

**Sexism in British Columbia  
Trade Unions, 1900 - 1920**  
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INTRODUCTION

Women have always had an uphill battle to wage on their own behalf in the labour movement. Union practices have been used successfully to exclude or “properly integrate” working class women into male dominated unions.<sup>1</sup> The roots of the constraints on women’s participation in the union movement in British Columbia can be found in the first two decades of the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> The analysis being presented here highlights sexism in the labour movement at that time.

Sexism in this context has a particular meaning and is identified in a specific way.<sup>3</sup> When union practices differentially affect women workers, thereby creating or maintaining disadvantages for women, these practices are sexist. It is these kinds of practices which are identified and their context of use explored in this essay. Evidence will be introduced to show how sexism featured in the relations set up and enforced by union practices, and beyond that, how unions used sexist practices as a means, along with racist practices, (see below), of differentiating among competitors for privileged positions in the labour force.

Trade unions developed to protect their members from excessive exploitation by employers. To accomplish this, working men formed associations which, by replacing competition with cooperation helped them gain more control over their working conditions. The competition which unions wanted to exclude was that of workers who would work for less money or in bad conditions. Union membership was at that time the prerogative of skilled workers, since scarce skills were the basis of a worker’s bargaining power. At first, therefore, union members were men with special training, who formed themselves into like groups to support each other in demands for better working conditions. Workers without training, e.g., women, children and native people were without this prerequisite for union organization. With adequate numerical strength, a union could force an employer to hire only union members, excluding from the work force non-union workers in this way. The union “closed shop” was an important device, gaining benefits for union members from employers.

Asian immigrant labour was being brought into British Columbia during this time to provide work at substandard rates. Organized labour’s attempts to fight the resulting competition were aimed at exclusion of these immigrant workers, and manifested themselves as racist practices.<sup>4</sup> Asian and native men and women, and white women were forced into work for which little training was required and which was undesirable in some way. It was always low paid and frequently dirty or demeaning. The labour movement avoided seeing women as a legitimate part of the work force early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, although significant numbers of women always had to work outside their homes to make ends meet, and some of these women were unionized.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to being relegated to the kind of work not organized by unions, women were prevented from participating equally with men in the labour movement when they worked in unionized jobs. The union movement from early days in British Columbia was dominated by white men and was attentive and responsive to priorities related to a

white male labour force. However, it is important to this analysis to understand that the labour organizations and labour policies did not remain static during this period.

The union movement began, during the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to be integrated with other institutions into a “ruling apparatus” through which the harmonious development of the capitalist economy could be organized.<sup>6</sup> As this happened, among other serious consequences for working class cohesion, was union adoption through their own policies and practices of ruling class ideas about women.<sup>7</sup> Protection of women’s virtue, sanctity of the home and of women’s dependent status as wife and mother took precedence over the concrete needs of working class women for adequate pay, provision of child care, unemployment benefits, safe and healthful working conditions, equal access to good jobs, and more importantly, the solid support of organized male workers in women’s labour disputes.

## 1. HOW UNIONS ORGANIZED WOMEN

In the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century women in British Columbia worked as domestics, laundresses, chambermaids, garment-makers, milliners, telephone operators, cigar-makers, waitresses, book-binders, shop-assistants, candy-makers, fish-plant workers, cooks as well as nurses, teachers and clerical workers. As the first world war depleted the supply of male workers, women moved into more occupations and the total number of working women increased. Many of these women workers remained unorganized. Scattered references to union activities in women’s occupations reveal some of the organizational disadvantages faced by women in unions.

Prior to an organizing effort at the time of the first world war, (see section three) trade unions had organized women primarily in furtherance of particular policies of their own, for example, exclusion of Orientals. *The Labour Gazette* recorded that the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council assisted in organizing a waitresses’ union and in having the following agreement signed by the hotel and restaurant proprietors:

We, the undersigned, do hereby agree to employ union waitresses and to apply to the secretary of the waitresses’ union when there is a vacancy in my place, all of which I agree to do for a term of one year from Sept. 1, 1910. The waitresses’ union, in consideration of the signature herein contained, do promise the support of the local unions and the central bodies in Vancouver to support houses displaying the card of the Waitresses’ Union, Local 766, Vancouver.<sup>8</sup>

The intention of this agreement was to exclude Orientals from restaurant and hotel work, a continuing union objective. This was made clear by another action taken by the Trades and Labour Council, said to be “in furtherance of [the waitresses’ agreement]”:

It was resolved by the central body to interview the licensing commissioners, in order to have a clause inserted in hotel and restaurant licenses providing that no Orientals be employed on these premises.<sup>9</sup>

Not only did male union policy not meet women's specific needs but it actually had an untoward effect on some women workers, as in the case of the restricted immigration policy and the Home and Domestic Employees. The Trades and Labour Council had played an instigating role in the Domestic Workers' initial organizing work at a time when labour was also actively lobbying for restriction of immigration of artisans.<sup>10</sup> The Domestics' Union actively dissociated itself from organized labour's anti-immigration policy, seeing that the objectives of its group - to raise the status of domestic work - required that more, not fewer, trained domestics be available.<sup>11</sup> This union was exceptional in pursuing objectives specific to their own members. Most of the women's organizations followed orthodox male union policy.

This was true of the Waitresses' Union. These women worked six and a half or seven days a week for low wages, but their union's demands did not reflect this problem.<sup>12</sup> The influence of the Trades and Labour Council actually steered women away from action on issues of importance to them and towards the interests of the male union movement. How this kind of male domination of policy in a women's union was accomplished is suggested in the following anecdote.

In 1905, Vancouver and New Westminster female telephone operators organized themselves into a Ladies' Auxiliary of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers.<sup>13</sup> The IBEW had previously organized the linemen and had concluded successful negotiations for a union shop. The Brotherhood accepted the male telephone operators into its regular body and offered guidance to the women in forming their own organization. One entry in the minutes of the IBEW meetings notes the striking of a committee of men to "whip the girls into line".<sup>14</sup> Another records that the men sent a letter to the women requiring them to change their night of meeting to allow some of the men to attend to help them.<sup>15</sup> Not only does this suggest overbearing and paternalistic attitudes on the part of the union men, but points to the way male-perceived issues and male decision-making practices would have been integrated into the women's organization.

When the operators went on strike in February, 1906, having been threatened by the company to give up their new union organization or be fired, the irregular status of the Women's Auxiliary became a problem. The IBEW men did not know how to conduct themselves during the disagreement and sent for their International organizer to instruct them, and to help the women. Although some of their own members, the male operators, were on strike, the IBEW linemen did not go out with the operators.<sup>16</sup> The strike dragged on and on, with the company refusing to recognize the women's organization. The IBEW provided some strike pay but this became a burden shortly; the minutes record hassles over how it should be raised and eventually it was left to a voluntary contribution.<sup>17</sup> The striking women were replaced and the union was broken, a comment on the lack of support provided for a separate women's organization by men in an associated union. The IBEW was in a relatively strong position with the Telephone Company at that time, able to win contract after contract.<sup>18</sup> But the strength of the men's organization did not benefit the women who were treated by the men's union as "other" than themselves.

Women who were organized into men's unions suffered different effects as a result of being seen as a separate category of workers, a less worthy one. Agreements signed by unions which had male and female membership reflected the low evaluation

placed on women's work, which made belonging to a union less attractive to women than to men. In Victoria, in 1913, the local union of the hotel and restaurant Employees' International Alliance negotiated an agreement in which waiters in unionized restaurants were to make not less than \$10.50 weekly, while waitresses were to get not less than \$8.00.<sup>19</sup> Even wider disparities were commonplace.

In 1918, the Hotel and Restaurant Employees' Union claimed "as a big victory" a strike settlement which still paid chambermaids less than a living wage.<sup>20</sup> The demands which the union had made were vastly different for its male waiters and the chambermaids:

A scale of \$15 to \$18 per week for the waiters, which is an increase of 50¢ per day, and the scale for the chambermaids is \$25 per month, being an amount of 17¢ per day over the old wage.<sup>21</sup>

The "big victory" referred to the wage settlement of \$22.50 per month won by the women, a war-time wage which was only half the amount estimated to be a living wage in 1913. While the report acknowledged that the settlement was not good enough, it pointed out that the employer (the Hotel Vancouver) had promised a better meal for the women while they were on duty.<sup>22</sup>

The same practices which organized female union participation around male unionists' objectives and which ensured the domination of male ideas about how unions were to be run prevented the emergence of indigenous female leadership. Helena Gutteridge is the only woman whose name is consistently associated with union work during this time. Although given prominence (she was on the executive of the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council for many years, and she wrote for the *B.C. Federationist*) her influence was limited. Her work suffered from the handicap of her sex; her authority both within and outside the trade union movement was undermined in the same way as other working women's. When she testified about women's working conditions before the Royal Commission on Labour Conditions in B.C., her report was concise and factual, the product of first hand experience.<sup>23</sup> She had not been invited to sit on the committee drawn up by the Trades and Labour Council to formulate recommendations about women workers, whereas middle-class women were. They were questioned extensively by the Commissioners and had a chance to express their opinions while Gutteridge's testimony was eventually overlooked<sup>24</sup> (see next section).

Appointed "woman organizer" by the Trades and Labour Council in 1918, she held the post for only a few months before she resigned.<sup>25</sup> No reason is recorded in the TLC executive minutes, but Gutteridge was involved in a strike of laundry workers at the time; this strike did not go well and the women strikers eventually lost their jobs.<sup>26</sup> One can speculate that frustration in her organizing role, including lack of support for this strike, may have led to her leaving the post so precipitously. This speculation is supported by the record of a disagreement she had with other members of the council over how union women could be involved in policy decisions affecting them. On this occasion, Gutteridge was forced to withdraw a proposal to bring women together from different unions to discuss the 8-hour day, the minimum wage for women, and mothers' pensions.<sup>27</sup> Her idea had been "to get women working for themselves now that they would have the ballot".<sup>28</sup> The male members of the Trades and Labour Council objected to this special treatment for women, saying the minimum wage for men should

be taken up as well.<sup>29</sup> They also raised objections to any irregular arrangement which drew women together, their position being that elected delegates were the only people who rightfully could represent their unions, even for discussions. They declared that an existing committee (of men) should handle the policy questions in the established way.<sup>30</sup>

This anecdote illustrates how rigid attitudes of male unionists interfered with Gutteridge's organizing efforts. It also shows how the established practices of the central labour body were used to maintain control over the knowledge women workers needed to become politically aware. Such established practices prevented access to the channels through which women might otherwise have expressed their own priorities for action. The structure of the trade union movement, its methods and organizational forms, excluded informed participation by women and maintained policy domination by men.

## 2. WORKING WOMEN IGNORED BY LABOUR

Rather than organizing women, the labour movement's more usual response to working women was to ignore them. When this happened the exploitation of women workers was unchecked by any working class effort. In addition, the lack of attention male trade unionists paid to the actual situation of working women, and the lack of authority they accorded to working women on any subject meant that union men didn't "see" women's problems clearly. When working women's social problems became too public an issue to ignore any longer, trade union men characteristically turned to middle-class women's groups to provide help.<sup>31</sup>

For instance, when the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council was asked by the Royal Commission on Labour Conditions in British Columbia to provide suggestions for legislation to control the working conditions of female shop and office workers, the labour body turned to middle-class groups for advice. They invited representatives from the Local Council of Women, as well as the Board of Trade to sit on a committee with the trade union men to formulate recommendations.<sup>32</sup> The trade union leader, James Wilton, who shared the committee did some investigation on his own, visiting stores and talking to *their proprietors*; no reference is made in his testimony before the Commission suggesting that he ever talked to working women.<sup>33</sup> The committee compromised on the following wage recommendation: they asked that girls aged 14 - 16 be started at wages of \$5.00 per week, with increases every six months until they reach \$10.00.<sup>34</sup> James Wilton testified verbally that he believed that although \$16.50 was a reasonable wage for a working woman, and \$10.00 was barely adequate, his committee had decided to accept the \$5.00 figure that the Local council of Women was recommending as a minimum wage.<sup>35</sup>

Also at the urging of the women's group, a clause was inserted in the union brief recommending that Caucasian women not be permitted to work in establishments with Asiatics, due to the feeling that the morality of the women would be endangered.<sup>36</sup> The brief asked for a woman inspector of places of employment and seats for female employees.<sup>37</sup> These latter recommendations were incorporated into the final report of the Commission, while "unfavourable consideration was given" the request for a minimum wage for women.<sup>38</sup> Rather than better pay

the commission [was] of the opinion that more [could] be done in the interests of women and girls by the appointment of women inspectors with the authority to see that working conditions in shops [were] satisfactory.<sup>39</sup>

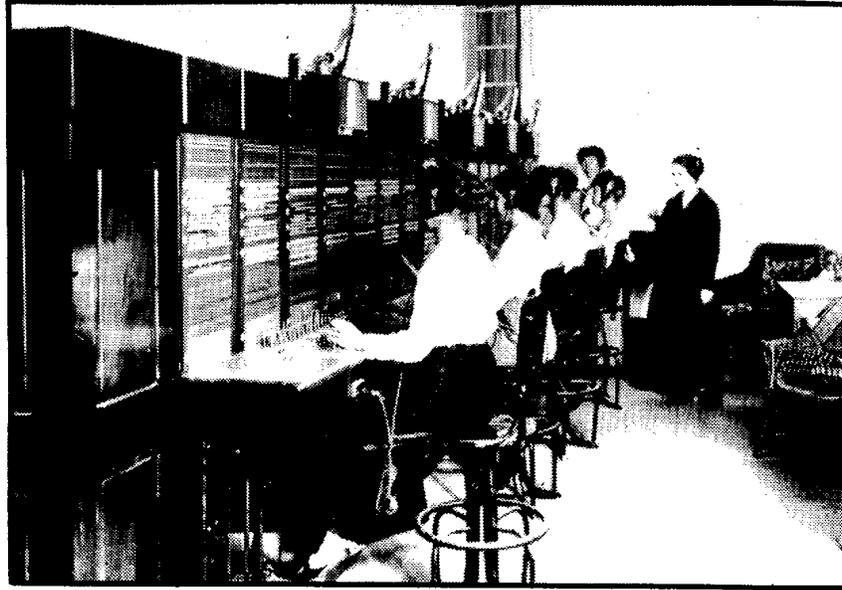
It was the aspect of protection of working women which was picked up by the Commissioners, rather than the need for improved wages. The Royal Commission's recommendations protected business interests, while the interests of working women were not attended to adequately. The Commission had heard plenty of testimony about wages too low to live on being paid to Vancouver shop assistants and concern about prostitution, yet the Trades and Labour Council, having sought help from middle-class groups, was committed to supporting the recommendations they made.

What women's groups focused their attention on in their work with working women was that was available for them to see from their position in society. In Vancouver, Local Council of Women members moved in social circles occupied by businessmen and government officials. Their meetings were held in the Vancouver Board of Trade offices.<sup>40</sup> Their members were appointed to government posts and were received by cabinet ministers.<sup>41</sup> Local politicians and socialites addressed their meetings.<sup>42</sup> These women's ideas were developed through relations of this sort and through a communication network with their own groups across the country which allowed the viewpoints of women in one city to influence the thinking and action in another.<sup>43</sup> For instance, consider how Federal Minister of Labour Crothers' address to a Montreal group would have communicated the government's concept of the working class and shaped women's thinking. These excerpts from his speech illustrate the kind of influence exerted on middle-class women by men in dominant positions. Crothers said:

"The great aim of labour legislation [is] the establishment of the home on a solid basis. Every effort must be made to keep the mother in the home, she being the natural and primary factor in education and in the development of good citizenship."<sup>44</sup>

Crothers went so far as to instruct the women "to interest employees in the output of business" and to dwell, in their contacts with working women, on the idea that "capital and labour rate interdependent".<sup>45</sup> This kind of message took on new importance when it went out to women to whom trade unionists turned when they needed someone to speak for working women. It was with this kind of consciousness that influential women in local communities defined problems and established programs for working women.

The following account whose how consequential was the lack of a "working woman's perspective" in the work on the Local Council of Women Brief to the Royal Commission previously mentioned. Mrs. William Forbes Macdonald was a doctor's wife who presented her group's brief to the Commissioners. She said, in testimony, that she was concerned to present a *balanced account* of the problems of shop-assistants.<sup>46</sup> In her opinion young and inexperienced girls did not do enough work to entitle them to a living wage during their first few years of work in spite of working as much as sixty-six hours per week in a store.<sup>47</sup> She said



PABC Photo

*Hotel Vancouver Switchboard.*



Vancouver Public Library

*Varnishing cans in a B.C. cannery*

“Now, if we are going to deal with this question, we must look at it from both sides, the employer’s side as well as the employee’s side.”<sup>48</sup>

She referred to her desire to “be fair to employers as well as the employee” as the reason that the Local Council reduced its recommended minimum wage for women to \$5.00 from the amount, \$7.50 per week, they had decided was the bare minimum a woman would need to support herself.<sup>49</sup> The balance Mrs. Macdonald tried to find was tipped in favour of the businessman, a mistake she would not have made if she had to live on a sub-minimum income herself.

The provision of unemployment relief during the 1914 - 15 depression was another example of trade union insensitivity to working women’s needs. Women’s suffering was brought to the attention of the Local Council of Women who organized a mass meeting to discuss the problem.<sup>50</sup> A program of action was decided upon, but the Local Council gave priority to a fund-raising campaign for the war effort (which was going on concurrently) and this restricted the effort they could put into raising money for unemployed women.<sup>51</sup> Instead of a door-to-door canvas, which had been discussed, the women decided to concentrate on finding employment for those out of work. Various schemes were tried, none too successfully. Members were urged to make room in their homes for live-in domestics, and an employment agency was set up to find daily domestic work for unemployed women. An ambitious program in which working women’s handicrafts were sold from a storefront was organized. It failed to provide the hoped for return.<sup>52</sup>

The provision of child care became seen as charity in the same way as did unemployment relief. Instigated by people not personally involved in its use, and with funding, housing and staffing arrangements erratic, its service to children was open to criticism.<sup>53</sup> While the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council officials thought the effort to put into unemployment relief by the Local Council of Women was commendable, there was no indication at all that the labour movement saw the need for provision of child care for working mothers.<sup>54</sup> Assistance with child care was left to government officials who were concerned about mounting expenditures for public relief, this being the only alternative available for many women who had to support themselves and their children.<sup>55</sup>

If the union movement had not excluded women, women’s actual working arrangements could have been considered as the basis for union policy concerning women. What working class women needed could have been included in union bargaining, rather than being overlooked entirely or provided as second-rate charitable services. But working women were not consulted about their needs. Trade union men, schooled in discounting the voices of their wives and daughters, listened instead to the more authoritative voices of middle-class women. These women recommended women’s suffrage and female voters’ pressure for a legislated minimum wage as the best way to improve women’s conditions of work. The trade union papers supported this position and urged working women to attend meetings of the Minimum Wage League.<sup>56</sup>

But legislated solutions for women eventually proved an unsatisfactory substitute for organized collective action as had the charitable undertakings of the middle-class women’s groups. Helena Gutteridge reiterated the need for the organization of women workers. Just after the passage of the Minimum Wage Law she wrote:

The principle of collective bargaining is a greater protection to [women] than is at the present time legislation on the statute books, that is not enforced, and never will be enforced for the benefit of the workers so long as the reins of government are held by the representatives of the employing class.<sup>57</sup>

From its inception, the Minimum Wage Board, made up of J.D. McNiven, the Deputy Minister of Labour, Helen Gregory MacGill, a prominent Vancouver woman, and Thomas Mathews, a businessman, seemed to bear this out.<sup>58</sup> The Board implemented its recommendations slowly, to give employers time to adjust to the idea

that while they are in appearance paying more, they are getting more stable conditions, and better service.<sup>59</sup>

There were problems in the method by which the Board operated which biased its action against working women.

The Board had the right to demand from employers what wage they paid any woman or girl; in case it was too low, they could call a conference of employees and employers to work out what was an honest, fair minimum wage..., the aim being to avoid arbitrary strong-arm methods.<sup>60</sup>

The Retail Clerks Union objected to the total discretion allowed the Board in the appointment of employee representatives to these employer-employee hearings, feeling that the Board's choice might not be a suitable representative of the worker's case. (The union had been left out of the decision-making process.)<sup>61</sup>

Decisions made by the Board were not always satisfactory and interfered with union organizing. The example of the Board's involvement with the Laundry Workers is instructive in this regard. These workers had been unionizing in spite of harassment from employers.<sup>62</sup> A difficult strike had been waged in which strikers had lost their jobs. After the strike was called off, the Board, without consulting the union, made its recommendations, which included wages "practically re-establishing the inadequate wage existing before the strike", and a new lower pay scale for workers under 18 years of age.<sup>63</sup> This latter recommendation was seen as contravening the Minimum Wage Act, since it did not provide a living wage.<sup>64</sup> The union said that the Board's recommendation for sub-minimum wages for young women would lead:

to girls over the age of 18 years being eliminated from the industry.<sup>65</sup>

Mrs. MacGill was particularly castigated for her part in this decision. She replied when questioned about it, that the girls "would have parents to help them".<sup>66</sup> She wasn't able to answer when asked about the case of the girl without parents.<sup>67</sup> Her ideas, like those of Mrs. Macdonald, referred to earlier in this paper, suggest that Mrs. MacGill was incapable of providing the advocacy which working women needed for proper implementation of Minimum Wage Regulations.

### 3. UNIONS MOBILIZE AGAINST WOMEN

While not an adequate solution to working women's needs, the Board's short-term help for women and its long-term promises probably eased the return of many women workers to their traditional place in female occupations after the war. This was an issue in which trade unions played a prominent role since increased participation by women in the labour force had become a threat to men's work and wages. The basis of the threat posed by women at this time was their willingness to work for less than men. Having proven that they could do men's jobs, it was feared that employers would keep them on after the war, displacing men who had left work to go to war. The labour press was filled with speculation about the problem and how it should be handled.<sup>68</sup> Writers expressed resentment against women as in this article:

Women have worked for less than men... and women will continue to work for less than men. Employers have had a taste of cheap labour and will be loathe to part with their feminine employees at the close of the war. When the "heroes" return... they will have to seek jobs. The women will insist on staying where they are in the industrial field. The "heroes" will have to accept employment at such work and wages as the employers see fit to give. The work of the trades union for the past fifty years will have to [be] done all over again.<sup>69</sup>

Unions attempted to circumvent the potential problem women might cause by protecting jobs for male workers. For instance, the Postal Clerks decided at their annual convention in 1918 to recommend only temporary employment of women so that their jobs would be available to returning soldiers.<sup>70</sup> The Canadian Trades and Labour Congress recommended that the federal government regulate the employment of women in industry, as this report indicates:

We called upon the government for the protection of women who enter industries to replace men, and suggested that they should only be placed there after full investigation had proven that all available manpower had been absorbed. Inspection of working conditions should be carried out... and reports... as to the advisability of women undertaking any class of work (with the view of their responsibility towards the nation as mothers of our future citizens), should be contingent conditions of their employment in any industry. Equal pay for women employed in work usually done by men, as men are receiving or were receiving for the same work, will be insisted upon.<sup>71</sup>

The TLC was preparing legal routes by which women could be removed from particular jobs, and to ensure that women would not have a competitive edge by virtue of their cheap labour.

The following excerpt from the *B.C. Federationist* probably represented general opinion among trade unions when it suggested that women should be returned to the

home. It pointed out that “considerable tact” would be required to get the women out and the men back into the industrial process once the war was over, but that if this army of gallant and efficient men [were] taken from the battlefield and munitions factory and set... to work upon the fields and in the factories producing the useful and indispensable things of life, it would not be necessary for the rest of the family to do anything at all.<sup>72</sup>

Trade unionists seemed to agree that failing the complete removal of women from the occupations considered to be a male prerogative, or until such time as they were removed, women should be unionized, to reduce competition.

We will not only benefit [women] by helping them to secure equal pay for equal work but we shall... prevent our own wages and conditions from being drawn down to the lower standard by any successful efforts of the employers to use female labour at a lower price.<sup>73</sup>

This writer identified an additional self-interest union men had in organizing women - an important development in thinking of B.C. trade unionists, showing the penetration of “business union” ideas:

We have another interest [in organizing women]; that they are all purchasers of our production. We want them to be union purchasers and large purchasers, that is to say, we want them to earn the highest [wages possible].<sup>74</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Although the research reported in this paper does not focus directly on the ideological directions taken by the British Columbia union movement during this period, it does show, coincidentally, the development of working relations between union leaders and representatives of government and industry. This cooperation affected the decisions unions were making about women workers. Discussions were taking place about women’s working conditions, their involvement in the war effort and potential unemployment caused by more women in men’s jobs after the war. At the same time the central union bodies were being influenced to see industrial harmony as the means to strengthen capitalist development from which certain segments of the working class, the unionized workers, would benefit. Women workers and their organizations suffered from being “outsiders” in the labour movement. Leaders of the labour movement in B.C. consistently treated the women workers they organized, like the unorganized women, as “other” than real workers who rightfully belonged in unions. While treating women workers differently in practice (i.e., in the effort expended on organizing them, in the kind of wage settlements they demanded for them, in matters of job tenure, and so on) they also prevented union structure and regulations from being modified to accommodate women’s special needs. The frequently enunciated objectives of the union movement to get equal pay for women never materialized. Rather, union

practices helped to maintain the low-status, low-paid and poorly organized (i.e., sex-segregated) female labour force. This was a solution to the threat women posed to men's jobs, as well as providing a pool of cheap labour to aid capitalist growth.

Identification of sexist practices in trade unions is not a total indictment of the union movement. Rather, it is an attempt to clarify what happened and how, the better to enlighten women's on-going struggles for equality to contemporary settings. Sexism has been called into use in the past as it still is today, to further particular causes. It has a history about which we can read and from which we can learn.

## Footnotes

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An earlier version of this paper "Women and Trade Unions in British Columbia, 1900 - 1920: The Social Organization of Sex Discrimination" was prepared for the Vancouver Women's Research Centre, July, 1978. I am grateful to Alison Prentice for reading and commenting on the earlier paper. J. Muller and R. Ng also provided helpful suggestions for improvements to this version, prepared for publication in *In Her Own Right*.

<sup>1</sup> Alice Kessler-Harris's research on the history of women workers in United States has led her to reject as insufficient the explanation typically advanced to account for their low rate of unionization, i.e., women's traditional place in the family and in the workforce. Finding Kessler-Harris's argument persuasive, this essay beings from her reformulated research question, "When we stop asking why women have not organized themselves, we are led to ask how women were, and are, kept out of unions." Kessler-Harris, "Where are the organized women workers?" *Feminist Studies* 3:1 (2) Fall, 1975, pp. 92 - 110.

<sup>2</sup> Sources of data include the *Labour Gazette*, (LG), a monthly government publication which published information about Canadian labour conditions; the *B.C. Federationist* (BCF), a weekly newspaper published by the B.C. Federation of Labour from 1911 on; (it represented the left-wing of organized labour in B.C. during most of the period under study); the proceedings of the Royal Commission on Labour Conditions in British Columbia (RCLC), 1912 - 1914, housed in the Provincial Archives, Victoria; the minutes of meetings of the executive of the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council (VTLC), and of Vancouver Local Council of Women (LCW), Special Collections, UBC library; records of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), in their local office, Burnaby; various reports of Vancouver City Council, Vancouver Public Library.

<sup>3</sup> Not to be confused with "attitudes" of people, which are often taken to be the "cause" of women's disadvantage vis-à-vis men. Julie White examines the attitudinal studies of women and unions and finds them wanting as an adequate explanation of why women are not as unionized as men today. White, *Women and Unions*. The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Hull, Que; Canadian Government Publishing Centre, 19890, pp. 29 - 50.

<sup>4</sup> The Vancouver correspondent of the *LG* reported that twenty-seven Japanese carpenters applied for membership in the Moulder's union and were refused. The same report gives an indication of how unions were able to keep contracts from (non-unionized Chinese) tailors; the Trades and Labour council demanded of the city authorities that the contract for police clothing be union made. *LG* 10, p. 1126.

<sup>5</sup> In 1901, 238,000 Canadian women are shown as in the female labour force by the census. This is 13% of the total labour force; White, *Ibid.*, p. 38. Statistics on unionization are not available for early in the century. By 1913 in Vancouver female telephone operators had been unionized; IBEW, May - Dec. 1905; one exclusive women's union was in operation - the Waitresses and Lady Cooks Union, and there were female members of the Garment Workers' and Bookbinders' Unions, *LG*, Female Correspondent, 1913.

<sup>6</sup> Dorothy E. Smith uses the term "ruling apparatus" in a paper "A Sociology for Women" presented at the conference "Prism of Sex: Towards an Equitable Pursuit of Knowledge", Madison, Wisconsin, Oct., 1977, mimeo, p. 6. The significance of organized labour's involvement in a ruling apparatus is discussed by R. Mahon in L. Panich, *The Canadian State: Political Economy and Political Power*, pp. 165 - 198, and by Panich in "Trade Unions and the Capitalist State: Corporatism and its Contradictions", presented at the conference "State and the Economy", Erindale College, Toronto, Dec., 1979.

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<sup>7</sup> An early instance of these working alliances between trade union leadership and government and business interests is referred to in this paper, p. 9 and was developed more fully in my article "Unlocking Women's Experience: A Method for Using Historical Sources" *Our Generation* Vo. 13, No. 3, pp. 11 - 15, 1979.

<sup>8</sup> LG 11, Oct. 1910, p. 421.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> LG 13, Apr. 1913, p. 1080, LG 14, Mar. 1914, p. 1070.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> LG 14, Feb. 1914, p. 954.

<sup>13</sup> *IBEW*, May 1905.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, Dec. 1905.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, May, 1905.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, Feb. 1906.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, May 1906, June, 1906.

<sup>18</sup> LG 6, June, 1906, p. 1383

<sup>19</sup> LG 13, Apr., 1913, p. 1072.

<sup>20</sup> LG 5, Oct., 1904.

<sup>21</sup> *BCF*, Aug., 9, 1918, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> *BCF*, Aug. 2, 1918, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> *RCLC*, IV, p. 124.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> *BCF*, July 19, 1918, p. 1; *VTLC*, Nov. 5, 1918.

<sup>26</sup> *VTLC*, Oct. 28, 1918; Dec. 6, 1918; Jan. 6, 1919; Jan. 13, 1919.

<sup>27</sup> *BCF*, Apr., 1917, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *RCLC* IV, p. 13.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20 - 22.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* This was not a new idea to trade unionists; a resolution passed at the 27<sup>th</sup> annual convention of the Canadian Trades and Labour Congress read: "Whereas, it has come to light from time to time, especially in our coast cities, that Chinese employing white girls have used their positions as employers to seduce and destroy all sense of morality...therefore be it resolved...[to] impress on the Federal government the necessity of passing legislation making it a criminal offense for Orientals to employ white girls in any capacity" LG 12, Oct. 1911, p. 344.

<sup>37</sup> *RCLC*, p. 13

<sup>38</sup> LG 14, Apr. 1914, pp. 1189 - 91.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *LCW*.

<sup>41</sup> e.g., Helen MacGill, appointed to the Minimum Wage Board; National Council of Women representatives had a yearly audience with the Federal Cabinet to put forward their concerns and recommendations.

<sup>42</sup> *LCW*; e.g., Vancouver's mayor addressed the group's annual convention in 1914; Lady Tupper addressed the group on Aug. 10, 1914.

<sup>43</sup> *LCW*; reports from groups across the country were read at meetings routinely.

<sup>44</sup> LG 14, April. 1914, pp. 1157 - 8.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *RCLC* IB, p. 3

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17, 13.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>50</sup> LG 14, Feb. 1914, p. 901; LG 15, Oct. 1914, pp. 467 - 9.

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<sup>51</sup> LCW, Sept. 1914.

<sup>52</sup> LG 15, pp. 800, 927, 1062.

<sup>53</sup> *Report from the Relief Officer to Medical Health Officer, 1912, mentions funds from city council going to the Associated Charities of Vancouver (whose management was composed of businessmen) for establishment of a crèche. This group had interests which included other charitable work such as establishing an old people's home. The LG mentions women's groups being involved in organizing a crèche earlier than this. In 1913, the ACV turned the crèche over to the city to operate. After 1916, it was financed through the Relief Department of the city. In 1914, LCW records criticism of the child care given at the crèche.*

<sup>54</sup> LG 15, Oct. 1914, pp. 467 - 9.

<sup>55</sup> *Relief Officer report to Medical Health Officer, City of Vancouver Annual Report, 1912.*

<sup>56</sup> BCF, May 16, 1913, p. 3; Jan. 4, 1918, p.1.

<sup>57</sup> BCF, Aug. 30, 1918, p. 16.

<sup>58</sup> BCF, May 23, 1919, p. 7.

<sup>59</sup> BCF, Nov. 29, 1918, p. 5.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> BCF, Aug. 2, 1918, p. 1: "the management [of the Cascade Laundry] is making it so uncomfortable for anyone prominent in the organizing movement that they quit."

<sup>63</sup> BCF, Mar. 14, 1919, p. 1.

<sup>64</sup> BCF, June 20, 1919, p. 1.

<sup>65</sup> BCF, Mar. 14, 1919, p. 1.

<sup>66</sup> BCF, June 20, 1919, p. 2.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *For example, BCF, editorial, Aug. 16, 1916, p. 2; BCF, Apr. 5, 1918, p. 1.*

<sup>69</sup> BCF, Aug. 11, 1916, p. 1.

<sup>70</sup> BCF, Aug. 2, 1918.

<sup>71</sup> LG 18, Oct. 1918, p. 833.

<sup>72</sup> BCF, Aug. 26, 1916, p. 2.

<sup>73</sup> BCF, Sept. 6, 1918, p. 7.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*