

# Equal Partners for Change: Women and Unions

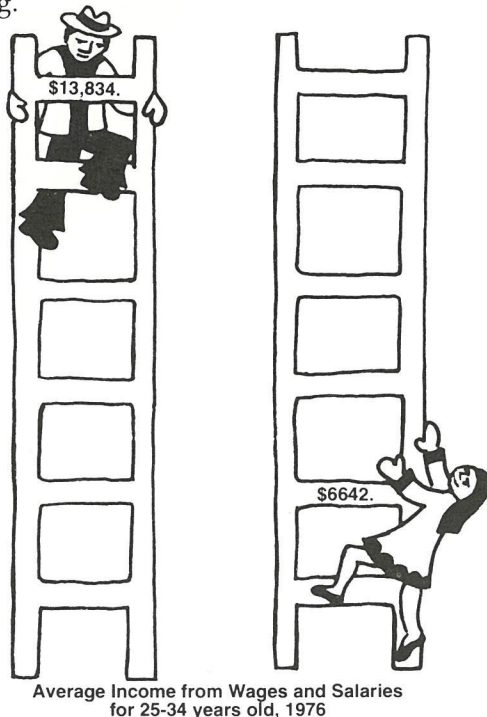


## Bread and Roses

The old union song of women textile workers demanded "bread and roses, bread and roses." As Canada heads into the eighties, Canadian women are still asking for their bread and roses — equal pay and equal opportunity.

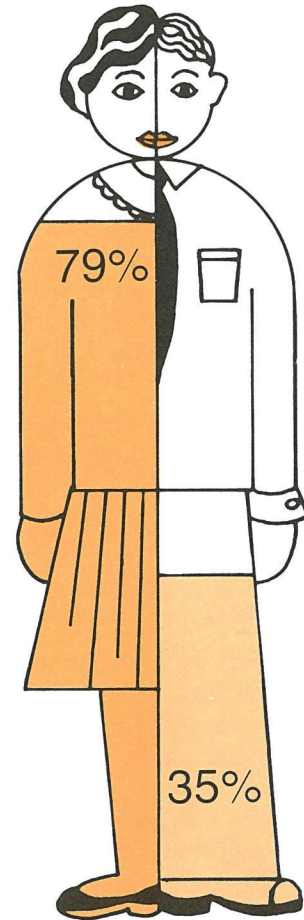
Almost 30 years after the International Labour Organization of the United Nations passed Convention 100 calling for equal pay for work of equal value, women in Canada are still not adequately paid for their work.

Full time female workers earn less than 60% of full-time male workers, and the gap appears to be widening.



In 1971, women working a full year earned about \$3,800 less than men working the same full year. By 1976, the gap had grown to about \$6,900 between men and women. Almost 80% of women employees earn less than \$10,000; only 35% of men earn under that amount.

Wage differences exist in all occupations. Whatever your age or education, if you are female, you are likely to be paid less than a male. Men 25-34 years old earn an average of \$13,834 while women of the same age earn \$6,642. Men with high school diplomas earn \$14,814



while women with the same education average only \$7,176.

Many women work in "job ghettos," occupations almost exclusively made up of women. These jobs have always paid less than men's jobs, but even here men working in "female" occupations earn more than women. In clerical jobs, usually done by women, the average male earnings were \$12,656 while the average female salary was \$7,852.

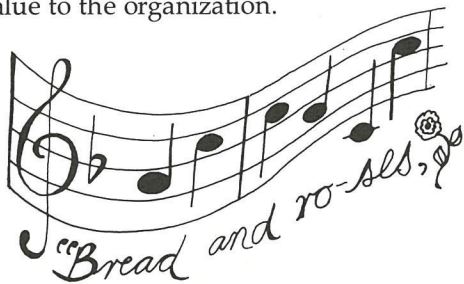
Because many women have taken time out of their working lives to bear and raise a family, women's paid work has not been taken seriously by society. These attitudes have helped to justify the unequal wages of men and women.

### Equal Pay

In 1951, Ontario became the first province to introduce equal pay laws. Now all provinces and the federal

government have legislation to encourage equal pay for equal work. However, most of the legislation covers only equal pay for work that is identical or substantially the same.

Recently, the federal Human Rights Act introduced the concept of equal pay for work of equal value for the federal labour jurisdiction. The province of Quebec now interprets their equal pay legislation in a similar way. Equal pay for work of equal value means that predominantly female jobs can be compared with predominantly male jobs in terms of skill, responsibility, effort and working conditions. For example, a woman's secretarial job could be evaluated against a man's work as a machine operator and found to be of equal value to the organization.



Similarly, a group of librarians employed by the federal government attempted recently to get equal pay for work of equal value. The librarian group is made up mostly of women who earn about \$3,000 less than federally-employed Historical Researchers, most of whom are men. The LS group usually had to have a higher university degree and claimed their work was of equal value. Although the LS group won a no-discrimination clause through collective bargaining, they did not win equal pay. With union support, they have taken their case to the Canadian Human Rights Commission.

In an attempt to bring about the enforcement of equal pay for work of equal value, unions are pushing for and including no-discrimination clauses in their agreements so they can process grievances at the workplace.

With strong legislation, these different but equal jobs would then get the same rate of pay. All factors that make up income such as wages, fringe benefits, commissions or wage scales must be equal.

If widely implemented and enforced, the concept of equal pay for work of equal value would bring profound changes to the workplace. Revised pay scales and job evaluation systems used to determine the value of work could be used to open doors of many occupations now closed to women. Women would at last be paid the wages their work deserves. However, the way in which this concept is interpreted and

implemented will determine how successful it will be as a means of achieving equality in the workplace.

Although the Human Rights Act establishes a base for federal workers, and some progress has been made in Quebec, most women employees are not able to receive equal pay for work of equal value because no legislation guarantees them that right. Through their union however, it is possible for them to bargain for the right which should be ensured by provincial law. Unions will be insisting on equal pay for work of equal value clauses in their next contracts.

The value of the work is determined by weighing the composite of four factors — skill, responsibility, effort and the conditions under which the work is done.

Skill means the intellectual and physical abilities needed to do the job. Skills may be acquired through education, training, experience or natural ability.

Effort means the physical or intellectual exertion demanded by the job. Different jobs may require similar effort although one may be mental effort and one physical effort.

Responsibility means the extent to which the employer relies on the employee to do a job, and the extent to which the worker is accountable for human or financial resources of the organization.

Working conditions such as heat, cold, noise and stress may also be used to help to determine the value of a job.

Under the existing federal legislation, the employer is responsible for determining the value of work as long as the legislation is obeyed. The employer may, but does not have to, ask for assistance from the union. Federal law should require the same kind of 50/50 union-management committee structure as is developing in the health and safety field.

It is clear that unions must continue to be involved in determining value of jobs if they are going to be able to put the concept of equal pay for work of equal value into their contracts.

Few collective agreements provide a means for re-evaluating the wage rates of present jobs, therefore the problem must be dealt with during collective bargaining.

Unions who bargain without a joint job evaluation formula may find it more difficult to determine the value of different jobs, particularly where the work is not similar in nature. However, they have been able to adjust inequities, particularly as pressure from the membership supports changes in the pay rates.





In workplaces that use a job evaluation system, the evaluation may be carried out in different ways:

- 1) the employer sets the categories for rates of pay without any criteria,
- 2) the employer, with or without the union, ranks jobs against each other and decides what the value will be,
- 3) the jobs are jointly evaluated according to a point-rating or a factor comparison plan using guidelines and numerical measures,
- 4) jobs in governments or public sector employment are compared against similar jobs in the private sector, and evaluated and paid accordingly. Thus if pay scales are discriminatory in the private sector they are used to continue the practice in public employment. This kind of comparison is also used among industries.

Unions with job evaluation programs in their contract must be sure that the program is not used to justify paying less to women. A good evaluation program ensures that:

- 1) all factors are weighted appropriately. For example, a physical exertion could not be weighted too highly in a plant where there is mainly light work, or the dexterity and speed involved in jobs traditionally done by women could not be seen as a "female" skill and underpaid accordingly.
- 2) the plan should cover only the bargaining unit and not supervisors.
- 3) the union should have equal input with the employer into development and implementation of the plan.
- 4) where separate plans are used for office and plant workers, the plans must produce acceptable results for women workers.
- 5) public employees in federal and provincial governments are prevented by law from bargaining on classifications with their employers. This must be changed.

Through collective bargaining, unions can go a long way to set up fair job evaluation programs, modify existing pay scales and push for equal pay for work of equal value. To do less would be unjust to women employees.

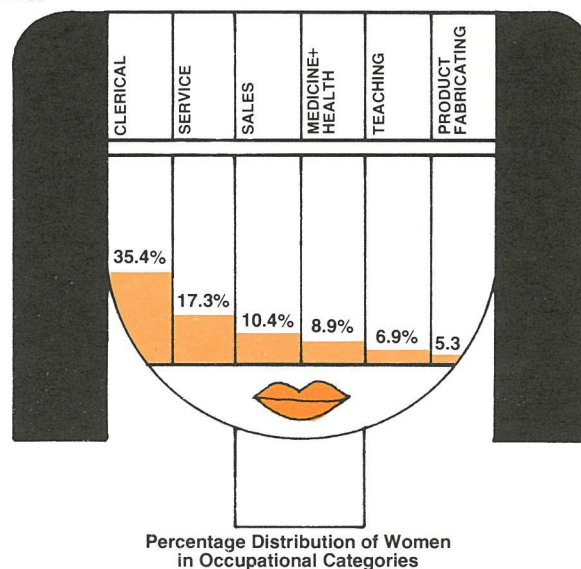
### Equal Opportunity

It is not enough just to win equal pay for work of equal value for women. If they are denied equal opportunity, women will still be restricted to job ghettos. Women do not rise through the normal channels to jobs of authority and responsibility. In almost all occupations,

the positions with the most prestige and highest pay are held by men.

In a study of municipal government employees, the City of Ottawa found that women were "completely absent in the highest echelon where responsibility for policy planning and administrative authority resides. Unlike men who are distributed among the 15 occupational categories, women are concentrated in only a few. 75% of the women in the City are employed in the Clerical and Regulatory category and the Office Support category." The office support category has the lowest scale of pay.

Across the country, women remain in job ghettos with little opportunity to break out. Clerical, sales and service jobs employ over 60% of women in the labour force.



From the first stage of employment, the hiring process, women face discrimination. They are often only considered for certain types of work and automatically rejected if they apply for non-traditional jobs. They are not hired if the employer feels they might leave to get married or have children, or to care for their children. Employers often feel that men should get the jobs because they are the "bread-winners" in the family. Women's experience as a homemaker or a community volunteer is rarely considered for most occupations. "Protective" legislation which keeps women from doing certain jobs, such as heavy lifting, automatically excludes women from certain occupations without testing for individual abilities.

Once women are hired, they are seldom given access to the on-the-job training or educational programs that would help them move up the job ladder. Often women are denied promotions because the employer feels that





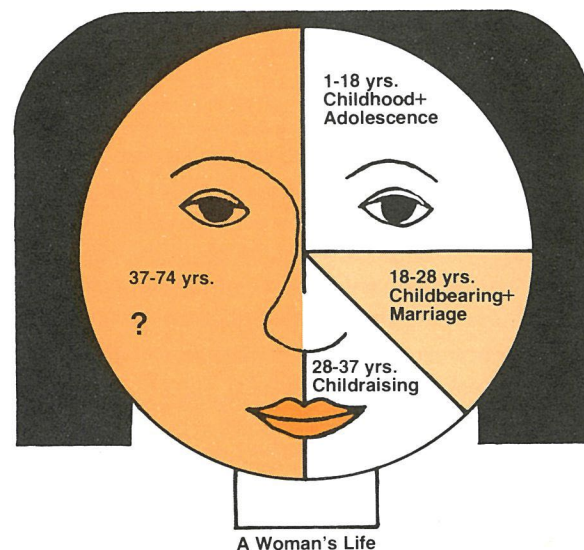
family responsibilities prevent women from doing a good job. Jobs requiring extensive travel are often denied to women for the same reason.

To open the barriers which restrict job opportunities for women, and to end female job ghettos, affirmative action programs must be started in the workplace. An affirmative action program sets policies and goals to combat sex discrimination and monitors the progress towards meeting these goals. The committee to plan and monitor such a program should be made up of equal management and union representatives.

A good affirmative action program eliminates job qualifications that discriminate against women and are unrelated to the job. It prevents employers from classifying women as a group without regard to their individual abilities. Affirmative action seeks out skilled women to fill jobs, and provides on-the-job training and upgrading so that less-qualified women may improve their abilities and move ahead. It is necessary to set goals and guidelines through a comprehensive affirmative action program to reduce job segregation and to move more women into higher paying and skilled labour positions.

The right to equal opportunity is as important to working women as equal pay. Historically unions have not had much say in hiring, promotion and training procedures. However unions are recognizing the need to establish affirmative action plans through collective bargaining. Once the need for affirmative action has been recognized and declared by the union, the individual workplace must be studied to determine how women are being discriminated against in hiring and promotion policies, job evaluation, access to training programs and collective agreements. By changing job evaluation systems, giving women access to training and revising personnel policies on hiring and promotion, new career paths can open up for women. Once an affirmative action program has begun, the union should monitor it closely to see that the objectives and procedures are being followed.

Most of the changes called for in an affirmative action program deal with practices, procedures and structures. Although organizational changes will bring about a more equal treatment of women workers, it will not guarantee equal opportunity. Women have long been taught to have fewer expectations, to put family needs first and to accept less opportunity. It is necessary therefore to ensure that an affirmative action program also helps individual women through career-development, confidence-building and assertiveness-training seminars. As most women will have many years when they will have to or be able to work, they must be encouraged to plan their work lives.



Equal pay for work of equal value and equal opportunity in the workplace are the two most critical issues facing women in the workforce. Women must be guaranteed the right to both if they are to achieve real equality with men.

\* Statistics from Women's Bureau, Labour Canada, 1977 edition, *Women in the Labour Force*.

#### For Discussion:

1. What are the wages for men and women in your workplace? Who is paid more? Evaluate male and female job classifications according to skill, effort and responsibility. Do the differences in jobs justify the differences in wages? Does the collective agreement give women any protection against unequal pay? Was your last increase a percentage increase or an across-the-board increase?
2. In the Acme widget company, women are only office workers and sorters and packers. Men are in supervisory and machine-operator jobs. Discuss how the union at Acme might set up an affirmative action program. Could the same kind of program be used by your union? Who controls the hiring and on-the-job training in your workplace? Are you informed of all job openings, training sessions and apprenticeship programs with your employer? Do you have the right to apply? Do you have unit-wide, department-wide or workplace-wide seniority provisions?
3. Are you guaranteed equal pay for work of equal value by either federal or provincial law? What are the salary differences between men and women at your workplace? How could your union bring about equal pay for work of equal value in your workplace?