, readable, and designed to be a useful educational tool for audiences as variable as high school students, the press, and politicians. It is published by the Social Planning Council with financial assistance from the Toronto Board of Education's Women's Studies and affirmative action groups. It was written by Mary Anne Coffee, one of our members, working with an ad hoc committee of the Council, which included a

number of OCSW members. In fact, this has been our main input to the women's employment scene this year. We hope members will find the booklet useful and that you will let friends, particularly those teaching women's studies courses, know about it. Further information and an order form are attached.

NOTES AND NEWS

Jean Wood

One of the members of the OCSW Pensions Committee, Jean Wood, has left Toronto to live in the U.K. Jean will be missed by many who knew her through NAC, the OCSW, and her work at Manufacturers Life. We shall miss her humour, common sense and imaginative schemes for the pension industry. We wish her well.

The Dinner Party is coming to the Art Gallery of Ontario from Saturday 22 May to Sunday 4 July. Reserved tickets go on sale at the Gallery on May 17.

This work by Judy Chicago is one of the most important visual art works of the last decade. More than 400 people participated in its creation over a period of five years.

The Dinner Party is a testimony to the glory of the participation of women in art history and also in the history of Western civilization. On a huge tile floor are carved the names of 999 women, historic figures from prehistory to the present time. On the memorial floor stands a large triangular table where 39 place-settings have been arranged for women who have played a predominant role in the improvement of the status of women. The Dinner Party incorporates sculpture, ceramics, china painting and needlework.

THE DINNER PARTY: background information Executed between 1975 and 1979. Presented in the following places: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1979; University of Houston at Clear Lake City in 1980; Boston Centre for the Arts in 1980; The Brooklyn Museum in 1981.

An equilateral triangle 48 feet on the side (the table itself measures 46½ feet on the side) covers approximately 1000 square feet. This sculpture is composed of some 390 pieces; the 39 plates with their chalice and flatware, napkins, banners, triangular tiles, etc. Production costs: more than 250,000\$, not counting volunteer work.

Annual Meeting--National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC)

Over 200 voting delegates attended NAC's 10th Annual Meeting in Ottawa from March 12 to 15. In addition to delegates from 126 of NAC's member groups were 200 people who attended the session as observers.

Improved pensions for women, including those women devoting time to the care of young children, and human rights protection for Indian women were among the issues receiving broad support at the meeting.

OCSW delegates to the NAC Annual Meeting were Cathleen Morrison and Nancy Jackman.

Doris Anderson, well-known author, journalist and former editor of *Chatelaine*, was acclaimed as NAC President for 1982-83.

OCSW members elected to the NAC Executive for 1982-83 are Chaviva Hosek, Wendy Lawrence, Louise Dulude, Kay Macpherson and Cathy Devlin.

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FIREWEED, a journal which is published by a non-profit corporation of the same name, began publication in the fall of 1978. It is edited and published by a collective of women, with the assistance of many other women in Canada, on a voluntary basis. The current issue, "Bread and Roses," is on sale now. Write: *FIREWEED*, P.O. Box 279, Station B, Toronto, Ontario M5T 2W2.

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Planned Parenthood of Toronto has published a pamphlet entitled "Am I Getting Through to You." It is about parents and teenagers communicating about sexuality. Write: Planned Parenthood of Toronto, 58 Shaftesbury Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M4T 1A3 (Tel.: 961-8290).

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The Home Birth Task Force provides support, resources, and information for those who are considering a home birth. It also holds open meetings throughout the year. Telephone (416) 698-5339 or 294-4832.

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A national study designed to assess the current status of women in the Canadian theatre, with particular reference to women playwrights, directors, and artistic directors, has been undertaken under the auspices of Status of Women Canada. Contact: Rina Fraticelli, 96A Bellevue Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M5T 3N9.

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The Feminist Party of Canada Centre is located at 175 Carleton Street in Toronto. For information about activities at the Centre, telephone 960-3427.

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OCSW PICNIC

Friday, June 25, 7:30 p.m.
At Judith Davidson Palmer's house
41 Admiral Road (St. George subway)

It's pot luck--please call Lynn Sullivan--
921-3205--to arrange your contribution to
the menu.

Make a note to join us for the fun.

* * *

The "London Rape Victims' Legal Handbook" is available from: Prof. C. B. Backhouse, Faculty of Law, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario N6A 3K7. It contains information about the rights of women who have been raped and what services are available in London, Ontario. For women outside of London, it is hoped that it will serve as a model upon which to conduct local research.

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Time to Renew Membership for '82.

MEMBERSHIP IN THE OCSW

(If a green dot appears on your mailing label, you need not renew.)

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 of the Status of Women which fall under provincial jurisdiction.

The Committee holds six general meetings a year. Projects are carried out by sub-committees working on specific issues. Past activities have included taking briefs to government and educating the public on women's issues through press contacts and public meetings. A newsletter is published three times a year.

Membership Fees The OCSW covers costs solely through fees paid by each member and the occasional voluntary donation. Membership is 10.00 a year and 7.00 for seniors and students. The membership year runs from May to May.

Group Members These members have the option of exchanging newsletters in lieu of paid membership.

Out of Toronto Members Members, group and individual, who wish to receive newsletters only may do so for a reduced fee of 5.00 per year.

Please send the following coupon to the

OCSW
P.O. Box 188, Station Q
Toronto, Ontario M4T 2M1

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I enclose _____ as Renewal _____ New Member _____ Donation _____

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PARTICULAR ISSUES OF INTEREST TO ME/US

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Child Care _____ Equal Pay for Work of _____ Constitution _____
Equal Value _____

Health _____ Education _____ Women & Aging _____

Other (Please specify) _____

I AM PREPARED TO HELP WITH: NEWSLETTER _____ MEMBERSHIP _____ PROGRAMS _____

