

Women's centres across Canada begin to close as funding dries up

BY STEVIE CAMERON
The Globe and Mail

This week, as their telephones were cut off, volunteers in women's shelters in British Columbia and Newfoundland were cleaning out their modest centres which had helped women in trouble.

At least a dozen centres have been forced to close after February's federal budget cut \$1.6-million from the Secretary of State's women's program. The money was used to pay rent, heat, utility bills and small salaries in 80 women's centres across the country.

Because the money was cut off after April 1, the past few days have seen several centres close while others struggle with volunteer help to stay open another few days or weeks.

Newfoundland, for example, has lost a total of \$240,000, and the women's centres in Stephenville and Corner Brook have closed; so have eight centres in British Columbia in places like Kitimat and Port Alberni. British Columbia has 32 centres that received \$478,000 under the program and more are expected to close in a few days.

In Quebec, where 42 centres were cut for a total of \$400,000, most also receive provincial money and hope to be able to keep going; an exception is Montreal's Carrefour des Femmes de Rosemont, which will close for the summer and reopen in September for two days a week.

The closings and the struggling have not happened quietly. The centres, most of which operate in small rural communities, have been able to mobilize a network of women's groups across the country, and two groups in particular — those in Newfoundland and in Quebec — are offering each other moral support and advice, an interesting development in light of Newfoundland's rescinding of its support for the Meech Lake constitutional accord.

On Monday, 20 women and two men were arrested in a demonstration in St. John's, while police have escorted other groups from government offices in Halifax and Vancouver.

And in Halifax yesterday, a speech by the federal minister responsible for the status of women was interrupted by hecklers protesting the cuts, The Canadian Press reported.

Eight women rose from their table at a Halifax luncheon where Mary Collins was speaking and went to the front of the room with a large banner saying: "Defend women's equality, restore our funding now."

Ms Collins told the protesters she would meet with them later in the afternoon and they could express their concerns then, but that didn't satisfy the protesters.

At least 100 angry women from Quebec plan to go to Ottawa next week to meet Secretary of State Gerry Weiner, and the Quebec



Danielle Poulin of the Carrefour des Femmes de Rosemont in Montreal is worried about the future of the centre because of government cutbacks.

group is also working with women in Newfoundland to bring extra protesters.

Liberal and New Democratic Party politicians have added their voices in Parliament to the storm of protest.

In the past few days, staff in Mr. Weiner's office have been urging women's groups to apply for a different kind of grant, money known as project funding, to keep their

centres open. Project money is available for specific projects and not for operational costs, although Len Westerberg, a spokesman for Mr. Weiner, said in an interview yesterday that the government would not object to centres using project money to keep running.

"There's a kitty of money sitting there," said Mr. Westerberg. "It all depends on how they couch the project. But women are refusing to apply. They are stuck on ideology. They're stuck on the principle that core funding lets them do anything they want."

Mr. Westerberg cited the example of a women's centre in Bridgewater, N.S., which had been ready to close but was saved at the last minute by a \$46,000 project grant to undertake research and educational activities on sexual assault and harassment. "It took them three days from application to getting the cheque," Mr. Westerberg said.

But many women were outraged by what they saw as a paternalistic face-saving effort by Mr. Weiner. "Bridgewater has been offered this money to keep us all quiet," said Stella Lord, a Halifax member of the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women.

CP quoted spokeswomen for the Bridgewater centre as saying they will not formally accept the money until similar funding is approved for other women's centres.

In Penticton, Donna Cameron, a member of the B.C. and Yukon

Council of Women's Centres, said the Secretary of State's office had told the groups in February that project fund money was not to be used for operating costs. She also denied Mr. Westerberg's claim that the groups had not been in touch with the government to find out how to keep going.

"We were in constant contact with our Secretary of State representatives," said Ms Cameron, "but they told us project funds were extremely limited and were only available for 10 months."

As a result, she said, many centres were forced to give notice to landlords, cancel their telephones and lay off paid staff.

"Now the budget appears to have magnified," Ms Cameron said. "If the money was there all along, why were the cheques withheld? This is a mess of the government's own making."

As a show of solidarity across Canada, women in several centres are refusing to apply for project funding, said Gander organizer Clara Byrne. Most of the centres contacted by The Globe and Mail operate on annual budgets of about \$25,000. Except for one or two paid staff members, all the workers in these centres are volunteers and they deal with hundreds of visits and calls from women in trouble every month.

In St. John's, Theresa Mackenzie said their centre, which opened 17 years ago and is the oldest women's centre in Canada, had hoped to

stay open until August, operating with savings and volunteer labor. "I volunteer 30 hours a week now," she said. "We have no staff people and it's hellish. We got 420 calls last month and 200 drop-ins; we have no social worker and have to use social work students to help with our caseloads."

The biggest problem in St. John's, said Ms Mackenzie, is still violence against women and sexual abuse, and like groups in some other cash-strapped communities the St. John's group shares its facilities with others. "The rape crisis centre gets no funding at all and uses our centre, but they won't have a home after August," Ms Mackenzie said.

"We're fighting for our lives in Gander," said Ms Byrne. "We will close in six weeks." This centre, a five-by-seven-metre room that operates on \$25,000 a year, opened to general community disapproval several years ago, said Ms Byrne, but now has complete community support.

It is very much the same story in Nelson, B.C., where the West Kootenay Women's Association has lost its \$27,000 annual budget. The money paid for a co-ordinator, rent and office expenses, said the centre's Sally Mackenzie. "We deal with 250 women a month and offer them information and advice on social assistance and with legal problems like separation and divorce and child custody. It's the only drop-in centre in Nelson."

Quebec magazine retracts article that said Péladeau Hitler admirer

BY PATRICIA POIRIER
The Globe and Mail

MONTREAL

The magazine L'Actualité has retracted an article that described Quebecor Inc. chairman Pierre Péladeau as an admirer of Adolf Hitler, but the press tycoon's true opinions about Jews remain unclear.

The author of the article indicated yesterday that he will hold a press conference next week to set the record straight after being publicly accused by the magazine's publisher, Jean Paré, of misquoting Mr. Péladeau.

And a journalists organization, the Fédération professionnelle des journalistes du Québec, has joined the Canadian Jewish Congress in condemning Mr. Péladeau, publisher of the Journal de Montréal, for refusing to apologize for his "irresponsible" comments on Jews.

In an interview on a popular open-line radio program Wednesday, Mr. Péladeau maintained that Jews "take up too much place" (in Quebec society). When asked to apologize by the host of the show, who said he had "no right" to say such things, Mr. Péladeau retorted: "I won't apologize because I consider there is nothing wrong with that."

In later interviews, the head of the multimillion-dollar publishing empire complained that the fashion industry is controlled by Jews, pointing out that they are "English-speaking."

A staunch Quebec nationalist, Mr. Péladeau said he had written a memo to the Journal de Montréal when it launched its fashion section urging it to promote francophone designers instead of English-speaking Jewish designers.

"In the city here ... there is no doubt that the fashion business is controlled by the Jewish people, English-speaking," he said.

The article in L'Actualité, a French-language current affairs magazine, implied that Mr. Péladeau admired Adolf Hitler and felt that Jews "take up too much space" in the Montreal media.

Mr. Péladeau vehemently denied Wednesday that he had made the remarks about Hitler and stated that he was not anti-Semitic.

Mr. Paré told The Canadian Press that he had asked for a tape of the interview with Mr. Péladeau from freelance writer Jean Blouin. "It was discovered that

Mr. Blouin had made an error," Mr. Paré said. "Blouin asked Péladeau: 'Is it true that you were once an admirer of Hitler?' Péladeau replied: 'Not Hitler. I have always been an admirer of countries where there is a great deal of discipline ... such as Germany ... and the Japanese,'" Mr. Paré recounted.

The controversy has been fueled in great part by Mr. Péladeau's initial refusal to comment on the article, which was published last Friday. The article and the controversy have generated a number of anti-Semitic comments on phone-in radio shows, and the publisher of L'Actualité acknowledged yesterday that his magazine has received a number of vulgar, angry calls in French and English.

One of the callers, whom he described as a "crackpot," warned that the magazine would suffer the same fate as Alliance Quebec, an anglophone-rights group whose headquarters was destroyed by a fire set by an arsonist in December of 1988. Mr. Paré said the threat was not treated seriously by the magazine, but security guards at the building were told about the call.

Michael Crellin of the Canadian Jewish Congress said he is concerned that Mr. Péladeau's comments, which have not been thoroughly clarified, might inflame the debate.

"Any time pejorative comments about any cultural community (are made) by people in high-profile positions, (this) brings extreme positions out from the fringe into the mainstream," he said.

Mr. Paré issued a press release Thursday night apologizing to Mr. Péladeau and to the magazine's readers "for the errors and approximations the article may contain." He said the author "should assume full responsibility for what he wrote."

Mr. Paré said in an interview that the biweekly magazine, which has a circulation of 250,000, has taken extra precautions to reinforce controls over its editorial content. He said he did not know what Mr. Blouin, who has written for the magazine over the past 10 years, intends to tell the press next week.

André Bachand, a spokesman for the Quebecor chairman, said that there were "many more mistakes" in the L'Actualité article but that Mr. Péladeau considers for the moment the apology is "acceptable and sufficient."

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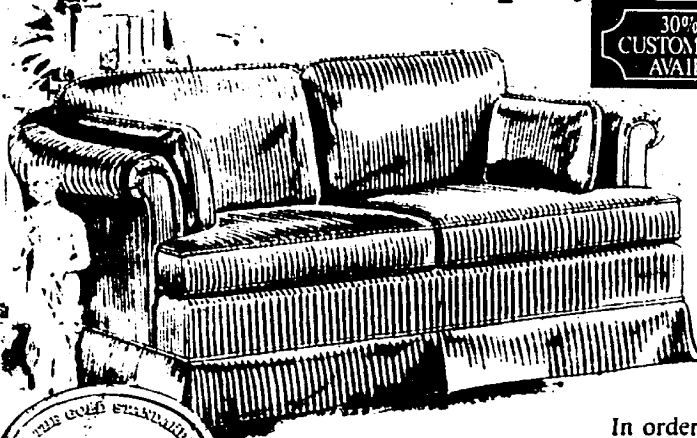
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