

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR

STATEMENT ON

WOMEN

TO THE

19th ANNUAL CONVENTION

Kitchener, November 3, 4 and 5, 1975

LEGISLATIVE ACTION

It is 1975. It is International Women's Year. It is time to realize that a piecemeal approach to the solution of the problems of working women will no longer do. Sweeping measures will have to be considered and implemented in order to facilitate the integration of women in the labour market and labour unions and to enable those who have family obligations to reconcile their status as workers with their role as mothers.

While the labour movement has long been at the forefront of programs and actions to ensure equality and justice for all workers, and while fair employment practice acts and equal pay acts were placed on the statute books in Ontario in the 1950's because of the constant perseverance and pressure of organized labour, many of labour's concerns in the area of equal rights for women remain unacted upon, unsolved.

Women continue to be the fastest growing component in the Ontario labour force: 72 per cent more Ontario women worked in 1973 than in 1963, and the provincial average of women workers is now over 35 per cent. The increase in numbers however has not been followed by an increase in equality. The highest percentage of women workers in Canada is still in the low paying, low status service industries — 46 per cent — and their major occupations are sales, service and clerical — 64.7 per cent, and this despite the generally higher education of women — 26 per cent completed high school as compared to 18.3 per cent of men in Canada in 1972.

But an increasing awareness of the changing

role of women in our society is slowly developing, creating an understanding of the inequities women face in the work force — disparities in employment opportunities, wages, educational opportunities, political representation, training, benefits and so on — inequities which create the statistics cited above. The gap between policy, legislation and practice, between good intentions, rhetoric and reality is well known and felt by all working men and women.

The fight for women's equality has been plagued by band-aid measures on the part of the government, that are unenforced or unenforceable, that are shaped by no real intent, with no overall purpose. For example, women are granted time off for child-bearing and must be reinstated on the job after this period with the same pay and benefits. However if women are really not to be placed at a disadvantage because of the socially and economically desirable act of having children, extensive child care facilities should also be part and parcel of this legislation.

A similar situation exists with equal pay. Legislation provides that women employees cannot be paid less than men employees doing substantially the same kind of work in the same establishment. Again women are being run roughshod by the government. This section covers only women who have substantially the same jobs as men, thereby excluding the hundreds of thousands of Ontario women who are employed where there are no men in the same establishment doing the same work, such as secretaries, typists, receptionists, some nurses and nursing assistants, many sewing machine operators and other textile workers, and many sales and clerical workers. The law still does

not cover a woman who may have a job which requires more effort than a man's, or more unpleasant working conditions, and is nonetheless paid less.

The difference between the wages of men and women all points in one direction — equal pay does not exist. Rather the gap in wages between men and women is increasing. Statistics Canada figures have consistently shown that women full-time workers earn on the average 40 per cent less than males who work full-time. Average hourly earnings in manufacturing outline an incredible gap — between 1955 and 1969 the wage differential between men and women doubled from 64¢ to \$1.28. The reasons for this kind of persistent economic discrimination are twofold: women continue to be paid less than men for doing the same work (equal pay legislation notwithstanding); and, women are consistently relegated to low-paid job ghettos (equal opportunity legislation notwithstanding). More recent figures from the federal department of labour survey enforce this argument, and show that even in clerical occupations, predominantly filled by women, that men generally earn more than women in similar jobs.

An outgrowth of this type of data is the realization that equal pay laws alone are not the answer. Equal pay treats the surface evidence of the problem rather than the root causes. Coupled with it, and "coupled" must mean coming under the same act with the same enforcement agency administering the act, must be policies and laws on equal job opportunity, training and promotion opportunity which are unambiguous and enforceable. Such equality of opportunity is vital since traditional social convention often restricts women in their choice of training and employment. Programs of recruitment and promotion continue to be based on sex, perpetuating unproven beliefs about women's abilities and inabilities as workers. As a result, women, particularly the semi-skilled and unskilled, can be kept concentrated in jobs where the rates of pay are lower, and the principle of equal pay for work of equal value can be effectively bypassed.

Important in this regard is the legislation now existing in the U.S. called "contract compliance" which states that a firm, in order to keep a government contract must make certain its women employees are being pushed up the ladder. Such legislation will free women from the prison of "women's jobs".

Enforcement of the present laws is also extremely cumbersome when it does exist. The onus is on the individual woman to prove the discrimination; class action is not possible as it is in the U.S.; employers are well protected from un-

favourable publicity, and prosecutions to enforce financial penalties are rarer than rare.

An example of where equal pay has managed to work was through the B.C. Human Rights Commission which obtained \$5 million for women hospital workers, including those jobs different from men's, by means of a job evaluation scheme. In addition, such a scheme is now in the implementation stages in Ontario hospitals, a consequence of the Johnston Report of the Hospital Inquiry Commission. Many of the unions have used such systems to good advantage including the United Steelworkers with their Co-operative Wage Study. This approach entails a joint union-management program which ends discrimination and satisfies workers that their pay is related to their worth rather than managerial whim. Such systems based on objective criteria that are the same for women as for men can be implemented and have been.

The barrier in the way, when all the jargon is cast aside, is of course, cost. To pay women what they are worth is costly. The labour movement believes that not to pay them what they are worth is costlier still. Strange as it may seem, when the labour movement was advocating the abolition of child labour, the strongest opponents to this reform generally ended up being its greatest beneficiaries. Such is likely to be the case here. Cheap labour is often unproductive labour and the concentration of women in dead-end jobs means a loss of talent, which Canada should utilize. Women also tend to be responsible for the raising of families and so children suffer; and the existence of women's low wages are a factor in maintaining lower wages for men. The problem then is not one of women's interests versus men's, but of maintenance of the status quo and age old discriminatory attitudes versus long-run productivity and prosperity. The Ontario government babbles about the lack of such legislation in other jurisdictions. "Monkey see, monkey do" is a game they have played long enough and they would only be lauded for innovative and socially responsible legislation.

Another critical issue underlying women's role and treatment in the work force is education. There is an urgent need for extensive and early vocational counselling as part of a non-sexist education. Both male and female children must be exposed to a much wider range of possibilities and expectations to ensure that all the vestiges of sex-based patterns of employment become non-existent.

Sweden is a remarkable example of reform in this area. The Swedes have begun a re-education program on sex roles for the whole nation includ-

ing the rewriting of the school curriculum and texts, the retraining of teachers to present adult life where parents share responsibility for home and children and meet on equal terms on the job. In addition labour market authorities opened apprenticeship and training programs at every level, and of course support services were instituted beginning with child care. Ontario should take heed!

The social inequalities, the discrimination in the work force, the often hidden and unarticulated assumptions about women's abilities, needs, skills and desires must be attacked and changed.

Specifically we propose:

1. That the government adopt a comprehensive policy to promote both equal pay for work of equal value and equal opportunity and to draft enforceable legislation which would encompass these policies under one act.
2. That the present legislation on equal pay be much more strictly enforced, that violators of the act be publicized and that stiff penalties be meted out.
3. That educational and publicity campaigns be carried out to inform women of their rights under the legislation, to promote implementation of equal pay for work of equal value, and to apprise employers of their full obligation in this regard.
4. That a long range plan of affirmative action be established to ensure promotion and employment opportunity for women and that adoption of this principle be a prerequisite to the awarding of government contracts.
5. That textbooks must be produced which eliminate sex-stereotyping and portray women in diversified roles; traditionally male or female subjects should be open to both sexes with full support from teaching staff for those who display interest or aptitude for such courses; guidance counselling should be improved to eliminate the tendency to direct girls into "female" programmes and boys into "male"; and teacher training should include courses in the unconscious sex stereotyping which pervades the school system.
6. That the new regulations pertaining to the equalization of pension and other employee benefits be strictly monitored and enforced.
7. That maternity leave provisions be revised to allow either working parent to stay at home and care for the newborn child and collect the cash benefit, and that such cash benefits under the Unemployment Insurance Act be extended to full salary for a parent earning the minimum wage.
8. That universal child care be available as a right to all parents and children, and be funded through corporate financing; each centre must have properly trained, qualified personnel with a child-staff ratio which would allow proper supervision and care; and staff in the centres must be paid substantial wages which reflect their education, training and expertise, and the responsibility of their job.
9. That tougher legislation concerning property rights be enacted to ensure that married persons are entitled to share in the assets acquired by either or both during marriage.
10. That abortion be removed from the Criminal Code.
11. That much more detailed statistics be collected by the Ontario government concerning the wages and salaries of women in the labour force and other pertinent data so that enlightened research and just policy making can be undertaken.

UNION ACTION

Unions in Canada have a long record of supporting measures to improve the status of women. A number of unions, particularly those in the white collar field have been promoting excellent campaigns during this women's year. It is a sorry fact nonetheless that within the trade union movement some women still experience similar types of occupational segregation, lower wages, unequal benefits and promotion opportunities as their sisters outside the union movement.

Unions can play a unique role in ensuring equality of working conditions and economic progress for women. The ability to negotiate a collective agreement can be a powerful tool to overcome injustices women suffer on the job.

Women are also conspicuous by their absence on the executives and committees of most unions. While this is no doubt partially due to the trepidation and apathy of some women, the majority of women who are sincere and dedicated unionists, if informed and encouraged, are ready to look for leadership roles in the union and better job opportunities.

This is a particular challenge and a difficult one for unions in this period of high unemployment and economic instability. If the labour movement can meet this challenge, as it has done in the past, and bring the issues of equal pay and opportunity to the bargaining table, the impetus and far reaching effects such actions will trigger will revolutionize our social and economic structures.

Specifically the OFL encourages its affiliated unions to:

1. Develop an affirmative action program in the union to encourage participation by women in running for office on bargaining committees, local union offices, convention and conference delegations and standing committees.
2. Establish joint union-management committees as part of a workplace affirmative action program to identify inequities in the status of male and female employees and make concrete recommendations to guarantee equal opportunity in training, promotion and career advancement.
3. Police collective agreements on a non-discriminatory basis at all levels (benefits, wages, job classifications, seniority, hours of work, maternity leave, training programs) and advise women members of their rights and the procedures for filing complaints when discrimination is present.
4. Ensure that all training programs, whether management or union, are open to women on an equal basis.
5. Negotiate equitable systems of job evaluation which measure the worth of the job and not the sex of the job holder and promote equal pay for work of equal value.
6. Establish or continue an education program to inform new members particularly women of the structure of the union, its policies and procedures, rules of order and so on.