

Power and Pay: The Union and Equal Pay at B.C. Electric/Hydro

Gillian Creese

Volume 32, 1993

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/11t32art06>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (imprimé)

1911-4842 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Creese, G. (1993). Power and Pay: The Union and Equal Pay at B.C. Electric/Hydro. *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 32, 226–246.

Résumé de l'article

Cet article examine la lutte pour l'égalité salariale des femmes dans le grand bureau d'un syndicat où l'on retrouvait un personnel de bureau féminin et des travailleurs techniques et manuels masculins. Pendant plus de 30 ans, de 1949 à 1981, le Office and Technical Employee's Unions a poursuivi un objectif de "de salaire égal pour un travail de valeur égale" pendant que l'employeur, la B.C. Electric/Hydro restructurait systématiquement l'inégalité salariale. Au cours de la même période, les pratiques et les priorités de négociation du syndicat renforçaient la hiérarchie au travail selon les sexes et l'égalité salariale pour les femmes demeurait une préoccupation sectorielle de femmes plutôt qu'une question syndicale de fond.

Power and Pay: The Union and Equal Pay at B.C. Electric/Hydro

Gillian Creese

Introduction

THE DYNAMICS OF UNION commitment to gender equity are central to our understanding of the reproduction of gendered classes¹ and the promise and limitations of unions as vehicles for greater gender equality. As more women fill the rank and file of unions, and as more women move into leadership roles, union representation of women has become more effective and more contradictory. Issues like pay equity, sexual harassment, affirmative action, daycare, and maternity leave have become bargaining demands in many unions, but often coexist rather uneasily with more traditional attachments to seniority, hierarchical occupational and skill classifications, and masculine norms on the job.² The workplace itself is a highly

¹The term gendered classes denotes the inseparable character of social relations as simultaneously shaped by class and gendered relations of power and privilege, rather than a relationship between two separate processes. See John Acker, *Doing Comparable Worth Gender, Class and Pay Equity* (Philadelphia 1989); Cynthia Cockburn, *Machinery of Dominance Women, Men and Technical Know-How* (London 1985); and Sally Hacker, *'Doing it the Hard Way' Investigations of Gender and Technology* (Boston 1990).

²See Maureen Baker and May-Anne Robeson, "Trade Union Reactions to Women Workers and Their Concerns," *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 6 (1), 1981, 19-31; Linda Blum, *Between Feminism and Labor* (Berkeley 1991); Linda Briskin and Lynda Yanz, eds., *Union Sisters Women in the Labour Movement* (Toronto 1983); Carl Cuneo, *Pay Equity: The Labour-Feminist Challenge* (Toronto 1990); Miriam Edelson, *Challenging Unions: Feminist Process and Democracy in the Labour Movement* (Ottawa 1987); Nancy Gabin, *Feminism in the Labour Movement: Women and the United Auto Workers, 1935-1975* (Ithaca 1990); Edmund Heery and John Kelly, "Do Female Representatives Make a Difference? Women Full-Time Officials and Trade Union Work," *Work, Employment & Society*, 2 (4), 1988, 487-505; Meg Luxton and June Corman, "Getting to Work: The Challenge of the Women Back Into Steko Campaign," *Labour/Le Travail*, 28 (Fall 1991), 149-185; Heather Jon Maroney, "Feminism at Work" in Maroney and Meg Luxton, ed.,

gendered environment, and 'gendered jobs' are part of what unions negotiate with employers — usually from the vantage point of male workers — from conceptions of skill and appropriate remuneration to gender hierarchies and segregation in the workplace.³ Feminized union politics tries to bring the gendered nature of workplace practices to the fore, and in so doing seeks to redirect politics within the labour movement.

A central issue within the labour movement today, and support for which is a good barometer of the advance of feminization, is the issue of pay equity. Like earlier union struggles for pensions, shorter hours, unemployment insurance, and health and safety standards that eventually affected all workers, the labour movement's support for pay equity can help raise the value of all women's work. Union support for pay equity is uneven at present. There are well-grounded fears that employers will attempt to redistribute the costs of pay equity to better paid (usually male) workers. Workers' own attachment to existing skill hierarchies, especially workers who benefit most at present (again usually men), and definitions of masculinity and femininity embedded in workplace hierarchies, are another barrier to strong support for pay equity. In addition there are numerous technical and political problems in implementation. Nevertheless, whether through pressure for effective government legislation or in negotiations with individual employers, some unions are playing a central role in getting pay equity on the agenda. Other unions lag behind, providing little or no support, or while advocating pay equity seem unclear about what comparable worth constitutes, sometimes resulting in settlements that provide little more than the appearance of a solution to women's low pay while hampering further progress.⁴

Feminism and Political Economy Women's Work, Women's Struggles (Toronto 1987); Shirley Tillotson, "Human Rights Law as Prism: Women's Organizations, Unions, and Ontario's Female Employees Fair Remuneration Act, 1951," *Canadian Historical Review*, 72 (December 1991), 532-57; and Julie White, *Women and Unions* (Ottawa 1980), and *Mail and Female Women and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers* (Toronto 1990).

³See Joan Acker, "Class, Gender, and the Relations of Distribution," *Signs*, 13: 3, (1988), 473-97, and "Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations," *Gender & Society*, 4 (June 1990), 139-58; Cynthia Cockburn, *Brothers Male Dominance and Technological Change* (London 1983), and *Machinery of Dominance*, *op. cit.*; Jane Gaskell, "Conceptions of Skill and the Work of Women: Some Historical and Political Issues," in Roberta Hamilton and Michele Barrett, *The Politics of Diversity* (Montréal 1986), 361-80; Sara Horrell, Jill Rubery, and Brendan Burchell, "Gender and Skills," *Work, Employment & Society*, 4: 2 (1990), 189-216; Jane Jenson, "The Talents of Women, The Skills of Men: Flexible Specialization and Women," in Stephen Wood, ed., *The Transformation of Work? Skill, Flexibility and the Labour Process* (London 1989), 141-55; Barbara Reskin and Patricia Roos, *Job Queues, Gender Queues: Explaining Women's Inroads Into Male Occupations* (Philadelphia 1990); and Sylvia Walby, "Flexibility and the Changing Sexual Division of Labour," in *The Transformation of Work*, *op. cit.*, 127-40.

⁴Acker, *Doing Comparable Worth*; Pat Armstrong and Hugh Armstrong "Lessons From Pay Equity," *Studies in Political Economy*, 32 (Summer 1990), 25-54; Blum, *Between Feminism*

The current struggle for pay equity is part of a larger and longer struggle for equal pay for women that stretches back throughout this century. Although the definition of equal pay has been transformed during this time, the gendered class reality of working people's lives, and the unions that represent them, remains clearly enunciated throughout this struggle. The equal pay movement has occurred in three different phases, with pay equity the most recent of these. The first phase of equal pay was limited to identical work, and gained increasing currency during both world wars with the partial breakdown of gender segregation in the workplace. In this early form, equal pay for women performing 'men's work' was linked to protecting men's jobs from cheaper competition, and seldom led directly to a new vision of women's equality.⁵ The second phase, which developed slowly through the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, broadened the equal pay principle to include different men's and women's work defined as equal in value — equal pay for work of equal value within existing job hierarchies. This re-conceptualization occurs after the application of scientific management and job evaluation plans to more areas of 'women's work', producing job evaluation plans that systematize job hierarchies and explicitly compare the value of different female and male work. Comparing the equal value of different work in the second phase of the equal pay struggle was a necessary precondition to deconstructing existing skill and value hierarchies as gender-biased, and redefining the value of women's and men's work in the pay equity movement of the 1980s and 1990s. The third phase of the equal pay movement challenges the relationship between masculinity, skill, and higher pay, and, unlike the earlier phases, has the potential to alter gendered class relations fundamentally.⁶

and Labour; Cuneo, *Pay Equity*; Judy Fudge and Patricia McDermott, ed., *Just Wages: A Feminist Assessment of Pay Equity* (Toronto 1991); Carol O'Donnell and Philippa Hall, *Getting Equal* (Sydney 1988); Ronnie Steinberg "Social Construction of Skill Gender, Power, and Comparable Worth," *Work and Occupations*, 17 (4) 1990, 449-82; and Rosemary Warskett, "Wage Solidarity and Equal Value: Or Gender and Class in the Structuring of Work place Hierarchies," *Studies in Political Economy*, 32 (Summer 1990), 55-83.

⁵Josie Bannerman, Kathy Chopik and Ann Zurbrigg, "Cheap at Half the Price: The History of the Fight for Equal Pay in BC," in Barbara Latham and Roberta Pazdro, eds., *Not Just Pin Money Selected Essays on The History of Women's Work in British Columbia* (Victoria 1984), 297-313; Gillian Creese, "Sexual Equality and the Minimum Wage in British Columbia," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 26 (4) (1991-92), 120-40; and Tillotson "Human Rights Law."

⁶Pay equity is not a panacea. The comparable worth process usually entails constructing a new 'gender neutral' job evaluation system that reinforces sex segregation and a new skill hierarchy in the workplace at the same time that it challenges the existing gendered hierarchy. At the same time, pay equity does offer some hope of reducing, but not eliminating, the gendered wage gap. For a good critique of pay equity, see Fudge and McDermott, *Just Wages*.

This paper analyzes the struggle for equal pay for women in one large office union, the Office and Technical Employees' Union (OTEU) at British Columbia Electric/Hydro, concentrating on the second phase of the equal pay movement that preoccupied the union for more than three decades. The OTEU expressed an early and ongoing commitment to equal pay for women and, unlike most unions, did not abandon demands for equal pay after World War II. Instead, once equal pay for identical work was accomplished, the union shifted to the second phase of the equal pay struggle in 1949 and actively pursued equal pay for different male and female work for more than three decades. Equal pay for equal job-evaluation was finally achieved in 1981, yet this struggle did not produce a subsequent questioning of gender-bias within the job-evaluation process or the structure of the existing hierarchy of jobs. Far from having proved to be a leader in the third phase (the pay equity movement), the OTEU has shown a very recent, and as yet uncertain, commitment to the broader conception of equal value embodied in pay equity.

Dual Pay Scales at BC Electric

THE BRITISH COLUMBIA ELECTRIC COMPANY began in 1897 as the BC Electric Railway Company, formed to serve the growing populations of Victoria, New Westminster, and Vancouver. With a monopoly on the generation and supply of electric power, gas, and public transportation in the major urban centres, BC Electric grew rapidly, employing more than 6,000 people at the end of World War Two.⁷ There were three main groups of employees at BC Electric. The blue-collar street railway and electrical workers occupied primarily-male areas of employment, and each engaged in union activity from around the turn of the century, striking four times during the labour upheavals at the end of World War One.⁸ In contrast, white-collar office workers were fairly evenly split between women and men, and were much slower to organize, but the organization of other workers at BC Electric, and a company policy of recognizing unions, provided a context that encouraged unionization long before most other office workers.⁹

Office workers at BC Electric formed their own union, the Office Employees' Association (OEA), at the end of World War Two. The OEA was originally formed as a social club in 1921, but by the 1930s was attempting to bargain wage increases on behalf of office staff, albeit with little success. When the federal government passed P.C. 1003 and institutionalized collective bargaining rights in Canada in

⁷Power Corporation Annual Report, 1948.

⁸Street railway workers were organized under the auspices of the SRU, and electrical workers were part of the IBEW. Patricia Roy, "The British Columbia Electric Railway Company Ltd, 1897-1928: A British Company in British Columbia," PhD Dissertation, University of British Columbia, 1970, 266-92.

⁹Interview 1 (four former Executive Board members in the 1950s and 60s). In order to maintain confidentiality on sensitive issues, interviews are cited by number, with a general description of the position of the individual(s).

1944, the OEA sought certification as the legal bargaining unit for office workers at BC Electric. On 19 May 1944, 90 per cent of eligible OEA members voted for certification and the OEA became a legal trade union. Although it originated as a company union, the OEA affiliated with the AFL-chartered Office and Professional Employees' International Union in 1955, becoming Local 378, and in 1964 renamed itself the Office and Technical Employees' Union (OTEU) Local 378. Today the OTEU Local 378 is one of the largest unions in British Columbia, representing 8,400 members in more than 20 companies, with BC Hydro (formerly BC Electric) until recently the largest group in the local.¹⁰

Membership in the new union was roughly half male and half female, as it has remained ever since, but the leadership was overwhelmingly male. For much of the union's first 40 years, the recording secretary, who was always female, was the only woman on the executive board. The union constitution reflected the sharply segregated workplace by specifying some councillors¹¹ by job, floor, and even gender. Specification by job, floor, and gender resulted in a higher proportion of women councillors in the 1940s and 1950s than might otherwise have been the case, and as the practice of specifying the job, floor, and gender of some Councillors died out in the 1960s, the proportion of women on the executive council fell, not to grow again until the 1980s. While women never were absent from union activism, they remained marginal within the union until recently. The first female president of the union was elected in 1984, and since then the number of women councillors and executive board members has grown considerably.¹²

¹⁰ Affiliation with the AFL-chartered Office and Professional Employees' International Union in 1955 coincides with the first attempts to organize other office workers. To reflect this shift from a company union, its name was changed to Office Employees' International Union (OEIU) Local 378 in 1960, and four years later in an attempt to reflect the increasing technical component of many of its members jobs it was renamed the Office and Technical Employees' Union (OTEU) Local 378. To avoid confusion the union is referred to as the OTEU throughout this paper. UBC Library Special Collections, OEA General Minutes, Box 1: File 1, 25 October 1921 — 14 March 1933; File 2, 11 April 1933 — 12 March 1940; OTEU Executive Council Minutes, Box 1: File 3, 12 October 1943, 9 May 1944, 15 May 1944, and 13 June 1944; File 4, 29 March 1955 and 20 April 1955; File 11, 26 January 1960; File 15, 5 May 1964; and *The Office and Technical Employees' Union Local 378 Welcome to Our Union*, 1992, 2. For a rather uncritical history of the OPEIU, with one chapter on its Canadian locals, see Joseph Finley, *White Collar: The Story of the OPEIU and Its People* (New York 1975).

¹¹ Councillors are elected to represent various divisions of workers (previously different geographical locations within the company that corresponded to different types of jobs, today different companies represented within local 378). Councillors sit on the Executive Council, and often simultaneously act as job steward.

¹² UBC Library Special Collections, OTEU Executive Council Minutes, Box 1: File 3 (April 1940–April 1950), File 4 (April 1950–April 1957), File 5 (May 1957–December 1959), File 11 (1960 & 1961), File 12 (1962), File 13 (1963), & File 15 (1964); OTEU Executive Council Minutes, Box 2: File 1 (1965), File 2 (1966), File 3 (1967), File 8 (1968), File 9 (1969), & File 10 (1970); OTEU Executive Council Minutes, Box 5: File 5 (1978), File 6 (1977), File

The work force represented by the OTEU was sharply segregated on the job. Women, mostly young single women in the early years, were limited to clerical jobs. Men occupied a wide range of clerical and technical jobs as well as supervisory and manual labour within OTEU jurisdiction, and electricians, linemen, truck drivers and janitors in the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), transit workers in the Street Railway Union (SRU), and engineers and managers outside of any union jurisdiction. Professional engineers dominated management, producing a hierarchical corporate culture that valued male technical work associated with engineering while devaluing the clerical work performed by women.¹³ The gender composition of the OTEU affected its often less than cordial relations with other unions at BC Electric, especially the stronger, predominantly male and craft-based IBEW who tended to dismiss the OTEU as the 'girls' union.¹⁴ Although the OTEU is a pioneering white-collar union that has made considerable gains for its members over the years, on the whole it has not been a militant union. More reluctant to strike than the more-militant IBEW, the OTEU did not strike at BC Electric/Hydro until the 1970s.¹⁵ Bargaining in a community context of non-unionized, female-dominated office workers in the private sector and, later, relatively weak unions in the public sector, also lessened its bargaining clout with the employer. The OTEU has seldom been able to make the same gains as the male blue-collar unions and the wage gap between the two has widened over the years.¹⁶

7 (1974), File 8 (1972), & File 9 (1971); OTEU Executive Board Minutes, Box 1: File 8 (April 1951-December 1955), File 9 (1956 & 1957), File 10 (1958 & 1959), & File 14 (1963); OTEU Executive Board Minutes, Box 2: File 5 (1960 & 1961), File 6 (1962), File 7 (1964), File 13 (1966), File 14 (1965), File 17 (1970), File 18 (1969), File 19 (1968), & File 20 (1967); OTEU Executive Board Minutes, Box 3: File 1 (1971), File 2 (1972), File 3 (1973), & File 4 (1974). Current OTEU Office Files (Burnaby, BC Office), OTEU Executive Council Minutes, File 790071 (1979-1992); OTEU Executive Board Minutes, File 790059 (1979), File 800024 (1980), File 810021 (1981), File 820014 (1982), File 830014 (1983), File 840014 (1984), File 850014 (1985), File 870014 (1987), File 80014 (1988), File 890014 (1989), File 900014 (1990), & File 910014 (1991).

¹³For a discussion of patriarchy and engineering culture see Hacker, *Doing It the Hard Way, and Pleasure, Power and Technology* (Boston 1989).

¹⁴The term sometimes used was a union of "panty-waists," referring not only to the large number of women in the union, but also to the less 'masculine' nature of the male work, at least from the point of view of the male craft workers. Interviews 15 & 21 (current and former Business Agents) and Interview 1 (former Executive Board members).

¹⁵The OTEU never struck BC Electric (1944-1962). Once it became a provincial Crown corporation, the right to strike became a political issue and was denied for most of the 1960s. The union became more militant in the 1970s and, with the right to strike restored, did undertake various work stoppages including the first full strike in 1975. The last strike occurred in 1983-84, beginning with the Solidarity protests and lasting several months. It was a bitter strike that ended with major union concessions, followed by massive layoffs, and has dampened militancy ever since.

¹⁶The OTEU has always drawn direct comparisons with rates in the IBEW, and for years tried to maintain the same relationship between (male) OTEU technicians and (male) IBEW lineman

Women occupied a limited range of jobs at BC Electric and, as was the established custom, earned considerably lower wages than their male counterparts. Their work and their wages alike were tied to the construction of gendered jobs — assumptions about masculine and feminine work, its value, and family commitments so clearly expressed in support for the male family wage — but these were also subject to change.¹⁷ At the end of the war, the gender division of labour was in flux at BC Electric as it was across the country. During the war, women had been hired for many traditionally male jobs, performed them well, and were cheaper. The ability to use cheaper female labour in a broader range of jobs was clearly attractive to employers, although this trend was at odds with the reaffirmation of domesticity that dominated the post-war period.¹⁸ Broadening women's employment was especially attractive in those areas undergoing technological change or already similar to other women's work, such as male clerical jobs.¹⁹ As BC Electric entered the latter half of the 1940s, then, the boundaries of the gendered division of labour within the OTEU had softened and become permeable.

In 1945, BC Electric hired management consultants Stevenson and Kellogg to implement an office-job evaluation scheme based on the principles of scientific management. The union supported job evaluation in principle as a way of imposing order on a haphazard system of remuneration and eliminating management expressions of favouritism, but soon had objections to the plan implemented.²⁰ BC Electric adopted a factor point plan evaluating all office jobs according to 10 factors grouped into three main categories of knowledge and ability, responsibilities, and physical conditions. These factors were gender-biased in their construction, includ-

that existed in 1946, but to no avail. Today the typical comparison is between (male) janitors, the bottom of the IBEW rate, and the bottom of the (female) clerical rate, Group 2, in the OTEU. The latter is approximately 60 per cent of the former rate. Interview 22 (current Executive Board Member).

¹⁷See Joy Parr, "Disaggregating the Sexual Division of Labour: A Transatlantic Case Study," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30 (3) 1988, 511-33, and Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners* (Toronto 1990); see also Cockburn, *Brothers*.

¹⁸For an interesting discussion of restructuring the gendered division of labour during and after the war in the United States, see Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex During World War II* (Chicago 1987); on the experience of Canadian women, see Ruth Roach Pierson, *"They're Still Women After All": The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood* (Toronto 1986). See also Veronica Strong-Boag, "Home Dreams: Women and the Suburban Experiment in Canada, 1945-60," *Canadian Historical Review*, 72 (December 1991), 471-504.

¹⁹I am not aware of a postwar incursion of women into the male blue-collar jobs at BC Electric, although women had worked in the electrical division and as buss conductors during the war. The grey area of shifting boundaries after the war was mostly within OTEU jurisdiction, involving office work that men presently did that might well be reassigned to women.

²⁰UBC Library Special Collections, OTEU Bargaining Files, Box 21: File 8, 7 November 1947, letter from OEA to Grauer, president of BCE, 3-4; Box 24, File 31, 7 November 1945, letter from Grauer to OEA, 2-3.

ing valuing heavy or dirty work more highly than clean or light work; contacts across departments more highly than those within departments; communication with suppliers and senior management more highly than communication with customers; and excluding low-skilled, "non-office" jobs from the evaluation system so as to set wages at a higher level when community standards required higher levels of remuneration.²¹ Office jobs were evaluated by drawing up job descriptions, measuring the number of points applicable for each factor, calculating the total score, and then classifying the job into one of 16 (and soon only 12) job groups. Two separate salary scales were then constructed, a male scale applied to the full range of job groups and a truncated female scale applied to only 9 groups.²² Women were further concentrated at the bottom of the scale. In 1953, 92 per cent of women were in groups 5 and below, while 80 per cent of men were employed in groups 6 and above.²³ In addition to building the lower evaluation of women's work into the job evaluation system, there was a wage gap between male and female work ranked in the same job group. This gap was called the 'female differential' and during the next two decades it ranged from 10 to 20 per cent, with an average gap of 17 per cent.²⁴

The job evaluation system at BC Electric conformed to community standards of the day with its lower evaluation of female clerical work. What was unusual about these wage policies was not the gendered wage gap, but rather the establishment of two parallel pay scales to achieve the requisite pay gap. This necessity resulted from implementing a single job evaluation system that compared different male and female office-work and, once compared, found some work equivalent in value that was not equivalent in existing remuneration practices. Rather than revise discriminatory wage practices, BC Electric reasserted community standards through the female differential. What was hidden discriminatory practice in most workplaces at the time thus became open and systematic practice at BC Electric.

²¹ Almost all non-office jobs were performed by men, and at higher wages than the evaluation system would have produced. The most important non-office job was meter reading, historically an important entry-level job for men, that began at a group 4 pay level.

²² OTEU contracts with BC Electric, 1946 and 1947; and Stevenson and Kellogg Job Evaluation Manuals.

²³ Distribution within the job evaluation system remained fairly consistent for women, but men became more concentrated in the higher groups. The proportion of women in groups 1 through 5 was still 90 per cent in 1968, while the proportion of men in groups 6 and over increased to 90 per cent. UBC Library Special Collections, OTEU Bargaining Files, Box 21: File 6, charts with distribution of male and female OEA members, 1953; and Status of Women File, Box 14: File 14, "Brief on the Status of Women Employed as Office Workers," 21 March 1968, 6.

²⁴ These figures are derived by comparing the minimum and maximum salary levels for each group in the female scale with the equivalent group in the male scale. OTEU contracts with BC Electric, 1946-1962; OTEU contracts with BC Hydro 1962-1967.

In the context of the permeable gender division of labour after the war, the OTEU's immediate concern with the female differential was how it might be used to displace men from their jobs, so the OTEU demanded equal pay for women performing men's jobs. The first contract in 1946 guaranteed equal pay for women performing jobs "ordinarily done by men," a company commitment to more clearly define male and female jobs, and a 20 per cent wage gap between equivalent groups in the male and female pay scales. The union sought a formal policy ensuring that only males should be hired for jobs "ordinarily done by men," that men in groups 1 through 7 be given preference for promotions, and that BC Electric upgrade the job content of male group 3 jobs and raise them to group 4. In addition, the OTEU endorsed BC Electric's policy of transferring women to temporary status upon marriage, and hiring only those married women who received no support from their husbands. All these measures were intended to re-establish the gendered division of labour and strengthen men's claims to a higher family wage. By 1947 BC Electric had given all these assurances and formalized a hiring and promotion policy that reasserted the pre-war gender division of labour. The union leadership saw this as a great victory and believed that it ended an undeclared company practice of filling all new vacancies below group 7 with women.²⁵ Women members thought otherwise, and in 1946 more than 300 women signed a petition protesting the 20 per cent difference in the pay scales.²⁶ Women's presence in the union was significant enough to make their opposition to the female differential serious, and it would not disappear from the union agenda, but reasserting the gendered division of labour was the first priority for the male leadership.

With the gender division of labour redefined the OTEU did not abandon the issue of equal pay for women, as most unions did after the war. In 1949, "Equal

²⁵The fact that the union won its demands for preferential hiring and promotions of men suggests that BC Electric shared the same values regarding male and female work, and the union's conviction that there was an "undeclared" policy of hiring women in men's jobs may have been more a fear of what was possible, rather than a clear policy that was already in place. Unfortunately the archival material does not allow a closer inspection of hiring procedures immediately following the war, but it seems clear that boundaries of gendered work were shifting, and this strong union position played a role in reasserting the pre-war gender division of labour. UBC Library Special Collections, OTEU Executive Council Minutes, Box 1: File 3, Minutes, 1945-1947; OTEU Bargaining Files, Box 21: File 8, 7 November 1947, Letter from OEA to Grauer at BCE; File 9, 31 December 1947 Letter from OEA Vancouver to Victoria local; OTEU Bargaining Files, Box 24: File 15, 5 February 1948 Memo from Jack of BCE to OEA; File 19, Minutes from 30 September 1947, 14 October 1947, and 7 January 1948; & File 31, 12 October 1945, Letter from OEA to Grauer at BCE; and OTEU contract with BC Electric, 1946.

²⁶The OTEU had approximately 1100 members at this point so 300 women protesting unequal pay probably constituted a majority of female members. UBC Library Special Collections, OTEU Executive Council Minutes, Box 1: File 3, 14 May 1946; OTEU Bargaining Files, Box 24: File 20, Minutes, 13 May 1946; and OTEU Contract with BC Electric, 1946.

Pay for Male and Female Employees: No Female Differential" first appeared on the union's bargaining agenda, indicating the transition to the second phase of the equal pay struggle.²⁷ The ability to establish a sharp gender division of labour was a major reason for the early shift to equal pay for work of equal value. Women's lower wages no longer posed the same threat to male wages or male jobs, nor served to divide the interests of union members over appropriate responses to the female differential. Gender solidarity on equal pay for women was more easily built because the boundaries of gender segregation were no longer so permeable.

The existence of a single job-evaluation process, championed as rational, scientific, and fair, was also central to keeping equal pay on the OTEU's bargaining agenda. Accepting as natural a hierarchical gender division of labour in the office was one thing, but where was the fairness in separate male and female pay-scales that paid women less for equally evaluated work? Equal pay for different but equally-evaluated work was raised well before its common advocacy elsewhere because different male and female work could easily be compared at BC Electric and, once compared, discrimination against women was systematic and open. The overt nature of wage discrimination made it more obvious to the male leadership that it was "just not right" and must be changed.²⁸

Women formed a critical mass in the union, so the fact that this open and systematic discrimination affected half of the OTEU's members also made equal pay an important issue. Equal pay for women was not always pursued with the same diligence as issues directly affecting men, but while women's issues were often secondary, they were not ignored. In general, women were much less active in the union than men were during the early years, a pattern common to many unions at the time.²⁹ Women were not often very vocal about their opposition to the female differential, with the 1946 petition standing out as an exception. Indeed, once in place the female differential appears to have been accepted as natural by many women and men.³⁰ The archival evidence shows occasional letters of protest from

²⁷UBC Library Special Collections, OTEU Executive Council Minutes, Box 1: File 3, 26 October 1949.

²⁸This quotation is from an interview with 4 men who were Executive Board members during the 1950s and 60s, among whom there was consensus that the overt nature of wage discrimination was recognized as "just not right" and had to be remedied. Interview 1.

²⁹Various factors have long made it more difficult for women to become union activists, including the problems of operating in a male-dominated union environment, greater domestic responsibilities and childcare requirements for many women and, for most women in the 1940s and 1950s, the short-term nature of their paid careers, typically interrupted by marriage and motherhood. See Linda Briskin & Lynda Yanz, *Union Sisters*.

³⁰Executive Board members of the time do not remember much pressure coming from women members to end the female differential, and in interviews some women have said it was the way things were in all companies so they never thought to complain. Interviews 1 & 10 (former Executive Board members); Interview 22 (current Executive Board member); and Interviews 2, 3, & 4 (women members who have never held elected office).

female members, becoming more frequent by the mid-1960s as the female labour force participation rates began to change and more women worked after marriage and childbearing, and as the second wave of feminism began to bring issues of gender equality into the public discourse. Although there were always some women, and men, activists who ensured that abolition of the female differential remained on the union's bargaining agenda, more militancy from female members likely would have raised equal pay to a higher priority and perhaps resulted in an earlier victory.

Although this issue was on the negotiating table at every bargaining session after 1949, BC Electric simply refused to consider ending the female differential. The company's main arguments for the lower value of female work included: community standards for similar male and female work; two fifteen-minute coffee breaks only women received (originally to comply with the Factories Act) that decreased their work day by 6 2/3 per cent; the high turnover of female employees; and more absenteeism amongst women. Coffee breaks were a useful argument against union demands so BC Electric refused to grant coffee breaks to men, although twice daily tea and coffee wagons did deliver the beverage to their desks. The real reason for the pay difference was conformity to community employment standards and maintaining a cheap source of labour. In 1958 the estimated cost to end the female differential was \$344,000 a year, a large enough sum to encourage management intransigence.³¹ Moreover, as unionized office workers in an otherwise-unorganized sector, clerical staff at BC Electric were better paid than their counterparts in other offices, so it was not difficult to find community comparisons that favoured the company position that their clerical workers were already well-paid. Finally, as BC Electric pointed out, this was not a question of equal pay, as it was commonly understood at the time and encoded in the 1953 Equal Pay Act, because men and women were not doing exactly the same work.³²

Although on the union's bargaining agenda in every contract, the abolition of the female differential was not the union's top priority and never became a strike

³¹UBC Library Special Collections, OTEU Bargaining Files, Box 21: File 2, Minutes, 21 January 1958.

³²Beginning in 1949, the OTEU fought for equal pay in the form of a single pay scale for men and women. The union first argued that this was a question of equal pay for equal work, with the job evaluation system demonstrating the equality of male and female work in the same job group. In 1953, the Equal Pay Act was passed in British Columbia requiring employers to pay the same wages for men and women doing the same work in the same establishment. BC Electric quickly changed the women's pay scale from numerical values to alphabetical values, claiming different value for different work, while the OTEU, arguing that the company was circumventing the intent of the law, changed its demands to equal pay for equal job evaluation. UBC Library Special Collections, OTEU Bargaining Files, Box 21: File 1 (1957-58), File 2 (1958), File 3 (1957), File 4 (1957) & File 5 (1955); and Box 20: File 1 (1966-67) & File 13 (1960). See also Tillotson, "Human Rights Law," for a discussion of union responses to equal pay legislation in Ontario.

issue. General wage increases (usually tabled as percentage increases that widen the wage gap between women and men), and parity between higher-paid male technical jobs and lineman in the IBEW (although never won) were always the top priority. But by the late 1950s, and if for no other reason than inconclusive results despite a decade of tabling equal pay demands, equal pay for equal job evaluation had moved nearer the top of the bargaining agenda even without significant unrest amongst women members. The union began to propose ways to phase out the dual pay scales slowly to break the intransigence of the company. Various alternatives were raised, including transferring women with a number of years experience to the male scale, or those in the higher groups, or female breadwinners, or systematically lowering the gap over a number of years.³³ In 1958, the OTEU finally won a small first step with an additional 1 per cent increase for female employees and a joint committee to study the matter of equal pay for women. After nearly a decade, the female differential was narrowed to 17 per cent.³⁴ The recommendations of the joint equal pay committee three years later concluded that "management give early consideration to the elimination of its dual pay scales...[and accept] the moral responsibility placed upon it by the enactment of the Equal Pay Act in British Columbia."³⁵ BC Electric management ignored the report. The following year the provincial government nationalized the company and created a single publicly-owned utility, and after 65 years BC Electric ceased to exist.

Success At Last? Restructuring the Female Differential at BC Hydro

BC ELECTRIC WAS MERGED with the British Columbia Power Commission to form British Columbia Hydro and Power Authority in 1962.³⁶ As a public company, BC Hydro was more concerned than its predecessor with the appearance of wage discrimination but was just as eager to keep costs down. BC Hydro also resisted paying women more than community comparisons for similar work and argued that the level of complexity and skill involved in clerical work did not warrant wages as high as the male scale. Office unions were beginning to emerge in the public sector but most were still weak, and clerical staff at BC Hydro continued to be better paid than their non-union counterparts. At the same time, management resisted all wage comparisons with its male, blue-collar unions. Without favourable

³³These gradualist alternatives also implicitly accepted many of management's arguments for lower pay for women. Justifications about women's lesser experience and lower skill in equivalent job groupings, and the importance of the male breadwinner norm, are reinforced by recommending that women who do not fit these stereotypes have a greater claim for equal treatment with men.

³⁴UBC Library Special Collections, OTEU Bargaining Files, Box 21: File 1 (1957-58); Box 20: File 12 (1960-61), File 13 (1960) & File 14 (1959-60).

³⁵UBC Library Special Collections, OTEU Bargaining Files, Box 20: File 12: "Equal Pay for Equal Work," 1961, 14-5.

³⁶BC Power Commission provided power outside of the major urban areas.

community comparisons or militant job action, equal pay for women remained largely a moral argument.

In many respects labour relations were now more conflictual, with frequent threats to abolish the right to strike, even though the OTEU had no history of strike action. Despite sometimes stormy labour relations, BC Hydro gradually eliminated the female differential, at least in the form of the dual pay scales. That the real issue for the company was one of appearance rather than substance is clear from the way the female differential was restructured in a new, single-wage scale that continued to deny women equal pay for equal job evaluation, but was now hidden and no longer so obvious to employees.³⁷

The new BC Hydro management soon announced that it was willing to replace the dual wage scales, but with "a common salary scale [that] would result in a composite scale reflecting an average level (male and female)."³⁸ Lowering male wages was clearly unacceptable to the OTEU and could undermine support for equal pay for women. The official OTEU position, bolstered by increasing unrest amongst women during the 1960s, called for a lateral merger of women directly onto the male scale; but the union was still willing to see its implementation in stages, along the lines previously rejected by BC Electric. The gradual approach was eventually adopted, and while for the most part it maintained male wages, it allowed BC Hydro to manipulate the job classification system at each stage and thereby restructure the female differential.

In negotiations during 1963, BC Hydro agreed to begin the process of dismantling the dual wage scales. In exchange for eliminating two fifteen-minute coffee breaks each day, women received an additional 3 per cent increase a year, narrowing the female differential to 11 per cent over two years.³⁹ The next contract in 1965 included a partial merger of the male and female wage scales. Women in groups 6 (F) and above moved laterally to the equivalent male grouping. This affected only 69 women, or nine per cent of female office workers, but even then the cost was minimized by transferring women to the minimum of the male salary range, so many women gained nothing immediate. Moreover, for 91 per cent of

³⁷ It is ironic that the end of the female differential occurred after the company became a Crown corporation because labour relations became more hostile, rather than less, with the constant threat to take union rights away and the denial of the right to strike. In some respects this made the union more militant, and they now had the bargaining chip of publicly embarrassing the government. Interviews 1 & 10 (former Executive Board members).

³⁸ UBC Library Special Collections, OTEU Bargaining Files, Box 20: File 7, Minutes, 20 February 1962.

³⁹ Both men and women would now get coffee and tea service at their desks, which they were not supposed to leave; in this way BC Hydro (like BC Electric before them) claimed that this was not the same thing as a coffee "break." All members got coffee breaks in the next contract. UBC Library Special Collections, OTEU Bargaining Files, Box 20, File 5, Minutes, 8 & 21 February 1963; and OTEU contracts with BC Hydro, 1963 and 1965.

women in groups 5 (E) and below the female differential (now 10 per cent) remained in place.⁴⁰

The separate female wage scale was completely abolished in the next contract in 1967 in what should have been a major, and was certainly a hard fought, victory for the OTEU. Instead, the solution reached in conciliation was unpalatable to the union. Large, across-the-board wage increases aimed at parity with the IBEW, and equal pay for women, fuelled by growing unrest amongst women who expected the transfer to the men's scale to be completed, topped the union's bargaining agenda in a mood of increasing militancy, weakened only by the absence of the right to strike. BC Hydro proposed modest percentage wage increases and the creation of a single pay scale specifically designed so as not to increase women's pay. The latter was to be accomplished by transferring women one group lower on the male scale (so a B became a group 1, a C became a group 2 and so on), maintaining the dual pay structure within a single classification system. The OTEU insisted on a direct lateral transfer, which management rejected since it would produce female wages far ahead of the community. After months of negotiation, the OTEU finally agreed to management's proposal on the single wage scale, but only if the wage rates were raised substantially, which BC Hydro rejected. Eventually a conciliation board ruled in favour of the company. A single wage scale was created, with women needing more points from job evaluation to qualify for groups 2 through 5.⁴¹ The female differential, formally eliminated in 1967, was merely restructured, but restructured in a way that continued to undermine the appearance of gender neutrality and thus continued to keep it near the top of the union's agenda.⁴²

⁴⁰The union fought for fully automatic, length-of-service increases and no merit for years, finally achieving it in the 1965 contract. The further reduction of the remaining female differential is tied to the restructuring of wage scales that resulted. There is no evidence that there was an attempt to reduce the gap that year, and it was apparently understood that the dual pay scales soon would be completely eliminated. UBC Library Special Collections, OTEU Bargaining Files, Box 20: File 2 (1965), Employee Distribution Charts, 18 January 1965; and OTEU contract with BC Hydro, 1965.

⁴¹UBC Library Special Collections, OTEU Bargaining Files, Box 20: File 1 (1966-67); Box 19: Files 12 (1967) & File 13 (1967); OTEU Status of Women File, Box 14: File 14, "Brief on the Status of Women Employed as Office Workers," 21 March 1968; and OTEU contract with BC Hydro, 1967.

⁴²Moreover, BC Hydro insisted on the addition of the following clause to ensure its ability to distinguish between male and female jobs:

It is recognized that due to special job requirements and duties, female employees may not be eligible for selection to certain positions.

This was partly in response to a new nondiscrimination clause won by the union which stated that neither the company nor the union could discriminate on the basis of "race, colour, creed, national origin, age, sex or marital status." The OTEU did not succeed in removing the clause refusing some jobs to women until 1974. OTEU contracts with BC Hydro, 1967, 1969, 1971 and 1974.

From BC Hydro's point of view, its actions did not constitute discrimination against women. Like its predecessor, the company saw itself as a superior employer, and for the most part its employees would agree. Early recognition of unions, high wages and benefits, and, until the 1980s, good job security, have long made it a sought after employer. The sharp gender division of labour and lower pay for women's jobs were hardly unique to BC Hydro. The company, as it always claimed, was merely following community standards regarding the value of women's work, and 'unwarranted' higher wages could be construed as a breach of its commitment to the public to keep costs down. What distinguished BC Hydro from many other employers at the time, in addition to its role as a Crown corporation, was that routine discrimination against women was overt due to the dual wage scale. For management, then, restructuring lower pay for women while eliminating the dual wage scale eliminated the appearance of discrimination without unnecessarily increasing costs or, from their point of view, 'overpaying' their female staff.

The 1967 agreement had not fully accomplished the appearance of gender neutrality since it still set a clear double standard disadvantageous to women, so more restructuring occurred at the next round of negotiations in 1969. The OTEU continued to demand an end to the disparity in women's wages by upgrading those who had been downgraded in 1967 and completing the direct lateral transfer of women to the male scale. Management finally agreed to complete the lateral transfer of female jobs to a single wage scale (moving former group B from group 1 to 2, and so on), but in addition all male office jobs in groups 1 through 4 were transferred out of the job evaluation system so there were only women left below group 5! Male jobs below group 5 were all now designated as non-office jobs and subject to wage negotiations outside the job evaluation plan, resulting in higher wages.⁴³ In addition, the pay scales were restructured so that those in the lower groups earned proportionately less than those in the middle and upper groups, with an even more skewed pay grid than previously.⁴⁴ Although now with the ability to

⁴³For example, as of 1 November 1969 a group 4 office salary ranged from \$429 to a maximum of \$514; compared to \$422 to a maximum \$552 for group 4 non-office jobs. UBC Library Special Collections, OTEU Executive Council Minutes, Box 2: File 9, 30 September 1969; and OTEU contract with BC Hydro, 1969.

⁴⁴The number of length-of-service increases were reduced, decreasing the spread between starting and maximum salaries in the lowest groups, and at the bottom of the scale the spread between groups was increased. For example, in group 1 there was now only one length of service increase, resulting in a spread of 7 per cent between starting and maximum pay. Groups 6 through 12 had 5 steps, and a 17-per cent spread between starting and maximum pay. In the previous agreement, each group had a 21-per cent spread internally. In addition, the spread between the maximum of one group and the one above ranged from 14 per cent between groups 1 and 2 to 8 per cent between groups 11 and 12. The result was that a general 15-per cent increase over two years produced increases in maximum salaries ranging from 0.5 per cent in group 1 to 19 per cent in group 12. The rest of the increases were as follows:

strike, and after taking a strike vote to strengthen its bargaining demands, a more equitable settlement for female members apparently did not warrant more militant action, and none was forthcoming.⁴⁵ The female differential was restructured and BC Hydro's pay scales now had the appearance of gender neutrality with low-level male (now non-office) jobs no longer subject to job evaluation or appearing on the same pay scale, thus no longer as obviously comparable in value. Over time many employees would be unaware of the gender-based discrepancy in pay rates, or the role of the "non-office" designation in constructing pay differentials.

The OTEU leadership did not ignore the fact that the female differential had been restructured, and the union continued its fight for equal pay for equal job evaluation for women, although unrest among women members subsided, probably because the female differential was now hidden. For the next decade, during five successive rounds of negotiations, the OTEU tabled demands for an end to ongoing discrimination against women by enhancing and rationalizing the pay scales in groups 1 through 4. Equal pay for women stayed on the bargaining agenda, but it never became a paramount issue, and even during a period of increased militancy in the mid-1970s equal pay did not become a strike issue. In light of this, perhaps it is not surprising that it took another 12 years to finally achieve the second phase of equal pay for women at BC Hydro. An Industrial Inquiry Commission established to arbitrate the end of the first OTEU strike at BC Hydro in 1975 upheld the

group 2 (17.1 per cent), group 3 (18.8 per cent), group 4 (21.7 per cent), group 5 (15.6 per cent), group 6 (15.7 per cent), group 7 (15.6 per cent), group 8 (16.1 per cent), group 9 (16.9 per cent), group 10 (18.1 per cent), and group 11 (18.6 per cent). Letters referring to the anomalies created as a result of this restructuring indicate that individual salaries were not lowered below the general increases. UBC Library Special Collections, OTEU Executive Council Minutes, Box 2: File 9, Charts of Salary Scales and Increases, 30 September 1969; OTEU Office Bargaining File, 790378A, letters from Peck at Hydro to Bone at OTEU, 2 & 9 December 1969; and OTEU contracts with BC Hydro, 1967 and 1969.

⁴⁵Unfortunately, bargaining files are missing for the contract negotiations in 1969, so this discussion rests on less detailed material recorded in the general minutes of the Executive Council and the contracts negotiated. It is impossible to determine more precisely BC Hydro's rationale for restructuring the job classification system, but it is unlikely to have rested on an earlier argument for the need to create a more orderly progression in the pay grid because the 1969 revisions make the system less consistent than its predecessor. It is more likely that these changes were rationalized in terms of the need to conform to community standards, thus moving the lower male groups out of the evaluation system to compensate at community rates that were higher for men than for women. With the bargaining files missing, the union's detailed response to these proposals is unknown, but the agreement was reached after a strike vote, but did not involve job action, mediation, or arbitration. Thus it would have to be concluded, that now that a strike was an option, equal pay for women was not of sufficient importance, or did not have sufficient support from the membership, to warrant striking for a better settlement. UBC Library Special Collections, OTEU Executive Council Minutes, Box 2: File 9 (1969); OTEU Office Bargaining File, 790378A (1969-71); and OTEU contract with BC Hydro, 1969.

company's view that its pay scales reflected community standards and levels of skill and complexity, and no further movement was made toward equal pay for women during the 1970s.⁴⁶

Equal pay for equal job evaluation was finally achieved for women in groups 1 through 4, still half of all female office workers, in 1981. A bargaining demand that became a strike issue in 1974, and was achieved that year, was a joint union-management task force to design a new job evaluation system. Experience with restructuring the female differential contributed to the union's frustration with the job evaluation system, but their concerns were tied more generally to the secretive and inconsistent fashion in which the plan was administered. The joint plan was undertaken prior to pay equity challenges to job evaluation, so gender bias was not considered and the new plan, while providing the union with unprecedented involvement in job evaluation from job descriptions through classification and appeals, did nothing to alter the job hierarchy that undervalued all women's work.⁴⁷ The joint job-evaluation plan was finally ready for implementation seven years later in 1981. In negotiations that year, BC Hydro finally agreed that pay scales should be rationalized before the new plan came into effect, and wages in groups 1 through 4 were raised significantly. A cumulative 30-per cent increase over two years, when applied to a rationalized pay scale, produced increases ranging from 48 per cent in group 1 to 30 per cent in group 14, although with lower increases in the middle groups, especially groups 5 through 10. The union complained that some members were expected to pay for the long-overdue fair treatment of others but reluctantly endorsed the contract. Since the female differential had been successfully hidden, resentment was evident amongst many (mostly male) members receiving lower increases and a petition was circulated protesting the agreement. Nevertheless the 1981 contract was ratified and the women in groups 1 through 4, half of all female OTEU members, finally achieved equal pay within the job evaluation system at BC Hydro.⁴⁸ After 32 years the second phase of the struggle for equal pay for women had finally come to an end.

⁴⁶However, in 1974 the OTEU did win a minimum across-the-board increase that resulted in larger percentage increases for the bottom groups. UBC Library Special Collections, OTEU Bargaining Files, Box 21: File 10 (1971), File 13 (1971), File 14 (1974), File 15 (1974), & File 16 (1974); Box 22, File 1 (1975), File 2 (1975-76, especially "Report of the Industrial Inquiry Commission," 16 August 1975), File 3 (1975-76), File 4 (1977), File 5 (1978), File 6 (1978), File 7 (1976), File 8 (1975-77), & File 9 (1977); and OTEU Office Bargaining File, 790378A (1971) and 790378B (1979).

⁴⁷Joint union involvement in job evaluation was bargained away in 1986, so it could not be used to pressure for change from inside job evaluation once pay equity issues began to emerge. UBC Library Special Collections, OTEU Bargaining Files, Box 21: File 15, Minutes, 13 June 1974; & File 16, Minutes, 18 July 1974; Interview 10 (former job evaluation officer and Executive Board member), and Interviews 5, 7 & 9 (members of the joint job evaluation task force).

⁴⁸The pay grid would now have a 9-per cent spread between each group, and a 17-per cent spread within each group with five length of service increases. According to the union the

Pay Equity in the 1990s: A Few Comments

WITHIN THE CONTEXT of the existing job evaluation system, equal pay for women was finally achieved in 1981. But as the comparable worth movement has made clear, equal pay for work of equal value requires rethinking gendered conceptions of skill and value and attempting to construct gender-neutral job evaluation criteria,⁴⁹ something that has not happened at BC Hydro. The early and consistent commitment to equal pay for equal job evaluation, and union involvement in designing a new (albeit not gender-neutral) job-evaluation plan in the 1970s, did not lead to an early leadership role in the movement for pay equity. In fact equal pay for women disappeared from the OTEU's bargaining agenda during the 1980s, even though the first woman president of the local, a feminist although not elected on a feminist platform, was elected in 1984.⁵⁰

One reason for the late transition to the third phase of equal pay for women must be found in the historically marginal role of women in the OTEU, in contrast to their numbers, and the failure to make equal pay part of the core general issues of the union. A brief period of greater union militancy in the 1970s did not highlight any 'women's issues', and the events of the 1980s, including a long and devastating strike in 1983-84, have effectively dampened militancy among all members.

decrease in groups 5 through 13 (all of which received less than the general 30-per cent increase) more than paid for the additional increases for groups 1 through 4. Groups 5 through 10 received the lowest increases. Petitions of complaint were received from (mostly male) members in these job groups. How many members signed the petition is not recorded. The text noted that (male) "family heads" were the ones negatively affected by this agreement. In 1981, 83 per cent of women were in group 6 or below (50 per cent in groups 1 through 4), compared to 14 per cent of men (2 per cent in groups 1 through 4). In addition 18 per cent of men were in non-office jobs (compared to less than half of 1 per cent of women), which were still not subject to job evaluation. OTEU Office Bargaining Files, 800378: Minutes, 20 August 1981; Newsletter, 18 September 1981; President's memo to members, 2 October 1981; Member's petitions to Executive Board, 2 October 1981; and BC Hydro "Employee Counts," 31 March 1981 (supplied by BC Hydro).

⁴⁹See references in footnote 4 and 6.

⁵⁰Anne Harvey was elected president in 1984 following a major union defeat in the 1983-84 strike, and came in on a platform promising more democracy and new leadership. Although Harvey had been active in the Women's Committee before her election, and remains a staunch advocate of pay equity (she is currently on the editorial collective of the newsletter *Just Wages*), few 'women's issues' made it onto the bargaining agenda during her presidency, which ended in 1990. The onslaught of layoffs, restructuring, temporaries, and privatization that began just after her election no doubt made it more difficult to move forward on issues like pay equity, as did continual and bitter divisions among members of the Executive Board. In any event, pay equity was not placed on the union's agenda. A detailed discussion of gendered class politics in the 1980s is beyond the scope of this paper, but forms part of a larger ongoing research project. Interview with Harvey, and Interviews 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 23, 24, & 25 (members of the Women's Committee and/or the Executive Board between 1984-1990).

Throughout the 1980s generally, the union fought just to maintain the status quo in the face of massive layoffs, increasing use of temporaries, corporate restructuring, and privatization, and was often wracked by bitter public disputes among its leaders. Moreover, by the 1980s the nature of pay discrimination was hidden rather than overt so has not facilitated much agitation amongst women members, and at the moment there is little evidence of widespread internal pressure to feminize union politics. The gender division of labour, while still clear among office workers at BC Hydro, is more permeable than it once was and, when combined with the marked lack of upward mobility resulting from down-sizing in the 1980s, any movement that threatens the weakened position of men in the office hierarchy likely will meet with resistance.

In their last round of negotiations in 1991, the OTEU put pay equity on the bargaining table for the first time, pointing out the inequities between the IBEW and OTEU base salaries (janitors and clerical staff respectively) and some other ways the job evaluation system devalues women's work. Pay equity was not won in 1991, nor was it identified as the key bargaining demand. The union, however, has now identified pay equity as a central bargaining issue for the next round of negotiations. Some form of pay equity is likely now that BC Hydro's Board of Directors are NDP appointees, half of whom are women and some of whom are feminists, and as the NDP government prepares to bring in pay equity legislation. But whether the OTEU achieves minimal pay equity through government intervention (by way of the Board or legislation), or more progressive measures at the bargaining table, will largely depend on the strength of its bargaining position and its commitment to gender equity in the next round of negotiations.⁵¹

Conclusions

GENDERED CLASS RELATIONS can be both entrenched and challenged through labour negotiations in individual workplaces. In BC Electric/Hydro, as in all workplaces, workers are inserted into a complex of gender (and race/ethnic) relations that denote varying degrees of power and privilege in the workplace. Hierarchies of skill, comparative value, and divisions between men's and women's jobs must be located in the history of specific organizations and broader power relations, norms, and legislative canons that are negotiated in political conflicts between employers and employees and between different groups of workers. Job gendering is an on-going process, continually renegotiated as technological change, social values, demographic realities (like the increasing paid employment

⁵¹The transition to the third phase of the equal pay struggle appears most strongly influenced by events elsewhere in the labour movement, rather than by a grass-roots demand for pay equity coming from the membership, which in itself can limit the union's ability to make pay equity a clear strike issue. The union plans to undertake an educational campaign on the issue, but so far little has materialized. Interviews 15, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27 & 28 (current Executive Board members and Business Agents).

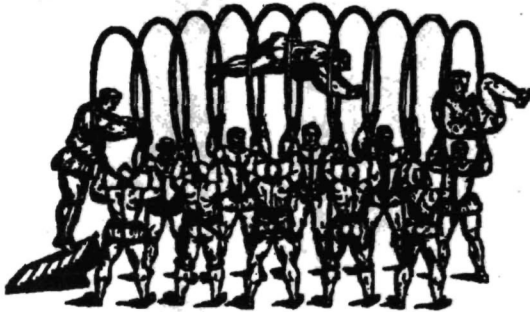
of married women), and the organized struggles of workers and (other) women's groups unfolds. Since this is so, organized struggles for greater gender equality can help to break the historical relationship between definitions of skill and 'men's work', and thereby challenge one of the bases of gender segregation and the feminization of poverty.

This study illustrates some of the ways that gender hierarchies and inequities are defined and reinforced by employers seeking to maintain profits by keeping labour costs down, as BC Electric/Hydro resisted eliminating the female differential, systematically restructured unequal pay, and continually resorted to lower 'community standards' even when the company's own job evaluation system suggested equal comparators with male jobs. Gendered jobs are also shaped by union practices, as evidenced by the OTEU's role in restructuring the post-war gender division of labour in the late 1940s, as well as their early and persistent challenges to the female differential but, at the same time, the continued marginalization of equal pay as a 'women's' rather than a general union issue. In the process, gendered class politics within the union have remained largely defined from the vantage point of the male membership, but with 'women's issues' sometimes figuring prominently.

The feminization of the labour movement is a contradictory process, but this study suggests at least five dimensions that shape that process and affect a union's commitment to gender equity: 1) the density of female membership, 2) the nature of the gendered division of labour (sharp or permeable boundaries and divisions that are stable or in transition), 3) the nature of discriminatory employment practices in the workplace (whether overt or covert), 4) the level of union activism amongst women, and 5) the general militancy of the union. Where enough women are present, visible, and vocal, where gender-based discrimination is open, where the gender division of labour is sharp and not in transition, and where militancy is fairly high, then issues that primarily affect women are likely to be strongly supported, although they may continue to be marginalized as only 'women's issues'. The ongoing process of feminizing the labour movement is about bringing women's issues into the mainstream of collective bargaining, such that the gendered reality of the workplace is explicitly acknowledged, and practices, policies, and priorities routinely scrutinized for their gendered implications. This process is still ongoing at the OTEU, as in many other unions, and it remains to be seen whether the next phase will be relatively swift and painless or, perhaps more likely, fraught with tensions exacerbated by economic decline and restructuring in the 1990s.

This research is funded by a SSHRC Women and Work Strategic Grant. I would like to thank Francis Adu-Febiri, Anna Ambrosini, Sousan Arafah, Dawn Farough, Fiona Maybin, and Sativa Quinn for their work as research assistants. I am indebted to the many OTEU Local 378 members, Executive Board members,

Business Agents, and BC Hydro management who have generously given their time and support to this research. Special thanks to Ron Tuckwood, Gloria Martin, and Paula Stromberg of the OTEU, and the staff at the UBC Library Special Collections. I also wish to thank the anonymous Labour/Le Travail reviewers for their suggestions.



BORDER/LINES

**SUBSCRIBE TO CANADA'S FOREMOST
MAGAZINE OF CULTURAL STUDIES.**

ONE FREE ISSUE WITH EVERY NEW SUBSCRIPTION

Special Issues on:

Eastern Europe, The First Nations, Black Consciousness, Latin America as well as regular coverage of ongoing themes in popular culture, film, art, music, the landscape and more. Also, an extensive book review section.

Published Quarterly

☐

\$20 Individuals

☐

\$16 Low Income

☐

\$35 Institutions

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____ **Postal Code:** _____

Send payment To: Border/Lines

Bethune College, York University, 4700 Keele Street, North York,
Ontario, Canada M3J 1P3 Phone: 416-736-5164 ext. 22050