

# Something new at 49 St George St.

By PAULA ROCHMAN

There is something new at 49 St. George Street. It is the UofT Women's Centre. So, after 20 months of educationg and organizing by the Coalition for a Women's Centre at UofT, the Women's Centre has become a reality.

The twenty months of work to get the Centre established has been an exciting and frustrating time. When the Coalition first formed in February, 1984, many groups and individuals offered strong support yet some expressed honest skepticism that a Women's Centre would ever be established at UofT.

While the need for such a Centre had been aptly demonstrated, the skepticism was legitimate. After all, since women were admitted to the university 100 years ago, there had been several attempts to establish a Women's Centre -- even a Women's Building. None had succeeded.

The Coalition submitted its request for space to the UofT administration in April, 1984. At the time, the Coalition was optimistic that space would be received by September, 1984, in time to celebrate the centenary of women being admitted to the university.

Unfortunately, this was not to happen. While the request for space was not turned down, it was unclear if and when the UofT administration would allocate space for this endeavour.

And so, a temporary Women's Centre was established, on the lawn in front of Simcoe Hall. For two days last fall, a Women's Centre existed at UofT, in the form of a tent. This was not an angry protest but a very successful effort to raise and discuss the Coalition's attempts to form a women's Centre and the need for such a Centre. The Coalition was approached by dozens of students at the tent. Thousands more heard about the struggle for a Women's Centre through the campus papers and tens of thousands heard about it through the Toronto Star and CBC News. The temporary Women's Centre even became a part of the UofT tour, as dozens of tourists had the tent pointed out to them by a local tour bus driver!

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In May, the Advisory Committee to the Status of Women Officer sent a letter to President Connell stating that it "endorses the Coalition for a Women's Centre proposal and the associated supporting documentation that has been submitted. The Advisory Committee is disappointed that the Centre was not established during this academic year, the Centenary of Women being admitted to UofT...The Advisory Committee strongly recommends that President Connell take whatever action is needed to ensure that appropriate space be allocated for a Women's Centre immediately. In the light of the evidence, the Committee can see absolutely no justification for further delay".

The President quickly responded and informed those who allocate space at UofT "of my judgement that this matter should be given a leading priority for resolution this summer."

The matter was resolved. The Coalition was informed that space would be allocated in the new Koffler Centre. As plans for this have been delayed, the Centre will now be housed (temporarily) at 49 St. George St.

Well, now that you know the history of that "something new at 49 St. George St.", you might be asking, "Well, what is a Women's Centre going to do anyway?". In its statement of principles, the Coalition stated, "The purpose of the Women's Centre at UofT is to provide a place for social, cultural and educational events concerning women. These events include discussion groups and workshops, as well as exhibits of women's creative work: music, films, poetry and readings. The goal of the UofT Women's Centre is to improve, through education, the status of women at UofT."

Wait a minute you say, "What's wrong with the status of women at UofT? There are women in all my classes. I have women professors. Why, even the Charter says women are equal now, so what's the problem?"

Yes, that is all true and we should celebrate the accomplishments that women have made and are making. Yes, there are women in engineering classes--I was one myself. But we still cannot ignore the real barriers that remain, whether they come from the stereotyping women receive from high school counsellors who direct them into certain jobs and lifestyles, the difficulty women have returning to school when there are inadequate daycare facilities, the problems of sexual harassment from professors and employers or the job

doesn't just happen. Change happens when people do research into a problem, propose a solution through education and undertake an action to ensure the change will come about and continue to happen.

Women didn't get the vote in this country in some miraculous and spontaneous way. They educated, organized and lobbied. More recently, the equality section of the Charter didn't just appear because of someone's noble thoughtfulness. It is in our Charter because of intense lobbying, and educating by, in large part, women, women's groups and women's centres across the country. And equality might become a legal reality now, as women's groups across the country raise money, prepare cases and challenge laws which appear unequal. This is how change happens, not in a vacuum because we all want it to, but because we got out and did the political, social and educational work to make it a reality.

And so the Women's Centre will try to do this for UofT, to constructively address the problems and victories that women have at UofT. This is obviously an ambitious undertaking in light of the extent and depth of these problems beyond the university. Because of the scale of the undertaking, one can't realistically expect the Women's Centre to change the world or even all the problems at this university. But if it helps to change one small corner of the world, or some aspect of life for women at UofT, it will have fulfilled a noble purpose.

Oh, Oh. You've got me now, right? The Equality Section of the Charter will be violated by establishing a Women's Centre with a women's collective. Reverse discrimination you charge. Sorry. The Charter states two things about equality. Section 15(1): "Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination, and, in particular, without discriminating based on...sex..." However, Section 15(2) states that "Subsection (1) does not preclude any law, program, activity that has as its objective the amelioration of conditions of disadvantage because of...sex..." It appears, despite allegations to the contrary that the Women's Centre is in fact "constitutional." We could ask J.J. Robinette.

Well, it might be legal and some people think its needed, but I'm not going to use it. That's okay. But certainly that isn't an argument against having the Centre. After all, not every



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In January, 1985, the Coalition's request submitted the previous April was officially recommended to be accepted and space to be provided. The recommendation, submitted by Lois Reimer, UofT's Status of Women Officer, was also supported by President Connell.

Excitement mounted for the Coalition. Maybe the Centre would be open in time for International Women's Day (March 8) activities! Maybe the announcement of the Centre's establishment could be made at the rally for International Women's Day!! Maybe...A little too excited, a little too soon.

School ended and the centenary celebrations were over. And still no Women's Centre. While rumors abounded as to where the Centre would be, the Coalition continued to meet and organize one year since its application

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A few statistics give weight to these concerns. On average, a woman with a university degree earns \$24,380 per year, a man \$36,720. 93 percent of staff at UofT who make between \$10,000 and \$25,000 per year are women. 84 percent of staff making over \$45,000 are men. In Ontario, 84 percent of all full time faculty at universities are men. At UofT, the average female faculty person makes \$39,461 per year vs. an average of \$51,352 per year for male faculty.

Yes, you say, all these statistics might be true but things are changing. We don't need a Women's Centre now.

It is easy to say and accept that change should happen but change

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Well, it might be legal and some people think its needed, but I'm not going to use it. That's okay. But certainly that isn't an argument against having the Centre. After all, not every student uses the UofT Housing Service but surely that doesn't mean the university doesn't need a Housing Service. No service, including the Women's Centre, will be used by every member of the university community, but that doesn't mean it is not needed.

So...Now that it is here get involved with the Women's Centre. It is the university's Centre and needs your support and input as much as we, the members of this university, need a Women's Centre.

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