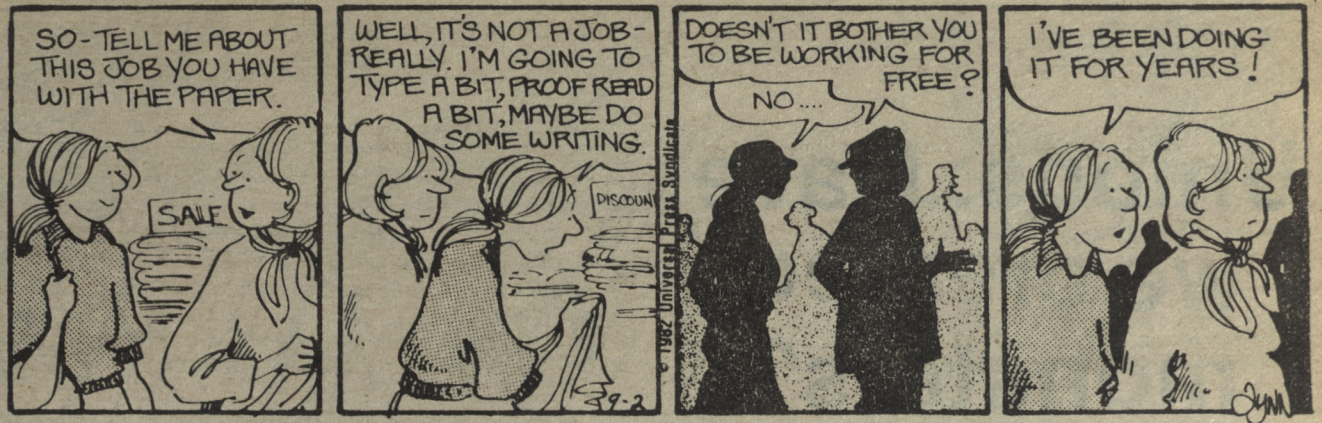


CFS avoids controversy over women's centre cuts

For Better or for Worse



OTTAWA (CUP) — Women's centres are the topic of heated debate on at least two Canadian campuses but women student politicians avoided confrontation over the issue at a Nov. 4 meeting of the country's largest student group.

The University of Saskatchewan student council closed its women's Directorate Sept. 28 and the Carleton University student council has cut back the budget and restricted its autonomy.

But tempers remained cool at the women-only caucus of the Canadian Federation of Students, where delegates from across Canada heard both sides to the stories. They did not recommend action over either situation.

Members of the student associations that initiated both reviews described the inadequacies of the women's centres.

"Their services were few and decreasing," said Beth Olley, student association president at the University of Saskatchewan, about the ill-fated women's directorate. "They weren't providing the service aspect. They were lobbying hard on issues — I don't take away the importance of doing that — but the reason why they're given so much money is for services."

The student association decided Oct. 20 to consider creating a service-oriented women's centre, plus an association sub-committee to propose actions on political issues.

Cheri Spooner, vice president and the only person to vote against the closure, told the meeting some good has resulted from the action. "Because the women's directorate isn't there anymore, council has to deal with these issues," she said. "My college council has set up a women's committee to deal with issues."

Spooner said the directorate had an image problem and wasn't doing enough to counter rumours of being radical and pro-abortionist.

Rena Lafleur, a member of the Carleton University Women's Centre said centres will always have an "image problem."

"As long as feminism has an image problem in society, women's centres will have an image problem. The image problem is there and (we as women) have to deal with it. That's no reason to axe the centre," Lafleur said.

The Carleton University student association cited image problems last summer when it began a formal investigation of the women's centre. Funding was frozen pending the review's outcome.

An overwhelming number of submissions to three public forums supported the centre but Angela Soukeroff, vice president executive and a member of the review commission, said the "vocal minority" dominated the hearings.

"Just because it has 'women's centre' on it doesn't mean they can't be criticized," Soukeroff said.

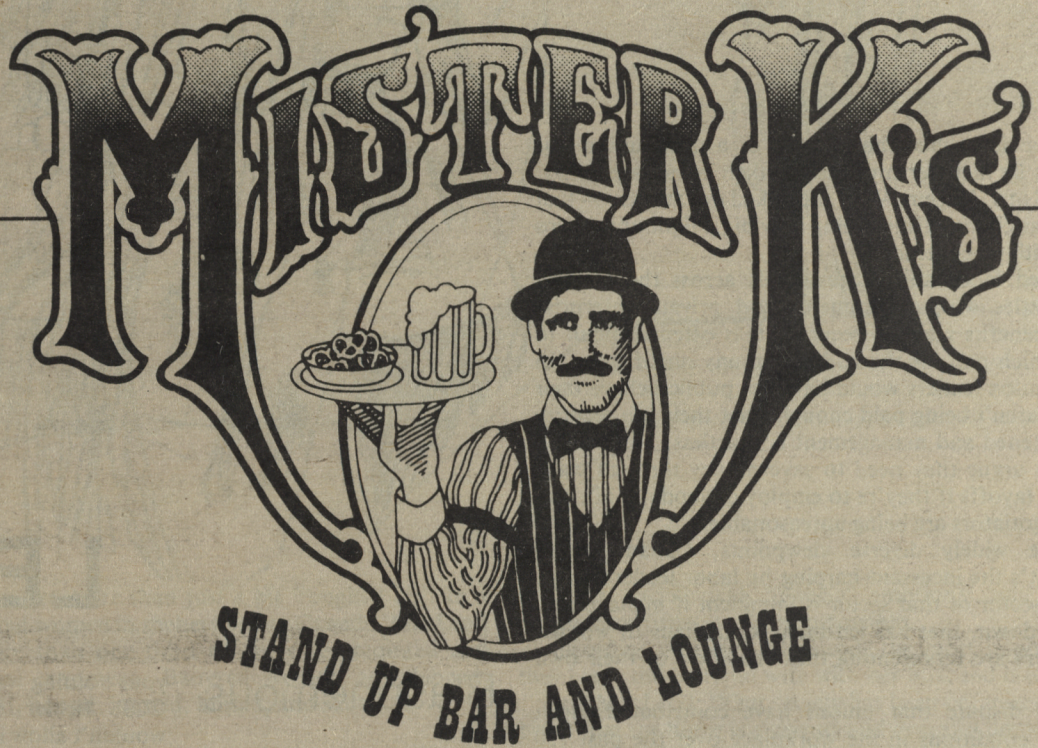
The Carleton student association decided at its Nov. 5 meeting to accept the review committee recommendations, which included a \$2,000 cut from the budget originally requested, greater accountability to the student association, and stricter membership criteria.

Olley agreed people are trying too much to tie criticism of women's centres into the feminist movement. "The whole question of image problem will have a bearing on the way people vote," Olley said.

But she stressed services were the main issue in the council's decision to kill the women's directorate.

"Maybe in the final analysis we'll get a women's centre that will provide a lot of services," she said, citing educational forums and promoting a rape crisis hotline and daycare facilities as important activities for the centre.

The conference continued the next day, and the final plenary wrapped up Nov. 13. Nov. 14 was the national lobby day for the federation.



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