

Uncle Sam faces fight on home turf

Mary Lynne Myers, president of Federally Employed Women, explains a proposal for an expanded women's grievance procedure within the federal government. Officers of the 70-member group are (l. to r.) Alice Cross, financial secretary; Evangeline Koonce, vice president, and Barbara Allen, corresponding secretary. (Sun-Times Photo by Carmen Reporto)



By Judy Nicol

The local chapter of Federally Employed Women thinks it is more than coincidence that 80 per cent of the 1 million women who work for the federal government are concentrated in the lowest six grades of civil service. And that although one-third of all government workers are women, less than 1 per cent of them have any authority to make decisions.

This is what led to the formation of Federally Employed Women, an economically oriented group that sees itself as kind of a national association for the advancement of female people within the federal government.

FEW has 70 paying members in the Chicago chapter and about 70 others who attend meetings. It has a core of activists in nearly every federal office in Chicago.

Its premise is that although discrimination on the basis of sex has been outlawed by several laws and executive orders, it still exists.

THE MEMBERS SAY discrimination is subtle. Women are called administrative assistants, men called administrative officers and paid \$4,000 more.

Female college graduates are placed in dead-end instead of training positions. Little notice is taken of women who go to college at night and earn a degree, although this would mean an automatic promotion for a man.

Women cannot be trained for executive positions unless they are already in that position. They can't get the position without the training.

Or at least that is the way it appears to Mary Lynne Myers, president of FEW in Chicago.

Mrs. Myers, who is married to a stockbroker and lives in the suburbs, is the government equivalent of a management consultant. She is one of what she says is a tiny number of women who have been allowed to participate in government executive-level training programs. She attends graduate school half on government time and half at government expense.

She thinks this opportunity should be available to qualified

women on the same basis as men.

FEW has regular meetings with speakers in charge of government programs, like Leonard Sherry, director of the personnel management training institute of the Civil Service Commission.

"SHERRY HAD STATISTICS on the number of women trained, which were high," says Mrs. Myers, "but we countered by citing our own statistics showing the small number of women given long-term training. Most of the training given women is secretarial and clerical and enables them to advance one grade in a secretarial position.

"Many of these women have college educations and should be given the opportunity to advance into decision-making positions."

Mrs. Myers says one of the programs of FEW is "self-education, trying to expand women's image of their status in government. If a woman has made it at all, she tends to think she's lucky. She accepts success 'for a woman.'

"We are not about to achieve miracles," she says. "Our primary function is to work with and put pressure on government to enforce its own antidiscrimination policy."

FEW also has a grievance committee that will represent women who believe they are being discriminated against.

Half of FEW's members are black, all are in Civil Service grades from 3 to 13. The group is virtually the only women's rights organization in the country with a significant black membership.

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The local chapter has doubled its membership in a year, and national chapters have expanded from eight to more than 30.

MRS. MYERS SAYS it will take a long time before government personnel officers divest themselves of the "pregnant or menopausal" stereotype of women.

FEW will put pressure on the agencies, act as grievance advisers to women who believe they've been discriminated against, collect statistics and demand explanations for apparent inequities.

One such matter is the hiring of women for career ladder positions.

Last year, for example, 49 per cent of the persons who qualified for jobs on the federal service entrance exam were women. But only 37 per cent of those hired were women.

"We feel," says Mrs. Meyers, "that this shows that many managers are still making decisions on stereotypes, not test results. We want to find out why."