

2020-01

# Employing Broad Tactics: Social Change, Women, and Work in Alberta: 1970-1993

Hrynuik, Erin

---

Hrynuik, E. (2020). Employing Broad Tactics: Social Change, Women, and Work in Alberta: 1970-1993 (Master's thesis, University of Calgary, Calgary, Canada). Retrieved from <https://prism.ucalgary.ca>.  
<http://hdl.handle.net/1880/111594>

*Downloaded from PRISM Repository, University of Calgary*

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Employing Broad Tactics: Social Change, Women, and Work in Alberta: 1970-1993

by

Erin Hrynuik

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE  
DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN HISTORY

CALGARY, ALBERTA

JANUARY, 2020

© Erin Hrynuik 2020

**ABSTRACT**

This study analyses how working women in Alberta navigated themselves throughout the change in workforce demographic in the province in the late 1980s and early 1990s. I argue that by employing a variety of tactics in advocating for themselves as full participants in the province's workforce, the groups studied were successful in bringing the voice of women into Alberta's labour movement. I assessed the activities and initiatives of three feminist labour activist groups in the province and found that each group was unique in how members tried to implement positive change to create a better environment for working women in the province. Through an analysis of each group's meeting minutes, correspondence, press releases, and media attention, as well as three oral interviews, I argue that each group advocated for the rights of working women in Alberta.

**PREFACE**

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Erin Hrynuik. The interviews reported throughout the thesis were covered by Ethics Certificate number REB17-0028\_REN2, issued by the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board for the project “Feminist Activism in 1970s and 1980s Calgary: Community Programs in Sexual Health Education, Labour, and Immigrant Advocacy” on March 20, 2017.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project began with my own general interest in how people – within organizations or as individuals – have tried to advocate for themselves throughout Western Canada’s history. My original project was more closely tied to a previous life of mine, in that I wanted to look at how university students at the University of Calgary advocated for themselves during the heavily studied protest era of the Long Sixties within the twentieth century. As my own life and aspirations changed throughout graduate school, so too did my research interest within this program. My project changed to reflect my post-academic life, that is, one that focuses on working women in the province of Alberta.

During the initial phase of my graduate school experience, the support of my former supervisor, Dr. Paul Stortz, was instrumental in laying the foundation for my interest in completing this program. My fellow graduate school colleague, Zach Bates, provided a level of conversation and friendship that was unmatched throughout my time in this program and for that I will be forever grateful. My route to completion has been long and winding but the constant encouragement from my supervisor, Dr. Nancy Janovicek, has been one of the most significant factors in my successful completion of this program. Her unwavering support and belief in my ability to pursue this project will have a lasting impact on my life in so many ways.

The three women I was fortunate enough to interview for this project provided a source of inspiration and motivation that I will always remember. Cindy McCallum-Miller, Susan Keeley, and Rosemary Brown, you are all truly role models in the history of this province, and I am grateful for the moments you were willing to share with me.

This project also benefitted from the academic and financial support of the University of Calgary History Department, as well as the Queen Elizabeth II Scholarship through the Faculty of Graduate Studies. More importantly, my success also stemmed from the support of my family and friends, especially my parents, who have taught me that the value of hard work and the rewards that follow it are always within my reach.

This project is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother, Elizabeth Gillespie. Employed full-time throughout most of her life, she was a single mother of five children who persevered and made it through her years with a constant love for her family. Grandma Betty, for all of us whose lives you touched, thank you for planting the seeds of such a beautiful life.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>II</b>
<b>PREFACE.....</b>	<b>III</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>IV</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS .....</b>	<b>VI</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
LITERATURE REVIEW .....	4
METHODOLOGY.....	16
<b>CHAPTER 2: ALBERTA LABOUR’S ‘OLD GIRLS’ NETWORK: THE SISTERS FROM HELL ....</b>	<b>27</b>
ON THE PICKET LINE: THE ORIGINS OF THE SISTERS FROM HELL .....	29
“FUN” – RAISING HELL: FUNDRAISING AND BUILDING COMMUNITY .....	36
ALBERTA’S OWN “GUERILLA” THEATRE?.....	40
CONCLUSION .....	48
<b>CHAPTER 3: ORGANIZED ACTIVISM: THE WOMEN’S COMMITTEE OF THE CALGARY AND DISTRICT LABOUR COUNCIL .....</b>	<b>50</b>
THE WOMEN’S COMMITTEE: BEGINNINGS.....	52
ACTION THROUGH NETWORKING.....	60
THE WOMEN’S COMMITTEE AND STRUCTURAL READJUSTMENT.....	64
ADVOCACY AGAINST SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN.....	69
CONCLUSION .....	75
<b>CHAPTER 4: “A FELT NEED”: ADVOCATING FOR PAY AND EMPLOYMENT EQUITY IN ALBERTA .....</b>	<b>77</b>
NATIONAL CONTEXT: THE ABELLA REPORT AND THE EMPLOYMENT EQUITY ACT OF 1986 .....	79
PAY EQUITY LEGISLATION IN PROVINCIAL JURISDICTIONS .....	84
ALBERTA’S “FELT NEED” FOR LEGISLATION .....	87
WOMEN OF THE 90S: THE PAY AND EMPLOYMENT EQUITY CONFERENCE .....	89
SHIFTING PARADIGMS: RACISM, COLONIALISM, AND ABLEISM IN CANADA’S WORKFORCE .....	92
“A BAD PAY EQUITY LAW IS NO BETTER THAN NO LAW AT ALL”: EFFECTIVE EQUITY LAWS FOR ALBERTA. 97	
“EQUITY IN THE BROADEST SENSE OF THE TERM”: ALBERTA’S PAY AND EMPLOYMENT EQUITY COALITION .....	105
CONCLUSION: “THAT FATEFUL SPRING ELECTION” AND THE END OF THE COALITION .....	113
<b>CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>123</b>
PRIMARY SOURCES.....	123
SECONDARY SOURCES.....	125
<b>APPENDIX.....</b>	<b>129</b>

ORAL HISTORY METHOD OF RECRUITMENT: LETTER OF INITIAL CONTACT – SAMPLE EMAIL.....	129
ORAL HISTORY METHOD OF RECRUITMENT: PARTICIPANT CONTACT – SAMPLE EMAIL.....	131
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .....	132
CONSENT FORM .....	133



## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

You know, I think I played a role. Maybe not a huge role, but I think that each person can make a difference. Even if it's in a small way, we all make a difference. ... One of the things that I am proud of is some of the coalitions we formed, that worked on equity issues that worked on workers issues. And I think by being part of that, that helped move things forward a bit, made things a little better.<sup>1</sup>

Looking back on her experience within Alberta's labour movement, Susan Keeley's recollection demonstrates how the strong community ties that she helped to establish in the late 1980s and early 1990s brought the voice of women into the province's labour movement. Keeley reflects the values of other like-minded activists, who saw themselves as part of wider grassroots initiatives that were concerned with the relationship between women and the paid workforce in Alberta. Whether these concerns were manifested through humour and education, collective action both within and outside of the provincial labour movement, or through the development of a province-wide coalition, feminist labour activists like Keeley agreed that this relationship between women and labour resulted in unfair and unequal working conditions for Alberta women and concluded that they needed to take action to alleviate these inequities.

This thesis will focus on three case studies, with each demonstrating the variety of methods that different groups employed for dealing with some of the negative consequences of the relationship between women and paid work in Alberta. The first group analysed, Sisters from Hell (SFH), of which Keeley herself was a founding member, showcases how an ad hoc group of labour activists could simultaneously demonstrate concern for the experiences of

---

<sup>1</sup> Susan Keeley, Interview with author, 10 October 2017, Calgary AB.

women involved in paid work in the province, and also provide an opportunity for members of Alberta's labour movement to engage in fun, humourous, and community-building activities. Most significant about SFH were the group's efforts to educate members about the particular experiences that women had while performing paid work in the province, while maintaining a sense of humour and engaging in its own version of performance activism that attracted a wider membership. SFH had unique methods for acting on their concern for the experiences of working women, and the connections that members created had a positive impact on the relationships that they formed with other community-building organizations in Calgary and across Alberta.

Of significance were the relationships that existed between members of the SFH and members from the Women's Committee of the Calgary and District Labour Council, the two groups featured within the second case study of this thesis, which employed more traditional methods of advocating for working women in Alberta. Members of the Women's Committee brought these concerns to the attention of the Calgary and District Labour Council (CDLC) and worked with the CDLC on joint initiatives that called for justice and equity for working women. These included offering formal support for other campaigns concerning the unjust treatment of working women across Canada, officially endorsing the striking social workers in Edmonton employed by the province as part of the AUPE Local 6 strike of 1990, and bringing discussions regarding the impact of sexual harassment and sexual violence against women and children into Calgary's mainstream labour movement. The CDLC's history with such supportive initiatives was complicated, however, as its wider membership did not always express support for women involved in paid work nor for those who were active in the Council's executive.

Despite inconsistent support from the CDLC's wider membership, members of the Women's Committee were able to utilize their activist efforts to forge relationships with other like-minded organizations in Calgary and eventually other parts of Alberta. These relationships culminated in the Pay and Employment Equity Conference that took place in Calgary in May 1991, and then in the Alberta-wide Pay and Employment Equity Coalition, which was active from 1991 until 1993. Both initiatives make up the final case study of this thesis. Those involved in planning the conference were concerned with the inequities that they saw in the province's labour force. In the *Report of the Commission on Equality in Employment*, Judge Rosalie Abella identified inequities that Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, and persons from visible minorities faced in their pay levels, job opportunities, and employment experiences, and these conference organizers picked up on the needs of these other groups as well. Conference participants listened to presentations that described these types of experiences, took part in workshops that discussed current pay and employment equity legislation that existed in other parts of Canada, and parsed out what effective laws could look like for Alberta. This broadened concern transferred into the province-wide Pay and Employment Equity Coalition, which was formed directly following the conference in May of 1991. The Coalition's focus was on drafting policy proposals that members felt would have a positive impact on the wage levels and employment opportunities of the four designated groups. While the Coalition's plan was to present these proposals to the provincial government, the 1993 re-election of the provincial Progressive Conservative government saw those grassroots organizations advocating for greater social justice retreat in their efforts towards pro-active initiatives such as equity legislation. Premier Klein's promises of deep cuts forced these activists to instead focus their

energies on more immediate concerns, such as cuts to health care, education, and other areas of social infrastructure.

## Literature Review

This thesis is about the relationship between women and paid work in Alberta in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It not only extends current historical understandings about women's paid labour, but also broadens our knowledge for how these groups brought the voice of women into Alberta's labour movement. The three case studies discussed here bring Alberta into the vast national and international literature on women's work and women's union activism, including several historical studies on women and their relationship to work in Canada and Alberta. Julie White's *Sisters and Solidarity: Women and Unions in Canada* provides an overview of the history of Canadian women's experiences within the paid workforce through a union lens. White looks at the early experiences of Canadian women in the labour movement from the end of the 1890s up until 1993, when *Sisters and Solidarity* was published, noting that women who had engaged in paid labour at the beginning of the twentieth century experienced isolating working conditions and were typically employed within unskilled and poorly paid jobs; in addition to these factors, women were also expected to leave paid work upon marriage.<sup>2</sup> White argues that during this period, organizing these women was difficult not only due to such isolated conditions, but also because most unions subscribed to the notion that women were inherently domestic.<sup>3</sup> Instead, early Canadian unions put their efforts towards advocating for

---

<sup>2</sup> Julie White, *Sisters and Solidarity: Women and Unions in Canada* (Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, 1993), 43.

<sup>3</sup> Other literature looks at women engaging in paid work through non-union perspectives. These include Lindsay McMaster's study on the social discourse that surrounded the figure of the "working girl" in Western Canada in the early twentieth century, which saw young, single, wage-earning women as embodying all that was unnatural and

protective legislation that promoted the idea of a family wage with a male breadwinner, which would also help to deal with the “problematic” women who worked for wages.<sup>4</sup> Women’s experiences with paid employment changed significantly over the twentieth century, however, and White traces this change within three “waves” of Canadian unionism: early craft unions, industrial unions of the 1930s and 1940s, and the public sector unions of the 1960s. She argues that the last wave had the most significant impact on working women, as many public sector jobs were clerical, administrative, and professional positions, all of which employed high numbers of women into the 1960s and 1970s as women entered the paid workforce in record numbers.<sup>5</sup>

Craig Heron’s short history on the Canadian labour movement parallels White’s analysis by addressing the activities and issues that women brought into the various unions that they joined as they entered Canada’s workforce. Both Heron and White note that as women began to form their own caucuses within unions and federations, the issues they brought forward were those that specifically impacted working women.<sup>6</sup> Their analyses include general discussions of goals such as helping to prepare women for union activity through training for public speaking and parliamentary procedure, and convincing their unions to implement affirmative action programs to better encourage participation from women union members.<sup>7</sup> Other activities included organizing conferences, writing briefs on a broad range of women’s

---

unnerving about modern times: the disintegration of the family, independence of women, and the promiscuity of city life. Lindsay McMaster, *Working Girls in the West: Representatives of Wage Earning Women* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008), 2.

<sup>4</sup> White, *Sisters and Solidarity*, 43.

<sup>5</sup> White, *Sisters and Solidarity*, 49-51.

<sup>6</sup> White, *Sisters and Solidarity*, 123. Craig Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement: A Short History*, Third Edition (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company Ltd., 2012), 145-146.

<sup>7</sup> Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement*, 145.

issues, organizing for special events such as International Women's Day, and connecting with women from other grassroots organizations.<sup>8</sup> This thesis builds on this historiography by focusing specifically on the concerns and activism of feminists who were involved in Alberta's labour movement. The context that White, Heron, and the following authors provide is also important for understanding how the groups studied in this thesis advocated for themselves as legitimate and equal participants in Alberta's paid workforce as the gendered notions of paid employment continued to impact their lived experiences as workers in the province.

The impact of wartime and postwar time periods in Canada assisted in changing the relationship between women and paid labour. Jennifer A. Stephen notes that the mobilization of women into the workforce during the Second World War was not the more commonly argued turning point for increasing societal acceptance of Canadian women engaging in waged labour.<sup>9</sup> Building on the argument of Ruth Roach Pierson, Stephen instead argues that between 1939 and 1946 the long-term implications for this mobilization saw a deeper ideological entrenchment of the gendering of work.<sup>10</sup> These gendered ideas became entrenched in three distinct time periods: leading up to 1939 when women were seen as a threat to men's jobs; Canada's entry into the war effort when women were seen as a temporary solution to Canada's

---

<sup>8</sup> White, *Sisters and Solidarity*, 123-124.

<sup>9</sup> Jennifer A. Stephen, *Pick One Intelligent Girl: Employability, Domesticity, and the Gendering of Canada's Welfare State, 1939-1947* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 10.

<sup>10</sup> Ruth Roach Pierson. *'They're Still Women After All': The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986), 11. Pierson argues that the recruitment of women into jobs outside of the home was intended to be only for the duration of the war and represented no concession of the principle of women's right to work.

manpower crisis; and at the end of the war when this “womanpower” was expected to disappear back into the household.<sup>11</sup>

In her study on unemployment insurance and the welfare state in Canada, Ann Porter also documents how gendered ideas of work were instrumental to the construction of Canada’s postwar welfare state, as well as within the neoliberal restructuring that began in the 1970s. Porter argues that the postwar welfare state model implemented in Canada was based on a family wage with a single male breadwinner, a dependant wife at home, and a state that would provide income security as a supplement where needed for the male breadwinner’s wage.<sup>12</sup> Porter argues that by the 1990s women eventually achieved greater formal equality, as the neoliberal restructuring that took place in the 1970s up until the 1990s encouraged employability for both men and women. Despite these positive formal changes, however, women faced disproportionately negative consequences because of programs that were cut or significantly altered. One example was the replacement of a rights-based Unemployment Insurance with an Employment Insurance scheme in 1996. Under the new scheme, those employed as intermittent and part-time workers, areas where women were overrepresented, no longer qualified.<sup>13</sup> Stephen’s and Porter’s analysis of the changing relationship between women and paid labour provide an important foundation for this thesis; members of the groups in the case studies I discuss were attempting to change the status quo for working

---

<sup>11</sup> Stephen, *Pick One Intelligent Girl*, 4.

<sup>12</sup> Ann Porter, *Gendered States: Women, Unemployment Insurance, and the Political Economy of the Welfare State in Canada, 1945-1997* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 4-9.

<sup>13</sup> Porter, *Gendered States*, 235.

women in Alberta and these analyses provide a context for how this status quo came to be established.

Joan Sangster has shaped the field of historical literature on how the relationship between women and work has changed. Her book *Transforming Labour: Women and Work in Postwar Canada* discusses the gendered implications of women within the paid workforce, although Sangster focuses on the tension that existed between women's actual working lives and the "idealized, domesticated femininity" that was promoted in popular media.<sup>14</sup> She analyses the ways in which women engaged in paid work in postwar Canada and how they demonstrated continuities as well as changes. Both are outlined through the ways in which not only gender, but also class and race were constructed through a labour force in Canada that did not have the security, pay, nor entitlements that existed for better paid unionized workers. Sangster argues that this "second tier of labour," while constructed on the basis of class, immigration status, ethnicity, race and age, was still one that was increasingly feminized on two fronts. The first was because working-class families required a second income, and the second was because women in general were staying in the workforce for longer with the increase in jobs deemed appropriate for female waged labour, such as clerical, sales, and service occupations.<sup>15</sup> Sangster's work acknowledges women's presence in paid work as a continuous reality that had existed for many working-class Canadian families prior to the 1970s, a decade more commonly identified for the nascent and increasing existence and acceptance of women as paid workers. Sangster's work, similar to those of Stephen and Porter, contextualizes how

---

<sup>14</sup> Joan Sangster, *Transforming Labour: Women and Work in Postwar Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 9.

<sup>15</sup> Sangster, *Transforming Labour*, 6-7.



paid work was constructed through gender; although she also discusses the construction of class, immigration status, ethnicity, race, and age. This thesis takes these gendered notions of paid employment into account by arguing that activists in Calgary and Alberta were attempting to alter this longstanding construction of gendered work; in the case of the pay and employment equity conference and coalition discussed in the third chapter, they also brought the construction of class and ethnicity into their activist efforts.

This thesis also contributes to literature on how the history of the changing relationship between women and work has come to include working-class women as agents of change over the last century in Canada. While many of the women involved in the groups discussed in this thesis may have identified as middle-class, their activism also concerned working-class women and, in some cases, even working-class men. Meg Luxton argues that the late 1960s and the early 1970s saw the development of a distinct union-based, working-class feminism that became an important political movement involved in the changing relationship between women and paid work across Canada. On a national scale, Luxton argues that unionized and working-class women contributed to efforts of groups like the Royal Commission on the Status of Women and the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, both of which have been more commonly associated with the mobilizing efforts of middle-class women.<sup>16</sup> She also looks at how women's groups came to address their own concerns within their respective unions and within larger labour movements in provinces like Ontario and Saskatchewan. These efforts included the fight for affirmative action in male-dominated companies like Stelco, and

---

<sup>16</sup> Meg Luxton, "Feminism as a Class Act: Working-Class Feminism and the Women's Movement in Canada," *Labour/Le Travail* 48 (Fall, 2001): 80.

examples of women union members forming their own caucuses and holding conferences and educational events on issues that women experienced within their own unions.<sup>17</sup> Luxton's argument is central to this thesis, as the grassroots organizations studied had their own experiences attempting bring their concerns regarding paid employment into the mainstream labour movement in Alberta.

Joan Sangster has also analysed the rise of activism concerning the rights of women engaged in paid work between the years of 1965 and 1975, a decade that many historians have labelled "the long sixties" because of the extension of social movements that occurred and continued after 1969. Building on Luxton's analysis, she argues that different types of working-class activism featuring women arose, which had "radically ruptured" from each other; on one side were women with a more longstanding history of paid work who were involved within the trade union movement, and on the other was a completely distinct form of socialist-feminist activism that emerged during the long sixties.<sup>18</sup> Activists involved in the latter group included New Left, Marxist, and socialist feminist activists who understood class, labour, and trade union issues as feminist issues that needed to be dealt with outside of traditional established structures. Those involved in the former group argued that already established union structures were the most effective vehicles for change and were more inclined towards union solidarity.<sup>19</sup> This thesis builds on Sangster's assessment of how women saw their roles as agents of change in their relationship to paid work. While the groups studied here often worked within the

---

<sup>17</sup> Luxton, "Feminism as a Class Act," 71-73.

<sup>18</sup> Joan Sangster, "Radical Ruptures: Feminism, Labor, and the Left in the Long Sixties in Canada," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 40, 1 (March 2010): 2.

<sup>19</sup> Sangster, "Radical Ruptures," 5.

structures that were available to them, especially the Women's Committee of the Calgary and District Labour Council, they also created their own structures to deal with the inequities and barriers that they faced in their employment experiences, such as the educational initiatives of the Sisters from Hell and the experiences that participants relayed during the Pay and Employment Equity Conference.

Other scholars have built on the analysis of Luxton and Sangster by looking at the impact of working-class and feminist activists on the changing relationship between women and paid work in Canada. Leslie J. Nicols's article on the women's movement and the 1982 CUPW Strike that traces the fight for paid maternity leave, both within the CUPW and eventually for women all across Canada, is a case study on how effective working-class feminist activists could be within the labour movement. Nicols argues that the alliance between the women's movement and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers was an important factor in changing public opinion towards the CUPW strike of 1982, in particular because of the strikers' calls for paid maternity leave. Working together not only resulted in a more positive response from the public, it also helped to connect a wider range of women's groups across Canada, as the union successfully sought support from several hundred women's groups. Nicols argues that the coalition helped to turn paid maternity leave from a women's issue into a labour issue, which resulted in many new people becoming aligned and sympathetic to the women's movement.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Leslie J. Nicols, "Alliance Building to Create Change: The Women's Movement and the 1982 CUPW Strike," *Just Labour: A Canadian Journal of Work and Study* 19 (Autumn 2012): 63-65.

Julia Smith also discusses the actions of a distinctly union-based feminist activism in her analysis of the Service, Office, and Retail Workers' Union of Canada (SORWUC) from 1972-1986. Tracing the roots of SORWUC's creation to the Vancouver Women's Caucus, a group of socialist feminists that advocated for women's liberation, Smith argues that the union was an example for how collective efforts could come together in attempting to effect social and political change for working-class women.<sup>21</sup> Unlike the success of those involved in the CUPW strike of 1982, however, the two case studies of striking SORWUC members that Smith analyzes did not lead to successful outcomes. Despite this, Smith argues that the formation and structure of the union itself was significant for feminist activists involved in Canada's labour movement, in particular because of its willingness to organize workers in occupations and industries that were not typically organized by more traditional unions in Canada.<sup>22</sup> Like Sangster, Smith examines both class construction as well as the role of gender within SOWRUC's history. This thesis builds upon both Smith's and Nicols' analyses of groups advocating for the rights of women involved in paid work. While Nicols documents how effective the influence of women's groups were within the CUPW strike, and Smith traces the importance of the ideological foundations of a socialist-feminist approach to a union within SORWUC, this work discusses the ways in which feminist groups in Alberta brought the voice of women into Alberta's labour movement. In comparison to other provinces, Alberta has lagged behind in labour legislation. From the outset of its success in the 1970s, the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta has had a history of

---

<sup>21</sup> Julia Smith, "An 'Entirely Different' Kind of Union: The Service, Office, and Retail Workers' Union of Canada (SORWUC), 1972-1986," *Labour/Le Travail* 73 (Spring 2014): 35, 65.

<sup>22</sup> Smith, "An 'Entirely Different' Kind of Union," 24.

diffusing class hostilities and disarming unions in its policy implementations.<sup>23</sup> This hostile context provides an even more significant place for these groups in Alberta's recent history, especially given that the province has opposed, or at best ignored, both labour and women's issues, which the following authors have outlined in their work.

Lois Harder, Joan Schiebelbein, and Cynthia Loch-Drake have analysed the changing relationship between women and work in Alberta. Political Scientist Lois Harder takes a state-centred approach in her book about the history of feminism in Alberta from the 1970s to the 1990s and highlights feminist activists and the struggles that they faced in the province. She remarks on how the provincial government prioritized, or did not prioritize, alleviating social and economic inequalities in the province during this period. She argues that throughout the 1970s, the first Progressive Conservative government, elected under the leadership of Peter Lougheed in 1971, despite the growth of state and public spending that characterized the period, had little concern for social and economic inequalities women faced in the province.<sup>24</sup> She discusses community groups and how they interacted with the government to advocate for better employment opportunities through both grassroots initiatives and lobbying for the implementation of a Minister Responsible for Women's Issues in the province.<sup>25</sup> She argues that in the 1980s the Alberta government was less resistant to calls from the province's feminist movement, and assesses the government structures that were developed for women including the establishment of a Minister Responsible for Women's Issues. She also explores how groups

---

<sup>23</sup> Jim Selby, "Delaying, Disarming, and Deceiving the Union: The Lougheed Government, Alberta Government Employees, and the Public Services Employee Relations Act, 1977," *Labour/Le Travail* 75 (Spring 2015): 76.

<sup>24</sup> Lois Harder, *State of Struggle: Feminism and Politics in Alberta* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2003), 20.

<sup>25</sup> Harder, *State of Struggle*, 26, 30-33.

themselves organized in the 1980s, and argues that feminist groups became increasingly introverted while also noting the establishment of several “antifeminist” groups that advocated for the maintenance of male breadwinner families with women to remain within the domestic sphere of influence.<sup>26</sup> She concludes her analysis with the election of Ralph Klein’s Progressive Conservative government in 1993 and how its policy of aggressive deficit elimination had an immediate negative impact on women’s groups in the province.<sup>27</sup>

Joan Schiebelbein has traced the long history of women’s involvement in labour, both paid and unpaid, in Alberta. Her work is inclusive of Indigenous communities in present-day Western Canada, noting that prior to European settlement, extended family units of production had been characterized by a millennia of hunting and gathering. In the first decades of twentieth century Alberta, she discusses how women engaged in labour activism prior to engaging in paid work, which was primarily through women’s auxiliaries, labour leagues, and union label campaigns.<sup>28</sup> She also discusses the ways in which women had been gradually incorporated into the paid labour force in Alberta and how this created occupational gendered identities that limited women’s pay and possibilities of advancement. She examines how women workers engaged with the provincial trade union movement in their efforts to improve their position within the labour force, and the positive and negative experiences that such involvement entailed.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Harder, *State of Struggle*, 49, 56-58.

<sup>27</sup> Harder, *State of Struggle*, 122.

<sup>28</sup> Joan Schiebelbein, “Women Labour, and the Labour Movement” in *Working People in Alberta*, ed. Alvin Finkel (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2012), 253-256.

<sup>29</sup> Schiebelbein, “Women Labour, and the Labour Movement,” 243. See also Patricia Roome, “Amelia Turner and Calgary Labour Women, 1919-1935,” in *Beyond the Vote: Canadian Women and Politics* ed. Joan Sangster and

While Scheibelbein took a broad view of the changing relationship between women and work in the province, Cynthia Loch Drake used a case study approach in her analysis of the Medalta workers strike, which took place in Medicine Hat in 1947. Loch Drake notes the interplay of class, gender, and notions about whiteness shaped the pottery workforce, the organization of work and wages, and the overall course of the workers' strike. Although her focus is not solely on the experiences of women and their relationship to paid work, Loch Drake argues that women's labour activism during the strike was treated differently by both the male strikers and the general media. This differential treatment was largely the result of conflicting values that existed between idealised middle-class notions of gender that valued male-breadwinner households, and the reality that many families' economic survival meant that women needed to engage in paid labour outside of their homes.<sup>30</sup> Loch Drake analyses the treatment and portrayal of women strikers who had participated in the Medalta strike and notes that women were treated as more fragile and less capable on the picket line than men, whom they viewed as daughters or potential wives more than workers by their male coworkers and union leaders. She argues that these attitudes ultimately helped to "put women workers back to the kitchen during the postwar years."<sup>31</sup>

This thesis builds on the work of these three authors by looking at how women's groups, as well as women involved in the province's labour movement, have navigated the

---

Linda Kealy (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 89-90; Brian T. Thorn, *From Left to Right: Maternalism and Women's Political Activism in Postwar Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016), especially chapter 5.

<sup>30</sup> Cynthia Loch Drake, "Jailed Heroes and Kitchen Heroines," in *One step over the line toward a history of women in the North American Wests*, eds. Elizabeth Jameson and Sheila McManus (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2008), 343.

<sup>31</sup> Drake, "Jailed Heroes and Kitchen Heroines," 343, 365,

changing relationship between women and paid work in Alberta. While Harder's work helps to contextualize how the provincial government interacted, however limited, with feminists concerned with working women in the province, this study addresses how the participants in the groups studied saw themselves as advocates for building a sense of community and finding better opportunities for working women in Alberta. This study is also situated in the greater scheme of Scheibelbein's macro-history of women and paid work in Alberta; however here, I assess specific case studies and take a closer look at the initiatives of grassroots organizations and how they expressed and acted upon their concerns on behalf of working women in the province. Loch Drake's work helps to provide a space for Alberta within nationally-oriented narratives that trace the changing relationship between women and paid work. This study continues Loch Drake's history of women's activism that originated in their place of work and addresses how activists involved in these three case studies saw themselves as agents of change in the provincial labour movement. The groups assessed in this thesis were not only part of Alberta's labour movement; their ideas and actions were significant because they made it clear to the larger union community that working women had particular needs to be addressed as more women entered the paid workforce. Of course these ideas and actions were part of a larger women's movement that, inspired by feminist theory, had taken up advocacy that challenged women's inequality in the labour force.

## **Methodology**

This project began with an exploration of the archival documents of the Women's Committee of the Calgary and District Labour Council, with an initial reading of the minutes and events during the 1970s and the 1980s. Curious about how, or whether, women who were



employed as paid workers in Calgary saw themselves as participants within the cultural and economic shifts resulting from greater numbers of employed women, I ended up focusing on events that took place just prior to Progressive Conservative Premier Ralph Klein's election in 1993, which was followed by infamous years of austerity measures and an extreme focus on eliminating the province's monetary deficit. Alberta has certainly had a reputation of a more conservative province, especially at the time of writing. The Klein government's measures have had an almost mythical appeal among a vocal segment of the province. Retrospectively, I now realize that this historical context was important for how my attention was drawn away from the 1970s, and towards the creation of these groups and initiatives in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Not only did I want to broaden my own historical understanding of the complexities of political identity for Albertans, but I specifically became interested in how women's groups, prior to the Klein years, saw themselves as agents that could stand together and positively impact the lives of working women, and in the case of the third case study, other minority groups in the province.

In the CDLC's archives, I read minutes from both meetings of the larger organization, as well as the Women's Committee. I discovered newsletters from the Sisters From Hell, which formed in 1989, as well as informational materials regarding both the Pay and Employment Equity Conference from 1991, and the province-wide coalition that was active from 1991 until 1993. All three chapters of this thesis demonstrate how these groups were interconnected, and showcase how members of all of the groups studied had strong ties with other organizations in Calgary as well as Alberta, including the Calgary Status of Women Action Committee (CSWAC), Women Looking Forward (WLF), and the Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL), as well as several

other groups. Because of these strong ties, I also read archival documents from AFL and CSWAC, which contained several editions of WLF's newsletters. Limiting the number of organizations within this project posed a challenge, as other groups in Calgary were also concerned with the changing relationship between women and paid work.<sup>32</sup> Because of the variety of organizations in Calgary alone that were concerned with feminism, increasing numbers of women involved in paid work, and the rights of women in the work place, I decided to focus on three different initiatives that had overlapping membership. I also consulted *The Calgary Herald* and Alberta Hansard to gain insight into how much, or whether, the voices within these initiatives had any momentum within the media and the provincial government.

In addition to reading archival documents, newspapers, and minutes from the Alberta legislature, I conducted three semi-structured interviews with participants who had been involved in these initiatives.<sup>33</sup> I recruited the participants by contacting the Calgary and District Labour Council, where I connected with Susan Keeley and Rosemary Brown, and was then connected with Cindy McCallum-Miller. I had also come across all of their names within the archival material and reading oral history interviews conducted by the Alberta Labour History Institute (ALHI). While the ALHI institute had interviewed both McCallum-Miller and Keeley, I was seeking insights and memories for how, or whether, these participants saw themselves as contributing to the initiatives of the groups studied within this thesis. With this in mind, I had a

---

<sup>32</sup> The Arusha Cross-Cultural centre was established in 1972 to provide development education for the Calgary area, and developed a life skills program for immigrant women called Making Changes, which included education around paid employment. The Calgary Status of Women Action Committee, formed in 1974 with the aim of alleviating the fragmentation of the activities of local women's groups, held workshops and events that were about educating workers in predominantly female work environments about their rights, such as the Domestic Workers Rights and Responsibilities workshop held in 1991-1992.

<sup>33</sup> This project was approved by the University of Calgary's Co-joint Faculties Research Ethics Board, under study ID: REB17-0028 REN2. All documents involved in contacting research participants are included in the Appendix.

set of twelve pre-written questions that were provided to each participant before each interview, although occasionally conversations would flow into topics that were not outlined in the initial plans.

These oral histories are not the central component of this project's primary source material, but they have had a significant impact on my understanding of how these groups brought the voice of women into the province's labour movement. Using the voices of individuals involved in the initiatives outlined here meant that I had to deal with the methodological implications of oral history in my analysis. By using participants' memories as source material, I had to acknowledge that the practice of oral history is, as Lynn Abrams has argued, "a subjective methodology" where "oral sources must be judged differently from conventional documentary materials" but that "this in no way detracts from their veracity and utility."<sup>34</sup> For Abrams, this is because shared authority between the interviewer and the interviewee is central in analysing oral history sources, and this shared authority has informed the ways that I have incorporated my own oral history interviews into this thesis.<sup>35</sup>

Understanding the significance of this shared authority has changed in the historiography of women's oral history as oral historians have acknowledged the importance of power dynamics that can, and have, occurred between scholars and research participants.<sup>36</sup> Bringing these

---

<sup>34</sup> Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 6.

<sup>35</sup> Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 3, 74.

<sup>36</sup> Abrams outlines the changes in power dynamics between researchers and research participants and argues that more attention is paid to the latter's focus on their inner selves that acknowledges what they have to say on their own terms, Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 71-74. Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack discuss shifting oral history methodology from information gathering to interaction with research participants; Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack "Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses" in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, eds. Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (New York: Routledge, 1991): 23. Joan Sangster outlines how oral history methodology within feminist scholarship came to encourage "the multiple axes of power, both in the research process and as a historical theme" in interviews, and how "increased attention to identity and subjectivity

women's voices into my argument not only broadens the history of these three initiatives that took place from the late 1980s into the 1990s, it also provides a space to incorporate the memories of McCallum-Miller, Keeley, and Brown as active agents within the three initiatives studied here. In the words of Alessandro Portelli, these interviews "tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did."<sup>37</sup>

Other methodological implications involved in the use of oral history interviews impact the analysis within this thesis. These implications mainly concern the validity of including oral testimonies in the three following chapters. Nancy Janovicek notes that when source reliability was questioned in the interviews used within her study on 1960s activists, she encountered assumptions that participants were too nostalgic, and that they over-emphasized the importance of their participation in certain events. Reflecting on these assumptions, Janovicek argues that historians also must remember that they "are trained to be aware that people will place emphasis on certain events and likewise forget others, based on how historical events are collectively recalled or how they have been judged by history."<sup>38</sup> The history of feminist labour activists in Alberta is not as well-known as the social movements of the 1960s, but even if it was, Janovicek's argument is important in trusting the recollections of those interviewed for this project. In addition to this level of trust, the purpose of conducting interviews was to

---

reinforced the project of integrating race, gender, and sexuality into working-class history," Joan Sangster, "Reflections on the Politics and Praxis of Working-Class Oral Histories," in *The Canadian Oral History Reader* eds. Kristina R. Llewellyn, and others (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 126.

<sup>37</sup> Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different?" in Alessandro Portelli, *Oral history, oral culture, and Italian Americans* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), 21-30. Cited in Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 22.

<sup>38</sup> Nancy Janovicek, "'If you'd told me you wanted to talk about the '60's, I wouldn't have called you back': Reflections on Collective Memory and the Practice of Oral History" in *Oral History off the Record: Towards an Ethnography of Practice*, eds Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 195.

include the perspectives of how these women saw themselves as contributing to initiatives that brought the voice of women into the province's labour movement, not to glean facts in the form of specific dates, names, and places.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, in accepting this level of trust I also acknowledge how I have inserted myself into this project, through both my participation in the interviews and because of my interest that led me to this topic in the first place. I agree with Valerie Yow's argument that "a value free research process. . . is not possible."<sup>40</sup> However I also agree with her point that when we understand the subjective aspects of our own research, we can use that awareness to be more cautious in how we approach evidence in constructing our historical narratives.<sup>41</sup> Trusting the source material used in this thesis is not mutually exclusive to understanding how personal biases, whether they are my own or those of the participants who were interviewed, can impact the outcome of this research.<sup>42</sup>

Limitations within the other sources used in this thesis also exist. Regarding the oral history interviews, all three women that I interviewed were white, born in Canada, and were all involved in organized labour movements in and around Calgary. The demographic make up of the groups within archival sources used are also more homogenous, with the exception of the third case study in this thesis, with the Pay and Employment Equity Conference and Coalition, both of which had members that insisted on including groups and individuals from more diverse backgrounds. In addition to this demographic limitation, the records I assessed in all three case studies were incomplete. While the Sisters From Hell were active from 1989 until

---

<sup>39</sup> Janovicek, "Reflections on Collective Memory and the Practice of Oral History," 195.

<sup>40</sup> Valerie Yow, "'Do I like them too much?' Effects of the oral history interview on the interviewer and vice-versa," in *The Oral History Reader*, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 63.

<sup>41</sup> Yow, "'Do I like them too much?'" 63.

<sup>42</sup> Sangster, "Reflections on the Politics and Praxis of Working-Class Oral Histories," 130-131.

approximately 1996, I was only able to locate four newsletters; however central to my argument is how members of SFH saw themselves as inserting the voice of women into the province's wider labour movement. So while a more detailed understanding of the larger narrative of the group would have been interesting and could add more insight into how the group understood itself and its own initiatives, for the purposes of my argument here, it is not necessary. The WC of the CDLC, as well as the Pay and Employment Equity Coalition also did not have complete records accessible in archival holdings. This meant that while I encountered other initiatives organized by the WC, too many important details were missing for analysis. In the case of the Pay and Employment Equity Coalition, minutes of meetings as well as brochures were incomplete, however, unlike the incomplete records for some initiatives of the WC, the content within them was enough to assess that they saw themselves and their initiative as having the potential to significantly impact women in Alberta's labour movement, as well as Indigenous persons, persons from visible minorities, and disabled persons.

The first chapter of this thesis outlines the origins and activities of the Sisters From Hell, a unique labour activist group that formed in Edmonton, Alberta in 1989. Susan Keeley, Cindy McCallum-Miller, Darren Steinhoff, and Ed Langele, prominent members of Alberta's labour community, all helped to form this group that fundraised for various labour causes across the country, established a stronger sense of community among various workers, and raised awareness and provided education for women's experiences within Alberta's labour movement through humour. The origins of SFH discussed here include analysing the importance of the group's formation and how members seized an opportunity to raise awareness of the increasing number of women entering the province's workforce, which ultimately had an

impact on the types of concerns of those involved in the wider provincial labour movement. They also include an analysis of the group's fundraising and "fun"-raising initiatives that involved selling Sisters from Hell buttons and a cookbook, as well as the distribution of a group newsletter. I also discuss the group's performance activism, specifically their hand shake and their "swearing-at" initiation ceremony within the context of guerilla activism that was popularised during the 1960s. This group provides a unique avenue for understanding how the voice of women was brought into Alberta's labour movement, as SFH focused on building community and educating its membership through less traditional forms of activism.

The close ties that SFH had with members of organizations in the other two chapters of this thesis are also important, as all three case studies demonstrate how important such relationships were in the various tactics employed for the purpose of bringing the concerns of working women into Alberta's labour movement. That these tactics were varied can be seen with the advocacy style of the other groups analysed in this thesis, including the more organized and structured approach of the Women's Committee (WC) of the Calgary and District Labour Council (CDLC) as discussed in the second chapter. While I primarily focus on the WC, I also discuss how some initiatives overlap with those of the larger CDLC, as it was generally open to supporting initiatives that advocated for the rights of working women despite some troubling recollections of female executives.<sup>43</sup> Most of the issues discussed involve the CDLC in some capacity, including its early support of national campaigns such as the Seven Jamaican Mothers in 1977 and Women Into Stelco from 1979-80, and its support of initiatives that originated

---

<sup>43</sup> Susan Keeley, Interview with Alberta Labour History Institute (ALHI), Edmonton, Alberta, 9 March 2007 (<http://albertalabourhistory.org/calgary-laundry-workers-strike/susan-keeley-2007/> accessed 9 January 2019).

within the executive itself, including a national campaign called Break the Cycle that called for the elimination of sexual abuse against women and children in 1992. The WC itself focused on the impact of economic restructuring of the Western world and its impact on women involved in paid work. With this in mind, I discuss how this focus informed the group's own initiatives including the WC's support of an illegal strike on behalf of provincially employed social workers in AUPE Local 6, and the WC's push to bring the topic of workplace sexual harassment as one that was both appropriate and necessary in Alberta's mainstream labour movement. This is assessed through their support for Pam Gardner, a former Safeway employee who had accused coworkers of sexual harassment, and in the greater Alberta Federation of Labour's push for more open dialogue around the topic.

The last chapter of this thesis explores the pay and employment equity initiatives that originated within a variety of groups in Calgary, including the WC, as well as other parts of Alberta. Similar to the second chapter, these initiatives were organized approaches to bringing women's issues into the province's labour movement. They were part of a broader Canadian movement that saw some provinces enact pay equity laws throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s and the federal government pass an employment equity law in 1986, with revisions in 1996. Beginning with the Calgary-based pay and employment equity conference, called "Breaking Through the Barriers," which took place in May 1991, I trace some of the key concerns that conference presenters and participants discussed at the conference: the difference between pay equity and employment equity; why legislation was needed; some personal experiences of members of the four designated groups on which such legislation focused that included women, as well as Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, and



persons from visible minority groups; and barriers that prevented governments in Canada from passing pay and employment equity laws. Concerned advocates in Calgary were able to act on the momentum that had been created during the conference, and after its conclusion in May 1991, they joined forces with other interested organizations across the province and formed the Alberta-wide Pay and Employment Equity Coalition. Ultimately expanding their scope to include all Albertans, the group called for more equitable access to employment opportunities and compensation policies. It did not see its advocacy for pay and employment equity as necessary for only women; it also saw these laws as necessary for the other three designated groups, as well as underprivileged and underemployed men in Alberta's workforce. Their proposed policies and statements expressed this more broad focus, however, as the sort of law the Coalition was lobbying for would ultimately impact the four designated groups the most significantly. More importantly, the group took an issue that began as one that working women in the province saw as problematic, and changed it into one that had an impact on Alberta's labour movement overall. Thus they brought the voice of women into the province's labour movement.

All three of these chapters take place within a greater political, societal, and economic context that was increasingly embracing neo-liberal values. Globally, governments were calling for fewer market restrictions, which meant less government intervention through economic policies. An example of this is seen in the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement that passed in October 1987, which later included Mexico in the North American Free Trade Agreement that

was passed in 1994.<sup>44</sup> Provincially, Alberta had always been a place for more conservative provincial policies. With the consistent majority governments of Progressive Conservative governments, and the infamous austerity measures of Ralph Klein's Progressive Government, which was officially elected in 1993, the groups assessed here were voicing their concerns during a time when the necessity and usefulness of government intervention was being questioned. Despite this neoliberal climate, these three case studies demonstrate the broad tactics that were employed by feminist union activists in order to bring the concerns of working women into Alberta's labour movement.

---

<sup>44</sup> Winston Gereluk, "Alberta Labour in the 1980s" in *Working People in Alberta*, ed. Alvin Finkel (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2012), 175.

## CHAPTER 2: ALBERTA LABOUR'S 'OLD GIRLS' NETWORK: THE SISTERS FROM HELL

"I've always said that if we had set out to do this deliberately, it would've fizzled. It would've never taken off."<sup>1</sup> These words of Cindy McCallum-Miller, one of the founders of the Sisters From Hell (SFH), help to describe the spontaneous origin story of this labour activist group. The group's impromptu formation provides a unique avenue for understanding how participating feminist labour activists saw themselves as contributing to and raising awareness for women in the province's labour movement. In addition to its spontaneity, what made SFH unique was that the group was not solely focused on women's issues and it was not only made up of female members.<sup>2</sup> Based on certain criteria, men could, and wanted to, join the group as they made up 50 percent of the membership. However, the group's origin story, and its commitment to educating members about the changing relationship between women and work demonstrate how SHF helped to bring the concerns of women unionists into Alberta's labour movement. Using humour, the group created an environment that encouraged relationship-building among various labour activists first within Alberta, then in other parts of Canada, and even in other parts of the world. Through this use of humour, members were able to raise legitimate concerns on behalf of women in the labour movement and raise funds for various causes across Canada. While SFH was not a formal organization, an understanding of this groups' origin, aims, and activities broadens current discussions regarding groups concerned with women's issues in Alberta in the 1980s and 1990s.

---

<sup>1</sup> Cindy McCallum-Miller, Interview with author, Calgary, AB, 20 November 2017.

<sup>2</sup> *Sizzle Sheets*, February, 1990. M8395-330, Box, File 1, Calgary and District Labour Fonds (CDLC), Glenbow Archives (GA), Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

This chapter will discuss three important features of SFH. These are the group's "FUN-raising" initiatives - which included creating a sense of community while also educating members about the concerns of women in Alberta's labour movement, raising money for various labour causes in Alberta and throughout Canada, and the group's performance activism. In discussing the group's unplanned formation, I examine how its founders seized the opportunity to employ "sisterhood" language and how this informed their identity as one concerned with women's issues. Two of the group's founders, Cindy McCallum-Miller and Susan Keeley, were active in Alberta's labour movement and their activist experience shaped how SFH would come to define "women's issues." McCallum-Miller, Keeley, and Darren Steinhoff, another founding member of SFH, were all active within Calgary's and southern Alberta's labour scene. They held prominent positions within the Calgary and District Labour Council, an organization that will be discussed in the next two chapters. The networks that these members established were significant in how SFH created a sense of community among labour activists and were central to how the group educated members of Alberta's labour movement about women unionist experiences. Similarly, the group's newsletter *The Sizzle Sheets*, although only sporadically published, was another avenue for education and community building. It kept members updated on fundraising initiatives and SFH activities, and provided information about the group's performance activism, including its membership handshake and details of its "swearing-at" ceremony, an aggressive and fun initiation for new members. These performances make up one of the most unique aspects of SFH, especially when assessed within the context of "guerrilla theatre," a theatrical demonstration method that was popularized in the midst of Canadian and American countercultural youth movements in the long 1960s. These

three features of SFH not only diversify our understanding of groups concerned with women's issues in Alberta in the 1980s and 1990s, they also demonstrate the unique ways in which the SFH brought the voice of women in the province's labour movement.

### **On the Picket Line: The Origins of Sisters From Hell**

If we had set out to say, we want to organize – we want to start up an organization that will, oh give us a thousand members in a year, and everybody'll pay money and wear a button and give a secret gesture when they see each other, they would've, that would've not happened. There would've been three people doing that.<sup>3</sup>

McCallum-Miller's explanation of the unpredictable beginning of the group describes how a passing comment turned into an ad hoc group that eventually included international members, had a slogan that was translated into Spanish and French, and, most importantly, helped to educate members of the province's labour movement about some of the specific issues that working women faced.<sup>4</sup> On 28 April 1989, when McCallum-Miller, the other four founding members – Susan Keeley, Ed Langele, Darren Steinhoff, and Melva Forsberg – and several other delegates participating in an Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL) Convention decided to support an early morning picket for steel workers who were striking at the Dam Galvanizing plant in Edmonton. Because five hundred delegates attended the AFL Convention, they saw this as a great opportunity to show solidarity with striking steel workers, despite recreational activities that ran very late into the prior evening.

---

<sup>3</sup> McCallum-Miller, Interview with author, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Archival sources name 4 countries: New Zealand, Australia, Jamaica, South Africa, and Cameroon.

The unplanned demonstration saw the origin of the group's name, because McCallum-Miller's and Keeley's exhausted appearances at the early morning picket amused fellow delegate Steinhoff: "My good brother Darren Steinhoff looked at sister Susan Keeley and I and said, you've never seen anything like it, they'll stop the scabs from crossing the lines because of the Sisters from Hell!"<sup>5</sup> Steinhoff's comment led to an initial reaction on behalf of McCallum-Miller and Keeley to laugh at themselves and turn it into an inside joke.<sup>6</sup> After the demonstration, Melva Forsberg – who ran a button-making company called Buttons Unlimited – found out about their lighthearted reactions to Steinhoff's comment and made a small number of yellow buttons with the words "Sisters From Hell." The production of the initially small number of SFH buttons created a significant demand among other delegates who wanted, at the very least a button, and at the very most to be included in what began as an inside joke. With the knowledge that these had been a souvenir for the four AFL participants, and perhaps sensing the potential for opportunity to further the joke, Forsberg informed those interested that if they wanted to get buttons, they needed to first speak with McCallum-Miller or Keeley. The original members, who at this point decided to call themselves the Chief Battle Axes, eventually realized this demand and saw the opportunity to build a larger group for fundraising and community-building.<sup>7</sup>

This origin story provides an important foundational element for understanding how SFH demonstrated concern for women's issues in Alberta's labour movement, especially

---

<sup>5</sup> Cindy McCallum-Miller, Interview with ALHI, Edmonton, 11 November 2008 (<http://albertalabourhistory.org/moving-forward-alberta-women-and-work/women-of-cupw/cindy-mccallum-miller/> accessed 9 January 2019). *Sizzle Sheets*, February, 1990, M8395-330, Box 1, File 1, CDLC Fonds, GA.

<sup>6</sup> McCallum-Miller, Interview with ALHI, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> McCallum-Miller, Interview with ALHI, 2008.

because the founding members came to see the group as an educational tool through the use of humour. By choosing the gendered term “sisters,” and playing on Steinhoff’s comment about the dishevelled appearances of women union participants, the Sisters From Hell empowered themselves by forming a women’s group that would only allow members who had women’s names, or would be willing to choose approved, non-derogatory woman’s names, always beginning with the pronoun “Sister.” The group’s two male founders, Steinhoff and Langele took on this criteria with enthusiasm, choosing “Sister Sassy Sally Firechicken” and “Sister Fast Alice” for themselves respectively.<sup>8</sup> McCallum-Miller recalled that Keeley started the joke:

We were talking about how we’re tired of the old boys’ network, we’d start an old girls’ network. The language wasn’t exactly right, but we were coming up with some ideas and we said we’d let some of the brothers in but they had to take on the name of women. Because women have always had to accommodate to male structures, men are going to have to accommodate to our structures.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the fact that they still only saw SFH as an inside joke, this naming system guided the eventual establishment of the SFH into a group that would assist in educating men in the labour movement about women’s issues, while also creating a place for members to have a sense of humour and fundraise for various causes across the country. By explaining to interested men the necessity of accommodating to SFH’s structures, the founding members saw an educational opportunity to discuss how “the status quo within society, within the labour movement, within just about everywhere in society, excluded women.”<sup>10</sup> McCallum-Miller identified herself as a

---

<sup>8</sup> *Sizzle Sheets*, February, 1990, M8395-330, Box 1, File 1, CDLC Fonds, GA.

<sup>9</sup> McCallum-Miller, Interview with ALHI, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> McCallum-Miller, Interview with ALHI, 2008.

“strident feminist,” and knew others existed among Convention delegates, and in the wider labour movement as well.<sup>11</sup>

Using humour to educate unionists about the women’s movement was central for SFH in the group’s goal to bring the concerns of women into Alberta’s labour movement. Even in its initial stage as an inside joke, McCallum-Miller used it to make having conversations around women’s issues easier: “I understand that strident lecturing and trying to forcefully make people change their habits doesn’t work very often. And so, you look for other methods.”<sup>12</sup> In this instance, “other methods” included letting others in Alberta’s labour movement in on the joke by becoming members of SFH. This was both important and necessary because Alberta’s labour movement, like that of the rest of Canada, had experienced a demographic shift with the service sector unionization of government employees in the 1980s. Between the late 1960s and 1989, unionization for women increased from 16 percent to 29 percent, while that of men very slightly decreased from just over 38 percent to 38 percent.<sup>13</sup> Such an influx of unionized women during this period meant that they brought their concerns around paid work to their unions, many of which were not always responsive or proactive to these concerns. Organizing women workers had rarely been a goal of the mainstream labour movement, as its focus was centred on the “family wage” with male breadwinners, and females taking on domestic roles within families and households.<sup>14</sup> One response to this inaction on behalf of unionized women includes the 1981 strike of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, which among their demands was a

---

<sup>11</sup> McCallum-Miller, Interview with author, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> McCallum-Miller, Interview with author, 2017.

<sup>13</sup> Denise J. Doiron and W. Craig Riddell, “The Impact of unionization on male-female earnings differences in Canada,” *Journal of Human Resources* 29,2 (Spring 1994): 505.

<sup>14</sup> Joan Schiebelbein, “Women Labour, and the Labour Movement,” 253; Stephen, *Pick One Intelligent Girl*, 4.



successful push for a full year of paid maternity leave.<sup>15</sup> Others include the formation of the Service, Office, and Retail Workers Union of Canada that was founded on principles that included political and social equality, free parent-controlled child care centres, community control of schools, community health services, and increasing price and rent increases.<sup>16</sup> While these examples did not reflect the views of all women involved in waged labour, they highlight the change in values that could occur when workplace demographics shifted to higher numbers of employed women. And although the SFH was not solely focused on women's issues, the group demonstrated that women involved in paid labour in Alberta, including McCallum-Miller and Keeley, brought their own concerns into the province's labour movement.

Indeed, the experiences of both of these women placed them in appropriate positions to act on women's issues in Alberta's labour activist community. McCallum-Miller had been active in the Canadian Union of Postal Workers since 1982 and had extensive experience as an activist in Alberta. In the town of Banff, where she resided, she was the first woman to serve on her union's National Appeal Board in 1988 and was director of the Bow Valley Peace Group from 1988 until 1991. She affiliated her union local and became a delegate with the Calgary and District Labour Council (CDLC) in 1988 and in 1989, would go on to help found the Council's Women's Committee. Provincially, she was elected to the AFL's Executive Council in 1989. She had been active in the New Democrat Party's executive since 1988.<sup>17</sup> Keeley had been active in the Calgary labour activist community since 1975 as a member of the Canadian Union of Provincial Employees (CUPE) through her work in childcare. She served as president of the CDLC

---

<sup>15</sup> Nicols, "Alliance Building to Create Change: The Women's Movement and the 1982 CUPW Strike," 59.

<sup>16</sup> Smith, "An 'Entirely Different Kind of Union,'" 29, 36-37.

<sup>17</sup> Gordon Christie to Susan Keeley, 14 December 1992, M8990-779, Box 1, File 1, CDLC Fonds, GA.

from 1979-1984 and then from 1985-1987 and was also a member of the AFL executive council, with experience working on its Human Rights Committee from 1981 to 1984. She was politically active as a member of the New Democrat Party, serving as president of her provincial constituency for five years and running provincially as the party candidate for Calgary Centre in 1984.<sup>18</sup>

Their extensive experience informed how SFH defined women's issues. Keeley's experience as a childcare worker shaped her belief that high quality, universally accessible childcare was necessary to achieve women's equality within their workplaces and unions. She was also an outspoken advocate for pay and employment equity, sexual harassment policy, contraception and abortion education, and educating young people about gender-based barriers and gender-based stereotyping.<sup>19</sup> Keeley recalled the hardships that some women activists faced when it came to issues of childcare at union conventions: "We would go to convention and men would say, 'there should be no daycare centres because women should be at home taking care of the children'. . . [some of them] fully believed women should be in the home."<sup>20</sup> McCallum-Miller's experience in labour organizing also influenced how she defined women's issues. Like Keeley, McCallum-Miller was concerned with increasing women's overall involvement in public arenas. In a column for the *The Activist*, the AFL newsletter, she wrote that "A woman's place is in the House – the House of Commons that is!" and advocated for a

---

<sup>18</sup> "Women's Day Award," by Karen Mottershead, *The Activist*, March 1990, 98.908, Box 8, File 112, Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL) Fonds, Provincial Archives of Alberta (PAA), Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

<sup>19</sup> "An Interview with Susan Keeley," Brenda Strawson, *The Activist*, March 1990, 98.908, Box 8, File 112, AFL Fonds, PAA.

<sup>20</sup> Susan Keeley, Interview with author, Calgary, AB, 10 October 2017.

greater presence of women in Canadian politics, especially in drafting legislation.<sup>21</sup> She also saw preventing violence against women, pay and employment equity, and accessible quality childcare as prominent women's issues.<sup>22</sup> Taking these similarities into consideration, it comes as no surprise that today Keeley and McCallum-Miller refer to one another as their "identical twin sisters."<sup>23</sup>

Keeley's and McCallum-Miller's experiences contributed to how SFH transformed from an inside joke to an activist group after the solidarity picket was over on 28 April 1989. Several delegates encouraged Keeley and McCallum-Miller to sell Foresburg's buttons with the aim of fundraising for the Workers' Health Centre, now known as Alberta Worker's Health Centre. In 1989 the Centre was raising money for operations by accepting donations of \$75.00 for the purchase of bricks, which could have names inscribed on them, for a "donation wall of fame." McCallum-Miller and Keeley decided to sell the buttons for \$5.00 each, with \$2.00 going to Foresburg for the production of the buttons and the rest going towards the centre. At this point SFH existed on an ad hoc basis, so only twenty-five buttons were made with proceeds put towards a brick inscribed with the words "Sisters From Hell" at the Worker's Health Centre.<sup>24</sup> Upon selling out of these twenty-five buttons, however, McCallum-Miller and Keeley realized that this could be a great opportunity to fundraise and build solidarity within Alberta's labour movement, which is what the SFH did in its seven years of existence.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> "Women in Politics," Cindy McCallum. *The Activist*, March 1990, 98.908, Box 8, file 112, AFL Fonds, PAA.

<sup>22</sup> Cindy McCallum, "Women in Politics," *The Activist*, March 1990, 98.908, Box 8, File 112, AFL Fonds, PAA.

<sup>23</sup> Keeley, Interview with author, 2017. McCallum-Miller, Interview with author 2017.

<sup>24</sup> This wall no longer exists at the Alberta Workers' Health Centre.

<sup>25</sup> McCallum-Miller, Interview with author, 2017.

## **“FUN-” Raising Hell: Fundraising and Building Community**

SFH presents a unique example for how feminist labour activists defined and acted on women’s issues within Alberta’s workforce. On one hand, some elements of the group’s activism were more traditional forms of activism, with members organizing fundraisers for various causes and seizing opportunities to build community and to educate members about women’s issues within Alberta’s labour movement. On the other hand, SFH is unique because it was never a formal organization, and members created their own methods for protesting the structures that they felt needed to change in order to create better union and working environments for women in the province. One important method was SFH’s use of humour to build community and to fundraise, which can be noted in McCallum-Miller’s explanation that the group was a “fun-raising” effort “because what [they] did was through the sale of the buttons . . . [and] we made donations. And, through our sense of humour.”<sup>26</sup>

Having a sense of humour was intrinsic to the group. The name “Sisters from Hell” itself began as Steinhoff’s joke, and some of the initial ideas about membership criteria, prior to SFH’s materialization into a real fundraising and community-building body, were the result of activists being able to laugh at themselves. Aside from the nomenclature criterion the only other rule was that members “must have a sense of humour,” which included an “affirmative action” sub-clause “which allows a certain percentage of [their] membership to have little or no humour in the hope that they will attain some after being involved [with the group] for a while!”<sup>27</sup> The memories of both Keeley and McCallum-Miller also confirm that humour was

---

<sup>26</sup> McCallum-Miller, Interview with author, 2017.

<sup>27</sup> *Sizzle Sheets*, 1990, M8395-330, Box 1, File 1, CDLC Fonds, GA.

central to defining SFH; Keeley described SFH as “a comedic solidarity group,” and explained that “in order to join, all you had to do was have a sense of humour.”<sup>28</sup> McCallum-Miller described the group as a “fun-raising endeavour”.<sup>29</sup> Creating a forum where those active in Alberta’s labour movement could also build community through having a sense of humour drew other unionists into the group; the *raison d’être* of SFH was, in addition to educating members about issues impacting women, to have fun.

Members of the group faced some heavy criticism at the use of the word “hell,” although founding members saw the term as necessary for educating others about some of the experiences that workers, particularly women workers, faced. McCallum-Miller recalled pushback from those opposed to the name “Sisters From Hell” on religious grounds, understanding “hell” to be a more literal interpretation of the term. Members tried to explain to those holding this view that the “hell” within their group’s name had nothing to do with the Christian concept of hell and that they used the term because it exemplified how they saw working conditions in Alberta. After repeated attempts to explain this and convince these other activists that the term was not religiously offensive, SFH decided to embrace the religious imagery by adding pitchforks and lightning bolts to their buttons and t-shirts. In recounting this controversy, McCallum-Miller explained the term was representative of both personal and broad working conditions:

Hell on earth is working for employers like Canada Post and some of the other employers that we deal with on a regular basis, who treat workers like dirt or like

---

<sup>28</sup> Susan Keeley, Interview with author, 2017.

<sup>29</sup> McCallum-Miller, Interview with author, 2017.

disposable commodities. Or hell is fleeing for your life from an abusive situation, whether at home or somewhere else<sup>30</sup>

While the nature of personal experiences at home are rarely documented, understanding how personal circumstances at places of work for women could be “hell” is important for the activism behind SFH. Lynn Bue, a member of SFH and a letter carrier with Canada Post in Edmonton, noted poor working conditions in the early 1980s for herself and other women when she was a member of the Letter Carriers’ union before it merged with the CUPW. Bue recalled notifying her supervisor of inappropriate behaviour from one of her male colleagues, which included threats on her life and general offensive statements towards women, and that “the supervisor’s advice was, “why don’t a bunch of you get together and get him in the alley?””<sup>31</sup> Keeley also recalled similar experiences in trying to deal with the lack of sexual harassment policies in the 1980s when she was employed as a local agent with CUPE Local 38 in Calgary. She noted that women did not have structures in place to deal with the harassment they faced, and “sexual harassment was something that women had to put up with if they wanted to be involved [at union events and functions].”<sup>32</sup> Although on a national level CUPE had published literature advocating for union contracts to include clauses on sexual harassment in 1981, most gains related to these clauses were made in British Columbia.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> McCallum-Miller, Interview with ALHI, 2008.

<sup>31</sup> Lynn Bue, Interview with ALHI Edmonton, Alberta, 14 October 2012 (<http://albertalabourhistory.org/moving-forward-alberta-women-and-work/women-of-cupw/lynn-bue/> accessed 9 January 2019).

<sup>32</sup> Susan Keeley, Interview with ALHI, Edmonton, Alberta, 21 May 2008 (<http://albertalabourhistory.org/calgary-laundry-workers-strike/susan-keeley-2008/> accessed 9 January 2019).

<sup>33</sup> Jane Stinson, “Sexual Harassment: Why it’s important to negotiate clauses on this issue,” *CUPE The Facts* 4, 3 (March 1982), 19-21. Rise Up Feminist Archive (<https://riseupfeministarchive.ca/activism/issues-actions/labour-movement-and-womens-equality/cupe-1982-sexualharassmentimportanttonegotiateclausesarticle/> accessed 15 November 2018).

Fundraising for various causes was also a defining function of SFH, and it was a tool that members utilized to further strengthen the sense of community across the labour movement in Alberta and Canada. The decision to purchase a brick for the Worker's Health Centre assisted in structuring how the group would fundraise: for every hundred new memberships, which would total to a \$300.00 fund, members would choose a cause and donate their membership proceeds. Causes for these fundraisers started out local, as the first was the Worker's Health Centre, but as membership grew, the group eventually fundraised for a variety of causes across Canada. These included: The Every Woman's Health Centre in Vancouver, British Columbia; striking International Woodworkers of America members who were in dispute with Zeidlers in Alberta; striking Retail Wholesale and Department Store Union members who were in dispute with Nipawin Co-Op in Saskatchewan; and fired Canadian Union of Postal Worker members in Quebec.<sup>34</sup>

Another prominent fundraising effort on behalf of SFH was their decision to publish a cookbook, called *Charity Begins at Home*, and donate its proceeds to the legal expenses incurred during the 1989 provincial election by New Democrat Party Candidate Bill Flookes.<sup>35</sup> In court, Flookes challenged the provincial election results in his riding, which he lost by only 126 votes to the Conservative candidate Gordon Shrake.<sup>36</sup> After losing his challenge in court, Flookes was left with \$40,000 in legal fees; the SFH was able to donate \$3000 from their cookbook fundraiser to defray costs.<sup>37</sup> While these fundraising efforts were not specifically

---

<sup>34</sup> *Sizzle Sheets*, February, 1990, M8395-330, Box11, File 1, CDLC Fonds, GA.

<sup>35</sup> *Sizzle Sheets*, no date, M8395-330, Box 1, File 1, CDLC Fonds, GA.

<sup>36</sup> Vicki Barnett, "Helluva recipe for success," *Calgary Herald*, 27 July 1990. Interview with Bill Flookes, Calgary 2005. ALHI.

<sup>37</sup> McCallum-Miller, Calgary, Interview with author, 2017.

focused on drawing attention to women's concerns within the labour movement, such efforts are a measurable result of the impact that the group could have educating members, and working together to create a sense of community among the province's labour activists.

### **Alberta's Own "Guerrilla" Theatre?**

Assessing how the SFH used performances demonstrates how unique the group was in its efforts to bring the voice of women into the Alberta's labour movement; these performances also broaden our understanding of how feminist labour activists highlighted their concern for the changing relationship between women and work in Alberta, and their concern for women's experiences with the province's workforce. Members would perform their "secret" hand gesture and their "swearing-at ceremonies," both of which created a space for members to connect with each other, and to draw attention to the structures that activists wanted to change. Prior to an assessment of these performances, however, an analysis of other activist performances, known as "guerrilla theatre" within some narratives of postwar Canada and the United States, is useful in order to better comprehend these aspects of SFH.

Historical studies about guerrilla theatre performances are typically rooted in analyses of countercultural movements that occurred in both Canada and the United States, particularly in the postwar era of the long sixties. Although this study concerns a group located in Alberta, Canada, the San Francisco Mime Troupe had the most influence in North America in this capacity because it was one of the first groups to popularize guerrilla theatre. R.G. Davis, the Troupe's founder, saw public performance as a means to enact social change. The group would perform in public spaces throughout San Francisco and eventually made their way to the rest of



the United States. The concept behind these public performances, and therefore the very idea behind guerrilla theatre, was the result of interactions between proponents of American New Left ideals, especially those concerned with expressing collective dissent from society, and avant-garde performers who were interested in bringing current political and social commentaries into their acts.<sup>38</sup> The Troupe would perform acts at street corners, college campuses, parking lots, shopping malls, libraries, plant gates, and community centres. The subject matter was always meant to raise awareness, generate discussion, and have a social and political impact around topical New Left issues of the 1960s. In his article on the public performances in the 1960s and 1970s of the group Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW), Ryan J. Kirby argues that groups using guerrilla theatre techniques were different from those that employed more traditional demonstrations. Guerrilla theatre encouraged greater interaction between performers and audiences by treating the audiences as “extras” within their skits. The VVAW would employ these techniques by staging military events throughout the United States that were meant to mimic those that occurred in various locations throughout Vietnam during the war such as military marches, raids, and interrogations of hired actors. Kirby argues that with this level of participation, the use of guerrilla theatre created “an emotional, visceral response from people who otherwise did their best to distance themselves from the war and political engagement.”<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Michael William Doyle, “Staging the Revolution: Guerrilla Theatre as a Countercultural Practice, 1965-68,” in *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960’s and 70’s*, eds. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (New York, Routledge, 2002), 71-73.

<sup>39</sup> Ryan J. Kirby “Dramatic Protests, Creative Communities: VVAW and the Expressive Politics of the Sixties Counterculture,” *Peace & Change: A Journal of Peace Research* 40, 1 (January 2015): 39-40.

Use of guerrilla theatre in Canada, unsurprisingly, took on a different tone than in the United States. In his book on countercultural youth movements in Yorkville and “Hip Toronto,” Henderson points out American youth experienced more alienation and anxieties due to American involvement in the Vietnam War, its military draft, as well as the very prominent and explosive racial conflicts and civil rights battles occurring across the nation.<sup>40</sup> Specific instances of guerrilla theatre exist in Canada’s reproductive rights activism, and, similar to groups employing the technique in the United States, these cases provide specific example of activists utilizing guerrilla theatre as a tool for raising awareness for their respective causes. In their study on the Vancouver Women’s Caucus (VWC), Christabelle Sethna and Steve Hewitt discussed how guerrilla theatre techniques were employed to protest recent amendments made to Canada’s Criminal Code in 1969. These amendments legalized abortion, but only with the approval of a Therapeutic Abortion Committee, which was to be made up of three doctors who would approve or deny applications on an individual basis. In front of the Vancouver Courthouse in February 1970, members of the VWC performed a skit which pointed out the inherent inequality within the new laws, concluding their performance with a march to Victory Square, invoking militaristic symbols to emphasize what they saw as a battle against women’s bodies.<sup>41</sup>

While the SFH did not self-consciously employ guerrilla theatre techniques, these assessments allow for a better understanding of why and how the group’s performance

---

<sup>40</sup> Stuart Robert Henderson, “Making the Scene: Yorkville and Hip Toronto, 1960-1970,” (PhD. Dissertation, Queen’s University, Canada 2007), 35-36.

<sup>41</sup> Christabelle Sethna and Steve Hewitt, “Clandestine Operations: The Vancouver Women’s Caucus, the Abortion Caravan, and the RCMP,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 90, 3 (September 2009): 471-472.

activism was a key component in how the group brought the concerns of women into Alberta's labour movement. Similar to the VVAW's and the VWC's more scripted demonstrations, SFH's hand gesture and swearing-at ceremony both contain elements of how the group protested certain structures that they were trying to change.<sup>42</sup> By relying primarily on the humorous elements within these performances, members used them, in the words of scholar Maiken Jul Sorensen, "to break the power of dominant discourses" and to create "an atmosphere of openness and dialogue while confronting various manifestations of power."<sup>43</sup>

The SFH "secret" handshake was a humorous nod to the group's mandate to educate members about women's issues. It was also an action that allowed members to directly express solidarity within Alberta's labour community. The gesture involved an action that mimicked lowering a toilet seat, a direct reference to a common complaint for many women who shared spaces with men.<sup>44</sup> This handshake was mentioned throughout the *Sizzle Sheets*, written and distributed by McCallum-Miller, and was typically included in her sign-off: "Until next time, keep laughing and don't forget about that toilet seat. . .OK?" and "Keep smiling & watch that toilet seat."<sup>45</sup> Indeed, one of McCallum-Miller's favourite memories as a Sister From Hell involved seeing former Canadian Auto Workers president Bob White at an NDP convention greet her with the gesture from across the convention room. White, who had become a Sister From Hell and took the name "Sister Moira" when he met McCallum-Miller at a political action

---

<sup>42</sup> Kirby, "Dramatic Protests, Creative Communities," 34.

<sup>43</sup> Maiken Jul Sorensen, "Laughing on the Way to Social Change: Humor and Nonviolent Action Theory," *Peace & Change* 42, 1 (January 2017): 128-129.

<sup>44</sup> Keeley, Interview with author, 2017.

<sup>45</sup> *Sizzle Sheets*, May 1989, M8395-330, Box 1, File 1, CDLC Fonds, GA. *Sizzle Sheets*, August 1989, M8395-330, Box 1, File 1, CDLC Fonds, GA.

conference in Alberta a few years before the NDP convention, kept signalling the gesture to her from across the room. McCallum-Miller, who had assumed that White would not have remembered meeting her, took time to realize that White was signalling this to her hoping for a response. When she finally caught on, she signalled the gesture back, recalling:

I could see he was doing this, which is our official secret gesture, which nobody's supposed to know. . . I thought I was mistaken. I thought, surely he can't be making the gesture. He was getting really impatient; so finally I gave him the gesture back. I went, okay, we've got something going here when somebody's enjoying it this much from that one little event and remembers that.<sup>46</sup>

This handshake created a sense of community and solidarity within Alberta's – and in this case, Canada's – labour community. It was also a physical reminder of the group's educational mandate to re-orient discussions of labour activism to those that also concerned women, as it mimicked such a gender-based gesture.

Similarly, SFH's "swearing-at" ceremonies were direct actions expressed by the group that created a stronger sense of solidarity among Alberta's labour community. These ceremonies were also one of the performances that most closely adhered to guerrilla theatre techniques as they were the most outward and direct expression of the group that attracted spectators who were not necessarily participants within the performances themselves. The idea behind "swearing-at" ceremonies was similar to the idea behind the SFH buttons as they were an exclusive and fun way of participation for both members and people who aspired to be members. The ceremonies themselves were essentially a "swearing-in" ceremony, but with an element of humour in true SFH fashion. "Swearing-at" involved lining up aspiring members

---

<sup>46</sup> McCallum-Miller, Interview with ALHI, 2008.

against a wall, where established Sisters would then yell swear words at those new members being initiated into the group. These ceremonies would typically occur at conventions or labour events and pickets that the founding members of SFH would attend; these included the 1989 Alberta NDP Convention and an event celebrating former AFL president David Werlin, “Sister Murgathoid,” as well as various picket lines that SFH supported.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, the large numbers of people attending these conventions and pickets would hear about these ceremonies and wanted to be a part of them, and because they would include other union activists from other provinces across Canada, eventually SFH had members from across the country.<sup>48</sup>

Swearing-at ceremonies drew the attention of people active in the labour movement outside of Canada as well. International attendees would hear about the ceremonies at conferences they attended in Canada, but a ceremony that occurred on an airplane marks one of the most unique places for a swearing-at to take place. McCallum-Miller recalled performing a swearing-at ceremony for an activist from Cameroon while on an airplane; although she drew attention to herself on the flight from the concerned crew, she explained what she was doing, and what the group’s purpose was, and ended up performing a swearing-at ceremony on an interested flight attendant.<sup>49</sup> The group even translated its name into Spanish, “Hermana del Infierno,” as the group was able to “swear-at” activists who resided in Spain as well as Mexico and other Latin American countries.<sup>50</sup> The name was also translated into French, “Les Soeurs de L’Enfer” on some of the later editions of the *Sizzle Sheets*.<sup>51</sup> SFH did not actively recruit these

---

<sup>47</sup> *Sizzle Sheets*, August, 1990, M8395-330, Box 1, File 1, CDLC Fonds, GA. Keeley, Interview with author, 2017.

<sup>48</sup> *Sizzle Sheets*, No date, M8395-330, Box 1, File 1, CDLC Fonds, GA.

<sup>49</sup> McCallum-Miller, Interview with author, 2017.

<sup>50</sup> *Sizzle Sheets*, no date, M8395-330, Box 1, File 1, CDLC Fonds, GA.

<sup>51</sup> *Sizzle Sheets*, No date, M8395-330, Box 1, File 1, CDLC Fonds, GA.

international members. Most of them had connections to Alberta either through family, friends, or professional networks.<sup>52</sup> The importance of the action-oriented nature of these swearing-at ceremonies, however, lies in the sense of community that they established among those who joined SFH.

Interviews with McCallum-Miller and Keeley reveal that they, as well as everyone who wanted to join SFH, found humour in these ceremonies but they do not reveal why humour was found in such an aggressive display. Drawing spectators from crowds at conventions and picket lines through these ceremonies made their ad hoc group notorious for having fun, and this had the effect of creating a stronger sense of community for those involved who joined SFH. However, this humour was a necessary component of the difficult times that those involved were experiencing during the late 1980s and 1990s. In her recollection of the origins of the group, McCallum-Miller noted:

We realized that when you're involved in the struggle in the labour movement. . . you have to maintain your sense of humour to survive. The struggle can overwhelm you and it can kill you. You can't let that happen, you have to have some sense of balance. Having a sense of humour helps keep that balance.<sup>53</sup>

Discontent with successive Conservative governments in Alberta, a province that was not labour-friendly in the 1980s, as well as the outcomes of austerity measures implemented by the Klein government, were some of the general struggles that required this balance. Struggles that women such as Keeley and Bue had experienced were important factors in these aggressive displays as well. Indeed, two reports published in 1995 both drew attention to the

---

<sup>52</sup> Keeley, Calgary, Interview with author, 2017.

<sup>53</sup> McCallum-Miller, Interview with ALHI, 2008.

disproportion of negative consequences that women faced in the massive government restructuring that took place with Klein's government during this time period. Both reports, the first by the University of Alberta, the second by the Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues, had noted that several job cutting measures impacted high-paying jobs for women in public service, including those in healthcare and education. While some lost jobs were replaced by new ones, many new positions increasingly employed by women were low-paying clerical positions.<sup>54</sup> The University of Alberta study noted that within AUPE, with workers employed directly by the government or indirectly by public institutions such as hospitals and post-secondary institutions, many more female members lost their jobs than their male counterparts. The percentage of job loss appeared to be roughly equal at 10.7 percent for men and 10.3 percent for women. However, from 1993-1994, the number of women employed decreased by 2,939, while that of men was at 1,707. Between 1993-1994, the University of Alberta Hospital laid off a total of 740 staff, 78 percent of which were held by women.<sup>55</sup> Keeping such a balance played a role in SFH's aggressive swearing-at ceremony. The group existed to create unity and to help foster a sense of humour, but these two tenants were so necessary because of the changing working conditions in general and especially for women in the labour movement. This frustration with the context of labour conditions for women in Alberta contextualizes these swearing-at ceremonies for SFH members.

---

<sup>54</sup> "Alberta Advantage doesn't work for women, report says (Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues)," *Canadian Press NewsWire*, 8 November 1995.

<sup>55</sup> Gurston Dacks, Joyce Green, and Linda Trimble, "Road Kill: Women in Alberta's Drive Toward Deficit Elimination," in *The Trojan Horse: Alberta and the Future of Canada* eds. Trevor Harrison and Gordon Laxer. (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1995), 274-276.

## Conclusion

The Sisters From Hell helped to raise awareness about women's issues among its membership, and was focused on bringing those concerns to Alberta's labour community. Although it eventually ceased its operations in 1996, at least in terms of its activity at labour conventions and on picket lines, McCallum-Miller, who is still active in the labour movement in British Columbia today, does not feel like the group reached a formal conclusion:

So it kind of . . . gently dissolved as far as activity level. But I swear! I still, every so often, will see somebody, and I'll give them the gesture. They still remember it, some people still wear their buttons. And yeah – I would say that it, it will never totally end as long as there's a need for a sense of humour.<sup>56</sup>

While not as direct and specific as those of the groups analysed in the following chapters of this thesis, the tactics employed by the Sisters from Hell demonstrate how women unionists in Alberta used humour to communicate their concerns about the changing relationship between women and work in Alberta. The origin story of the group showcased how the four founding members created an opportunity to educate members about the experiences of women through laughing at their own appearances on an early morning picket line in 1989. Taking this opportunity even further, they established methods that made for easier discussions of the hellish experiences of some of those involved in the province's labour movement. These methods included more traditional means of activism that included fundraising and publishing a newsletter, *The Sizzle Sheets*. However, they also included less conventional forms of activism including their performances such as their handshakes, and their swearing-at initiation

---

<sup>56</sup> McCallum-Miller, Interview with author, 2017.



ceremony. Creating this environment that drew membership and allowed members to laugh at their own experiences proved to be both an effective and unique avenue for the Sisters From Hell to bring the voice of women into the province's labour movement.

### **CHAPTER 3: ORGANIZED ACTIVISM: THE WOMEN'S COMMITTEE OF THE CALGARY AND DISTRICT LABOUR COUNCIL**

“And we also had quite an activist women’s movement at that time in terms of organizing the First Night March, you know, International Women’s Day. I just found myself as part of that because it’s what I believed in. I mean, I’ve considered myself a feminist for a long time, since the eighties for sure.”<sup>1</sup> These words are from Rosemary Brown, who was active on the Women’s Committee of the Calgary and District Labour Council from its inception in 1989 until the middle of the 1990s. Brown’s memories confirm that groups in Calgary, and within Alberta, had employed more organized tactics to deal with the concerns of women engaged in paid work. This chapter will focus on the Women’s Committee (WC) of the Calgary and District Labour Council (CDLC), a grassroots union-based group that organized actions on various women’s issues. The WC provides another avenue for understanding how groups concerned with women’s issues in Alberta brought their concerns into the province’s labour movement. While the Sisters From Hell were primarily focused on creating community and allowing for a sense of humour within Alberta’s labour movement, the WC utilized more organized methods to advocate for working women in Alberta.

This chapter will discuss the actions of the WC within the greater social, economic, and political context of Alberta in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The WC’s actions were part of a larger movement that increasingly saw activist efforts that raised awareness about and attempted to remedy issues concerning women in unions and in the general labour market. As

---

<sup>1</sup> Rosemary Brown, Interview with author, Calgary Alberta, 6 November 2017.

was the case with SFH, establishing and maintaining networks among other organizations was an important method that members of the WC, like Rosemary Brown, used to act on such issues. These networks went beyond union-based organizations, however, through the many ties that were established with non-union based organizations in Calgary, and through the WC's mandate that it would give memberships to women who were not involved in unions. Creating and maintaining these networks strengthened the resolve of the WC and like-minded groups, especially within the increasingly market-driven economic and political context of Alberta, as well as the rest of Canada. Some of the WC's actions were a response to certain initiatives on behalf of the federal government, such as the implementation of the GST in 1991, which the group determined would have an overall negative impact on women across Canada.

Provincially, the group was vocal in its support of striking social workers and other community service personnel in the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees (AUPE) Local 6 in 1990. They also pushed the topics of sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and violence against women as both appropriate and necessary issues to be dealt with in the wider union movement. This led to the gradual acceptance of these topics in union discourse in other parts of Alberta's union community.

All of these efforts took place within a provincial economic climate that, like the rest of Canada and the wider Western world in general, was beginning to align itself with neo-liberal values that called for less government intervention within economic activity and advocated privatization and deregulation of public services. The Alberta government was strong in its commitment to such values, which ultimately reflect some of the concerns of the WC that are examined in this chapter. Networking became an important tool for members of the WC to

establish connections and see themselves as agents of change in their opposition to this turn to neo-liberalism. This was part of how the group came to articulate a general concern over how re-structuring society would impact working women, and informed members' activism against the GST and their support for the striking social workers of AUPE Local 6.

Bringing discussions regarding sexual harassment, and violence against women and children to the attention of the CDLC membership also demonstrated that the WC were important actors in how those topics have been brought in the public sphere. These were issues that primarily impacted women in the workplace, and with increasing numbers of women engaging in paid employment, acknowledging their existence meant that they could begin the process of addressing and dealing with them as legitimate problems. While the CDLC was generally supportive of campaigns that advocated for justice and equality for working women, such as its support for the Seven Jamaican Mothers and Women into Stelco campaigns, the group had a complicated history of how its members understood women's rights. These contexts provide a foundation for discussing the broad tactics that were employed by women's groups in Alberta, and also demonstrate how the WC brought issues that specifically concerned women workers into Alberta's labour movement.

### **The Women's Committee: Beginnings**

The Calgary and District Labour Council's Women's Committee formed in 1989, at the tail end of the decade that scholar Winston Gereluk described as fateful for Alberta's economy: "The eighties saw a lurch to the right in Alberta, driven by a combination of factors that conspired to sacrifice the rights of workers in the misguided hope that these changes would

kickstart the economy and return us all to prosperity.”<sup>2</sup> This “lurch” occurred within a context that increasingly saw the adoption of neo-liberal policies by both provincial and federal governments. Increasing calls for free trade, which would first be established through the Canada - U.S. Free Trade Agreement in October of 1987, and later included Mexico in the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994, reflected economic trends that discouraged government regulations. These trends reflected conservative economic theories that saw privatization as the only viable path to greater economic growth for all nations, businesses, and individuals alike. This decrease in government economic involvement included the notion that the market was responsible for driving economies, and that governments and workers should support its needs and interests. For workers, this meant increasingly precarious employment, restrictive labour legislation, consistent social programming cut-backs, and privatization of various services.<sup>3</sup> Federally, Brian Mulroney’s Progressive Conservative government was part of this shift. It transformed Canada’s economic structure by dismantling the last parts of Sir John A. Macdonald’s National Policy, ending universality in social programs, selling many publicly owned corporations to private investment, and massively reducing employees within federal public service positions.<sup>4</sup> The election of Ralph Klein’s Conservative Party in 1993 also had a negative impact on workers, as its policies were primarily concerned with eliminating the province’s deficit partially through pay cuts for those working in the public sector and contracting out government jobs to private industries.

---

<sup>2</sup> Gereluk, “Alberta Labour in the 1980s,” 175.

<sup>3</sup> Gereluk, “Alberta Labour in the 1980s,” 175.

<sup>4</sup> Raymond B. Blake, “Introduction” in *Transforming the Nation: Canada and Brian Mulroney* ed. Raymond B. Blake, (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007), 4-5.

In addition to this greater economic shift, the fluctuating price of oil on a world-wide scale had an enormous impact on Alberta's economy, as much of the province's economic activity relied on stability and growth in its oil and gas sector. After the discovery of oil in Leduc in 1946, Alberta's economy transformed from one that was primarily based on agriculture into one based on oil, a commodity that was also heavily tied to global markets.<sup>5</sup> Such close ties were felt during the 1973 OPEC-induced energy crisis, and in 1979 when the Iranian Shah was overthrown; both events saw the price of oil dramatically increase in a short period of time. However, they also provided examples of how busts accompany booms, with severe decreases in the value of oil, and made apparent the negative aspects of the close ties between Alberta's oil-based economy and the global market.<sup>6</sup> This cycle can be seen in the 1980-1981 recession following the 1979 sharp rise in oil prices, which was deeper and lasted longer in Alberta than the rest of the country because of the province's strong economic reliance on the oil and gas sector. The National Energy Program (NEP), implemented in 1980 by the federal Liberal Party under Pierre Trudeau, attempted to regulate the price of oil and gas in the name of diversifying Canada's economy, to cease the harsh boom and bust cycles that accompanied global oil prices, and to provide Canadians with lower oil prices. However, its primary legacy was alienating Albertans and energy companies that were in favour of free-market oil prices.<sup>7</sup> Although investment from energy companies decreased in the province beginning in 1980, ultimately, Alberta's primary reliance on oil as an economic driver, and the commodity's close ties to the

---

<sup>5</sup> Paul Chastko, "Anonymity and Ambivalence: The Canadian and American Oil Industries and the Emergence of Continental Oil," *The Journal of American History* 99,1 (2012): 166.

<sup>6</sup> Frances W. Kaye, *Goodlands: A Meditation and History on the Great Plains*, (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2011), 281-285

<sup>7</sup> Tammy Nemeth, "1980: Duel of the Decade," in *Alberta Formed, Alberta Transformed Volume II*, ed. Michael Payne, and others. (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2005), 677-678.

global market, were the main causes of Alberta's recession at the beginning of the decade.<sup>8</sup>

This context is important for understanding the activism of the WC because their initiatives took place in a political climate that was increasingly friendly to private businesses and market-based economies and decreasingly supportive of workers' rights and government economic involvement.

The context of the CDLC itself is also important as its support and advocacy for women's issues has a dynamic background. The CDLC, which formed as the Calgary Trades and Labour Council in 1901, organized to unite and strengthen existing unions within the Calgary region. In 1950, it became the Calgary Labour Council, and in 1992 changed its name to the Calgary and District Labour Council.<sup>9</sup> The CDLC formally supported several different initiatives and campaigns regarding issues that primarily impacted women in the 1970s, 1980s, and into the 1990s. It supported calls to remedy wage disparities that existed between male and female employees in 1974, as indicated in a letter from former CDLC Executive Secretary Bill Paterson to the Calgary Status of Women Action Committee. Paterson stated that "the Alberta organized trade union movement for many years now, has brought to the attention of the Provincial Government numerous cases of wage discriminations against women."<sup>10</sup> In 1979, when the CDLC began keeping records of its Education Committee, it began to offer a course on Women's

---

<sup>8</sup> Kaye, *Goodlands*, 285. Gereluk, "Alberta Labour in the 1980s," 176.

<sup>9</sup> While this thesis deals with the group when it was called the "Calgary Labour Council," for the sake of simplicity, I will refer to the group as the "CDLC" throughout.

<sup>10</sup> W.Y. Paterson to Christine Bell, 22 November 1974, M5864-18, Box 2, File 2, Calgary and District Labour Council Fonds (CDLC), Glenbow Archives (GA).

Rights as part of its weekend school program affirming the CDLC's view that "All unionists should be aware of the need to create "equality" in the workplace."<sup>11</sup>

The CDLC also supported Canada-wide campaigns that raised awareness about issues that affected working women. One of these causes was resisting efforts by the Canadian government to deport seven Jamaican women, known in the media as the Seven Jamaican Mothers, who were living in Toronto in 1978. These women came to Canada in 1974 as domestic workers under a trade agreement between the Canadian and Jamaican governments, and a major condition of this agreement was that these women had to state that they were "single, widowed, divorced, without minor children or the encumbrance of common-law relationships."<sup>12</sup> They eventually faced deportation when federal immigration officials found out that the women had falsely declared they had no children upon their arrival in Canada.<sup>13</sup> Rosemary Brown, who attended CDLC meetings before the creation of the WC, noted that the campaign concerned issues that working women in particular faced when they were also mothers, especially those who had limited access to decent employment: "But here was a case of the government saying, 'We want you to come here, you're not to have children.' Well guess what? These women wouldn't be here if it wasn't for the children they needed to support."<sup>14</sup> However these mothers were not merely victims of exploitative and expendable labour when they sought assistance to stop their own deportations. Scholar Erica Lawson argues that they

---

<sup>11</sup> W.Y. Paterson to All Affiliated Organizations, February 14, 1979, "Re: Weekend School," M8395-81, Box 1, File 1, 4-6, GA.

<sup>12</sup> Kathleen Rex, "Lied about having children, Jamaicans being deported," *The Globe and Mail*, 13 February 1978: 28.

<sup>13</sup> Rex, "Lied about having children, Jamaicans being deported," 28.

<sup>14</sup> Brown, Interview with author, 2017.



acted as their own agents to change the terms that blocked their ability to continue to live in Canada and that “their activities influenced other social-justice seeking groups.”<sup>15</sup> In this case, they influenced the CDLC, and would come to have an influence in the WC when it formed in 1989, especially with the involvement of members like Brown.

In addition to the CDLC’s concerns about how these deportations impacted these women as mothers, the case of the Seven Jamaican Mothers also brought up the issue of how race impacted employment opportunities for women, a theme that will also be explored in greater detail in the advocacy for pay and employment equity legislation in the following chapter. Efforts to advocate against the deportations were organized by the Toronto-based International Committee to End Racism (INCAR), which had local committees across Canada, including Calgary, to raise awareness of the issue and to try to stop the deportations from occurring. In a memo by the Calgary INCAR, they noted that, “deportations of this kind have only started in the last 2 years, yet the trade agreement has existed for the last 20 years, so it’s arbitrary and racist.”<sup>16</sup> While the resistance was primarily organized through INCAR, the CDLC provided support by writing a letter of protest to the Immigration Minister, and contributing to the defense fund set up on behalf of the seven women.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Brown was the INCAR representative who brought this issue to the CDLC, and her participation involving these concerns over gendered and racial aspects of labour informed the concerns of the WC when it was established thirteen years later. Ultimately, the Canada-wide support of the campaign led

---

<sup>15</sup> Erica Lawson, “The Gendered Working Lives of Seven Jamaican Women in Canada: A Story about ‘Here’ and ‘There’ in a Transnational Economy,” *Feminist Formations* 25, 1 (Spring 2013): 139.

<sup>16</sup> Stop Racist Deportations, no date, M-8395-81, Box, File, CDLC Fonds, GA.

<sup>17</sup> Correspondence from Rosemary Brown to the CDLC, 22 January 1979. M8395-91, Box 1, File 1, CDLC Fonds, GA.

to the federal government cancelling the deportations and providing the women with landed immigrant status.<sup>18</sup>

The CDLC further provided a foundation for the future WC's efforts to raise concerns that specifically impacted working women in its support of 1979-1980 Women into Stelco Campaign, another Canada-wide initiative. The Campaign protested against the Steel Company of Canada, Stelco, in its refusal to hire women as production workers in the Hilton works plant in Hamilton, Ontario. This refusal led to the creation a committee in 1979-1980, supported by the United Steelworkers of America Local 1005, that supported five women who filed a discrimination complaint with the Ontario Human Rights Commission against the company. The Commission ruled in favour of the five women, after which Stelco began to hire more women workers, an event that scholars Meg Luxton and June Corman have argued was part of a larger fight to transform the organization of work, the location of women in the economy, and prevailing ideas about femininity.<sup>19</sup> In a letter of support to the Women into Stelco Campaign Committee, CDLC Executive Secretary Paterson stated, "the sincere best wishes of the Calgary Labour Council for a most productive, united commitment to affirmative action in support of all working women."<sup>20</sup> While the CDLC's actions here were minimal, these efforts are important for understanding the origins of the WC and how the group brought the voice of women in the labour movement.

---

<sup>18</sup> "Mass political campaign brings victory for 7 Mothers," *The Worker*, 19 July 1979. M8391-91, Box 2, File 3, CDLC Fonds, GA.

<sup>19</sup> Meg Luxton and June Corman, "The Challenge of the Women Back Into Stelco Campaign," *Labour/Le Travail* 28 (Fall 1991): 149.

<sup>20</sup> W.Y. Paterson to Women into Stelco Campaign Committee, 2 October 1979, M8395-91, Box 1, File 4, CDLC Fonds, GA.

Although the CDLC formally supported several initiatives that called for pro-active measures that would support women in the labour movement, personal views of members of the CDLC were not always consistent with these formal demonstrations of support. In her recollection of running for President of the CDLC in 1979, Susan Keeley spoke about some of the hardships women faced:

I know there was a lot of people that wouldn't vote for me because I was a woman, and this is really a place for men. There were certainly some strong ideas from some of the building trades in particular, but not just them. Those were in the days that I remember transit getting up and complaining that the city of Calgary actually hired women to drive buses, and they shouldn't be. "Women can't do that job; so they really shouldn't be hired"<sup>21</sup>

Keeley's memory demonstrates that CDLC members were not always united in supporting as leaders in the labour movement, especially when one considers that Keeley's successful campaign for presidency saw her serve in the role for eight years.<sup>22</sup> Her success is an example of how women could – and did – take on leadership roles and change how they participated within the labour movement. Her story also exemplifies how women had to actively push for such changes. On one hand, women in groups like the CDLC could experience misogynistic comments from fellow CDLC members when they attempted to participate within executive capacities, while on the other hand, women also served successful terms in those same roles.

---

<sup>21</sup> Keeley, Interview with ALHI, 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Brenda Strawson, "An Interview with Susan Keeley," *The Activist*, (March 1990): 1. 98.908, Box 8, File 112. Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL) Fonds, Provincial Archives of Alberta (PPA).

## Action Through Networking

Networking among women involved with the WC was central to the group's activism, as it helped to establish links with other concerned Calgarians, and concerned Albertans, to spread awareness about women's issues within the province's labour movement. An example of this desire to network with other activists can be seen in the actions of the founding members of the WC, who decided that they would not limit membership only to delegates of the CDLC when they formed as a group in 1989. They allowed and encouraged other non-union affiliated women to join.<sup>23</sup> The group also connected with other grass-roots organizations. Some of these groups had similar goals that focused on women in the labour movement, such as the Women's Committee of the Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL), while others were focused on a wider range of issues that affected women, like the Calgary Status of Women Action Committee (CSWAC). From its very beginning, the WC also had established connections with Women Looking Forward (WLF), a non-profit networking society whose purpose was to unite women's groups and individuals working towards the equality of all women.<sup>24</sup> These connections, especially in the case with WLF and the AFL, were important factors that influenced how the WC would eventually act on women's issues. One of the WC's earliest ideas was holding a conference around a general theme, such as "women and the shrinking dollar," in order to "involve women on a variety of levels with a variety of concerns."<sup>25</sup> Members' discussions around such a broad theme eventually focused on a more specific conference topic: payment and employment equity. Upon learning that the WLF had a similar idea, the WC, and several

---

<sup>23</sup> CLC Women's Committee Minutes, 5 March 1990. M8395-331, Box 2, File 13, CDLC Fonds, GA.

<sup>24</sup> *Women Looking Forward August 94 Calendar of Events*. M8990-794, Box 4, File 36, CDLC Fonds, GA.

<sup>25</sup> CLC Women's Committee Minutes, 7 May 1990, M-8395-332, Box 3, File 8, CDLC Fonds, GA.

other organizations in Calgary held a conference in 1992 on pay and employment equity, to be discussed in the next chapter. The actual conference was not solely significant in understanding the motives of the WC that called for greater influence for women in both Calgary's and Alberta's labour movements, however. An important factor in organizing the conference itself was the establishment of links between different organizations in and around Calgary.

The links that members of the WC established with other groups were some of the most important tactics that the group employed in its efforts to bring the concerns of working women into the province's labour movement. Examples of the WC's activism tied to other organizations and committees can be seen in Rosemary Brown and Cindy McCallum-Miller, two original members of the group. Brown recalled that prior to the beginning of the WC in 1989, she had "been very active in all kinds of community groups before then," particularly within international solidarity and anti-racism groups. After moving from Toronto in 1976, she had established connections with other Calgary activists through her contact with the CDLC prior to the existence of the WC. Brown was the primary point of contact when the CDLC supported the campaign to stop the deportation of Seven Jamaican Mothers in 1978, and had helped to establish the Calgary chapter of INCAR. Brown recalled being active in different groups when she was establishing herself in Calgary:

So I moved here in '76, and was active by the late '70's within the Calgary community in terms of anti-racism work, connecting with other feminists, participating in events . . . As someone who's involved in different international solidarity groups and anti-racism work, I remember working with Susan Keeley to organize international May Day events and Women's Day events. So that was

before I ever joined the Labour Council, so I already knew people there, because I had gone to them for support around different issues<sup>26</sup>

The networking she did with these groups was another avenue for her to establish connections for with other activists.<sup>27</sup> During her time with the WC, Brown was active in the AFL, contributed articles to the Federation's newsletter, *The Activist*, concerning equity and diversity in employment, networked with members of Calgary Status of Women Action Committee, and frequently attended meetings with Women Looking Forward.<sup>28</sup>

McCallum-Miller, also from Toronto, relocated to Banff in the early 1980s where she became involved in advocacy initiatives through connections she made within the Bow Valley area as well as through the CDLC. After attempting to establish a larger council of Bow Valley unions, she became involved in the CDLC. Part of her education within her own union, the Canadian Postal Workers Union in Banff, encouraged her to connect with the broader labour movement, which ultimately led her into the women's movement in her participation with the WC.<sup>29</sup> She recalled feeling a sense of community upon joining the CDLC:

But I felt way better when I got to Calgary because there was a whole hub there of feminist activists within the trade union movement and that's what we had in common initially. Was the fact that we were all members of unions, we were all women in unions, and we all wanted to break down some of the discriminatory and gate-keeping that was going on within our movements<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Brown, Interview with author, 2017.

<sup>27</sup> Brown, Interview with author, 2017.

<sup>28</sup> "Challenging Racism and Sexism with Pay and Employment Equity," Rosemary Brown, *The Activist* 6, 9 (March, 1993): 6-7, 98.908, Box 8, File 112, AFL Fonds, PAA. Minutes of October 31, 1992 Meeting of the Women's Committee of the Calgary Labour Council. M8990-786, Box 5, file 4, CDLC Fonds, GA.

<sup>29</sup> McCallum-Miller, Interview with ALHI, 2008.

<sup>30</sup> McCallum-Miller, Interview with author, 2017.

Her role in founding the Sisters From Hell also assisted in establishing networks for concerned Calgarians, Albertans and eventually Canadians from provinces across Canada. She would go on to participate within the executives of the Alberta Federation of Labour, the New Democrat Party of Alberta, and, like Brown, contributed articles to *The Activist*.<sup>31</sup>

In reflecting on how personal relationships assisted her own personal development within activist circles, McCallum-Miller gave plenty of credit to her peers who were active within the CDLC and the WC: “when I met people like Susan Keeley and Linda Karpowich. . . Yvonne Schmitz, some of those. . . people who were wonderful activists in the City of Calgary and me out in the boonies, I sort of used them as my anchor.”<sup>32</sup> Schmitz, and Karpowich, both social workers and also early members of the WC, participated in the illegal AUPE social workers’ strike of 1990 that saw provincial social workers walk off the job for twenty-two days. Karpowich was active in the AFL and went on to become its first female president in 1993; she was involved in the Alberta New Democrats, and served as the Provincial Co-chair with the Action Canada Network, in addition to being heavily involved with her own local.<sup>33</sup> Schmitz was also active in several other organizations in Calgary including the Action Canada Network and, in the 1980s, the Citizens’ Advocacy Society. She was also a strong supporter for the Independent Living and Community Living movements for people with physical and/or mental disabilities, and had memberships in Amnesty International, the National Anti-Poverty

---

<sup>31</sup> Cindy McCallum, “Women in Politics,” in *The Activist Special Issue: International Women’s Day* Vol. 6, (March 1990): 3-4; Cindy McCallum, “Women in Politics,” in *The Activist* 6, 6 (March 1992):6, 98.908, Box 8, File 112, AFL Fonds, PAA; Cindy McCallum, “Women in Politics,” in *The Activist* 6, 9 (March 1993): 5, 98.908, Box 8, File 112, AFL Fonds, PAA.

<sup>32</sup> McCallum-Miller, Interview with author, 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Linda Karpowich: a brief biography. M8990-794, Box 4, File 36, CDLC Fonds, GA

Organization, Greenpeace, the Canadian and World Wildlife Federations, Change for Children, the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, and the Friends of Canadian Broadcasting.<sup>34</sup>

Although not all of their community efforts specifically advocated for bringing the voice of women into Alberta's labour movement, their commitment to serving their communities through various channels demonstrates how they were agents for change within several capacities.

### **The Women's Committee and Structural Readjustment**

The tactics employed by the CDLC in the years preceding the group's creation provide a solid foundation for better understanding how the WC would voice the concerns of women in Alberta's labour movement, however the wider context of women's committees in general is significant as such committees developed in other labour councils and federations across Canada. In her work on women and unions, Julie White has discussed the varying types of activities and purposes of these committees and has argued that they were incredibly diverse. Women's Committees have been geared towards changes within unions themselves, focused on obtaining benefits through the bargaining process, and have also worked for broader social change.<sup>35</sup> The CDLC's WC primarily fell within the last category; most of the group's events and activities were social justice initiatives, especially those focused on bringing concerns of women into the Calgary and Alberta labour movements. Initially, the activism of the WC focused on broad goals, including "addressing the obstacles which prevent more women from becoming involved as active trade unionists," and "representing women's issues to organized labour, and

---

<sup>34</sup> Resume for the Women of Distinction Awards: Yvonne Schmitz. M8990-794, Box 4, File 36, CDLC Fonds, GA.

<sup>35</sup> White. *Sisters and Solidarity*, 123-124.



labour issues to the women's movement."<sup>36</sup> These objectives eventually made connections between local and international contexts, and they became more focused on specific points of interest for WC members.

Raising awareness about structural re-adjustment for both Calgarians and women around the world was one of the first initiatives for the members of the WC, and the group employed various methods for shedding light on how it affected women involved in paid work. After the group's founding meeting in September 1989, one of its first actions was to publicize a talk that one of its members, Susan Keeley, was moderating called "Is Development Working For Women? Reflections from Southern Africa and Canada." The event featured Thamdiwe Motsisi, a development consultant from Zimbabwe, Vangile Tite, an environmentalist with experience in community development from South Africa, and Martha Many Grey Horses from the Blood Indian Reserve, who worked as an Alberta Human Development Consultant within Indigenous Communities.<sup>37</sup> In their next meeting in January 1990, members discussed ways that they could "educate and motivate people around the impact of structural readjustment . . . on women and families in this country, as well as overseas."<sup>38</sup> "Structural re-adjustment" was the result of more neo-liberal policies being adopted by local and international governments in the 1980s and 1990s; an example of a such a policy that the WC protested was the goods and services tax (GST), which was implemented federally by Brian Mulroney's Progressive Conservative government in 1991. The WC viewed the tax as disproportionately impactful on

---

<sup>36</sup> "Report from the Women's Committee," 26 September 1989. M8395-311, Box 1, File 1, CDLC Fonds, GA.

<sup>37</sup> "Report from the Women's Committee," 26 September 1989, M8395-311, Box 1, File 1, CDLC Fonds, GA; "Is Development Working for Women? Reflections from Southern Africa and Canada." M8395-311, Box 1, File 2, CDLC Fonds, GA.

<sup>38</sup> "Minutes CLC Women's Committee Meeting," March 5, 1990. M8395-332, Box 3, File 8, CDLC Fonds, GA.

women since the tax was applied to goods and services that all Canadians needed to access; because women only earned an average of sixty-five cents for every dollar earned by men, they had to spend more of their income on the GST.<sup>39</sup> In 1990, the WC participated in demonstrations against the tax reform organized by the CDLC in Calgary. These demonstrations included distributing anti-GST postcards, encouraging members of the CDLC to sign and distribute anti-GST petitions within their respective unions, and holding registration tables for anti-GST petitions in malls throughout the city of Calgary in April 1990.<sup>40</sup> The CDLC, including members of the WC, staged a protest at the Palliser Hotel in downtown Calgary when Brian Mulroney held a meeting with some local Members of Parliament.<sup>41</sup> Members of the WC also distributed literature concerning the impact of the GST on women among their own Committee members, and also to other members of the labour movement and other women's groups within Calgary.<sup>42</sup>

The WC also identified concerns on the impact of structural readjustment on the workloads and wages of social workers. This concern was voiced not only because social work is a female-dominated profession, but also because WC members knew that often the clients who relied on their services were vulnerable women and their children. In May 1990, the group was able to act on this interest, when about 1,600 social workers, childcare counsellors, and psychologists in the AUPE Local 6 walked off their jobs for twenty-two days. In an illegal strike,

---

<sup>39</sup> "Women in Alberta – Selected Statistics," Alberta Community Development – Women's Policy and Programs, December 1993. M-8792-2, Box 3, file 16, CDLC Fonds, GA; CLC Women's Committee Minutes, 5 March 1990. M-8395-331, Box 2, File 13, CDLC Fonds, GA.

<sup>40</sup> CLC Women's Committee Minutes, 7 May 1990. M-8395-332, Box 3, File 8, CDLC Fonds, GA.

<sup>41</sup> Women's Committee Report – Calgary Labour Council, no date. M-8395-332, Box 3, File 10, CDLC Fonds, GA.

<sup>42</sup> CLC Women's Committee Minutes, 5 March 1990. M-8395-331, Box 2, File 13, CDLC Fonds, GA.

as strikes were prohibited under the 1977 Public Service Relations Act, these workers demanded that the Government of Alberta, their employer, reduce their caseloads and implement wage parity with their counterparts in other governmental departments.<sup>43</sup> The issue of wage parity was based on the strikers' grievance that those employed in the solicitor general's department earned \$7500 more per year than a person with the same qualifications and job description in the social services department.<sup>44</sup> Caseloads were also significant factors behind AUPE Local 6's collective action; workers explained that their heavy workloads, sometimes more than double the recommended twenty cases at a time, left them working evenings and weekends with no extra pay.<sup>45</sup>

Influenced by their views on the negative effects of the neo-liberal restructuring of Western society and on the experiences of members who were social workers themselves, the WC employed a variety of organized methods in its support of strikers within AUPE Local 6. Members provided support by attending rallies and participating in vigils for the strikers, and encouraging both its own members and those of the CDLC to write letters to their respective MLAs urging them to support the strike.<sup>46</sup> The WC placed this strike in an international context that saw other governments "restructuring their economic and social policies in order to meet the demands of transnational corporations" that demanded that those governments exercise "'fiscal restraint' in order to reduce 'the deficit.'"<sup>47</sup> They focused on gender inequities arguing

---

<sup>43</sup> Gereluk, "Alberta Labour in the 1980s," 200. Yonatan Reshef and Sandra Rastin, *Unions in the Time of Revolution: Government Restructuring in Alberta and Ontario*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 67.

<sup>44</sup> Reshef and Rastin, *Unions in the Time of Revolution*, 66.

<sup>45</sup> Mark Lisac, "Trust lost between gov't, social workers," *Edmonton Journal*, 10 May 1990, A19. Alberta, Legislative Assembly, *Hansard* (May 1, 1990), p. 918 (Mrs. Hewes, Member of the Legislative Assembly).

<sup>46</sup> CLC Women's Committee Minutes, 7 May 1990. M-8395-332, Box 3, File 8, CDLC Fonds, GA.

<sup>47</sup> "Statement of the Women's Committee of the Calgary Labour Council in Support of AUPE Local 6," No date, M-8395-332, Box 3, File 3, CDLC Fonds, GA.

that these types of economic agendas “always translates into cuts in social spending, and specifically social services,” and expressed concern about how this shift in government intervention would affect women, whether they were employed as social workers or used the services that social workers offered. These ideas were expressed in a “Statement of the Women’s Committee of the Calgary and District Labour Council in Support of AUPE Local 6,” as the group summarized this concern with examples of how government cuts affected social workers:

Sometimes social workers are laid off. Or, new ones are not hired to increase in social crises caused by other aspects of “fiscal restraint.” Or, new ones are not hired when others retire. No matter which scenario is followed, the new result is to drastically increase the workload of social workers, most of whom are women; and to shortchange those who need their services the most, women and children.<sup>48</sup>

Such efforts on behalf the WC in support of the striking workers were influenced by the group’s membership, as two striking AUPE Local 6 members, Gloria Atkinson and Linda Karpowich, had attended some of the earliest meetings of the WC.<sup>49</sup> The WC and its efforts mobilized some of the strikers, as two other participating members of the Local, Evelyn Clarke and Chris Nokleby, attended meetings of the WC after the strike ended on May 20<sup>th</sup>.<sup>50</sup> While the striking workers eventually settled on a deal with the province, the WC’s activism in support of AUPE Local 6 not only demonstrated the group’s concern with how structural readjustment affected both women working in positions that were predominantly employed by women, and those women

---

<sup>48</sup> “Statement of the Women’s Committee of the Calgary Labour Council in Support of AUPE Local 6,” no date, M-8395-332, Box 3, File 3, CDLC Fonds, GA.

<sup>49</sup> CLC Women’s Committee Minutes, 5 March 1990. M-8395-331, Box 2, File 13, CDLC Fonds, GA.

<sup>50</sup> CLC Women’s Committee Minutes, 11 June 1990. M-8395-332, Box 2, File 8, CDLC Fonds, GA.

and other vulnerable populations that utilized the services that were provided by publicly employed social workers. By employing these tactics in support of striking workers, members of the WC were not only able to define specific issues that predominantly impacted women workers. They also created a rallying point to voice their concern for the gendered implications of structural readjustment within the larger CDLC and provincial labour movement.

### **Advocacy Against Sexual Harassment and Violence Against Women and Children**

Activism concerning the elimination of sexual harassment and violence against women and children was another important rallying point for members of the WC, and, similar to the strike of AUPE Local 6, they were able to voice their concerns regarding these issues with the support of the larger CDLC. The WC's initiatives not only demonstrated that it was committed to making both workplaces and the wider society safer for women and children, it also broadened the concerns that came to be included within labour activism that occurred within the province. Sexual harassment and violence against women and children were once considered private matters that were to be dealt with in private arenas. The women's movement, including the WC, helped to acknowledge these issues as both legitimate and necessary political points to be discussed and acted on within public forums. The following initiatives of the WC led show how women's organizations were important actors during this shift. For the WC, these examples demonstrate how the group, with the support of the wider CDLC, brought these concerns into Alberta's labour movement.

Supporting initiatives that began elsewhere provided an avenue for the WC to bring forward the concerns of women involved in paid work, as not all of them originated within the

group's membership. In 1992, the WC endorsed a Canada-wide Child Sexual Abuse Awareness & Fundraising Campaign called "Break the Cycle," a move that originated within the CDLC's executive. Canmore residents Alyson Lockwood and Terry Smith created this campaign. They rode their bicycles across Canada between 14 May and 11 September 1992 to fundraise for the National Foundation for the Prevention of Child Abuse. Funds raised by the group were distributed nationally by its board to organizations providing programs for child and adult survivors of child sexual abuse.<sup>51</sup> The CDLC - with its president Darren Steinhoff, one of the founders of Sisters from Hell - officially endorsed the campaign, and formally acknowledged the impact that this type of abuse had on children and women within both the labour movement and society in general. One of the founders of the WC, Cindy McCallum-Miller, wrote the formal endorsement that came from the executive of the CDLC, and demonstrated active commitment to this cause by calling on the Council's Executive to write to the federal and provincial ministers responsible for women's issues, social services, and health and welfare.<sup>52</sup> Gordon Christie, who had taken over as the Executive Secretary for the CDLC in 1990, wrote letters to these ministers on behalf of the CDLC requesting increased funding for public facilities and to provide adequate funding for training programs for R.C.M.P. members, municipal police forces, doctors, nurses, teachers, and social workers, in addition to increasing the funding of current programs for children and adult survivors of abuse.<sup>53</sup> An underlying concern for re-structuring was also present within these efforts, as the letters and the formal endorsement written by

---

<sup>51</sup> Break the Cycle Across Canada Child Sexual Abuse Awareness & Fundraising Campaign, M-8990-779, Box 3, File 8, CDLC Fonds, GA.

<sup>52</sup> Document, no title, no date, M-8990-779, Box 3, File 20, CDLC Fonds, GA.

<sup>53</sup> Gordon Christie to Mary Collins, 3 September 1992, M-8990-779, Box 3, File 8, CDLC Fonds, GA. Gordon Christie to Benoit Bouchard, 3 September 1992, M-8990-779, Box 3, File 8, CDLC Fonds, GA. Gordon Christie to Elaine McCoy, 3 September 1992, M-8990-779, Box 3, File 8, CDLC Fonds, GA.

McCallum-Miller expressed concern over government cutbacks to programs for sexual abuse survivors. The formal endorsement placed blame on “right wing governments” that had “created a crisis by not only failing to recognize the scope of the problem, but by continuing to erode and eliminate existing services necessary to assist survivors dealing with the trauma of their abuse.”<sup>54</sup> In its support of initiatives that did not originate within its membership, the WC was able to advocate for more causes that concerned working women in the province.

The WC advocated for the elimination of sexual harassment and violence against women and children through its own campaigns as well. It helped to transform discussions around labour politics and gender relations in Calgary workplaces by publicly supporting and fundraising for Pam Gardner, a woman who was fired from her unionized job with Canada Safeway in July 1994. Gardner was the first woman to work in the MacDonald’s Consolidated grocery warehouse for Canada Safeway, and, along with the only other female employed in the warehouse in 1993, pressed charges against four male employees for sexual assault and indecent acts after being employed in the position for four months.<sup>55</sup> Gardner told the press that the forms of harassment she faced from those accused included being threatened with rape, being asked for oral sex, and constant pranks that included the accused dropping their pants in front of her and Marina Charriere-Bazin, the other female employee in the warehouse.<sup>56</sup> After an internal investigation that followed the two women’s reports of the incidents to management in the summer of 1993, two of the accused were fired by Canada Safeway. Charriere-Bazin quit her job in the warehouse following a stress leave that took place

---

<sup>54</sup> Document, no title, no date, M-8990-779, Box 3, File 8, CDLC Fonds, GA.

<sup>55</sup> Dave Pommer, “Woman Who Filed Complaint is Fired,” *Calgary Herald*, 24 June 1994.

<sup>56</sup> Dave Pommer, “Sexual Harassment Claimed,” *Calgary Herald*, 1 October 1993.

after she reported the abuse in August 1993. Gardner was eventually fired from her job one year later for “disruptive behaviour” and “unwillingness to cooperate with fellow employees,” despite Gardner’s claim that only a few days before her dismissal, her manager had complimented her on her good work.<sup>57</sup> A letter from Canada Safeway addressed to the CDLC noted that Gardner “was dismissed for reasons unrelated to the June 1993 accident.”<sup>58</sup>

The WC mobilized to support Gardiner. The group was vocal in its support for reinstating Gardner in her job with Canada Safeway, despite the company’s statement that she was dismissed for reasons unrelated to the 1993 incident. The WC created an educational pamphlet designed for public distribution, received support from the wider CDLC in the form of a letter of protest written to Canada Safeway, and fundraised for Gardner’s defense fees. In addition to these actions, the group furthered the discussion of sexual harassment and gendered workplace power dynamics to a more public arena by raising awareness of Gardner’s case. In their educational pamphlet, the WC noted that her case was one that had the potential to affect all working women: “In taking a stand Gardner has spoken out for all women in both traditional and non-traditional work sites. Her fight is our fight. Let’s give her all the support we can.”<sup>59</sup> The WC also had the opportunity to specifically define “sexual harassment” and some of the reasons why it occurred in workplaces:

Sexual harassment is any repeated or unwanted sexually oriented practice that endangers a woman’s job, that causes her discomfort or humiliation at the workplace, or that, in any other way, threatens her economic performance or

---

<sup>57</sup> Dave Pommer, “Woman Who Filed Complaint is Fired,” *Calgary Herald*, 24 June 1994.

<sup>58</sup> Correspondence from Jim Waters, Vice President, Public Relations and Government Affairs, Canada Safeway Limited to Ms. Beth Wiwchar and Ms. Gillen, Calgary and District Labour Council, 8 August 1994, M-8990-794, Box 4, File 36, CDLC Fonds, GA.

<sup>59</sup> “Stop Sexual Harassment at Safeway: Defend Pam Gardner’s Job” no date, M-8990-794, Box 4, File 36, CDLC Fonds, GA.



potential. However it is expressed has three basic components: it is unwanted, it affects the woman's work, and it is an expression of power, authority, or control through sex.<sup>60</sup>

Explanations for why both Gardner and Charriere-Bazin left their jobs can be seen in this definition and rationale for this type of harassment.

The WC's support for Gardner, as well as the group's role in bringing the topic of sexual harassment as one that was appropriate and necessary for public discourse, was also manifested in how they reached out to Canada Safeway through letter-writing, and how they encouraged others to do the same. After receiving the support of the CDLC for Gardner's cause, this discussion was brought up in a letter written by the Labour Council's President S'ean Gillen and council member Beth Wiwchar, to the Human Resources Department of Canada Safeway Limited. Stating the council's position that "Pam Gardner had just cause for her complaints" and that "until this matter has been resolved in a fair and equitable manner, we will not be shopping at Canada Safeway," the CDLC, as well as the WC, was bringing the discussion of workplace sexual harassment into the public domain.<sup>61</sup> The WC's educational pamphlet also stated that if people wanted to get involved, they should write to Canada Safeway and demand that the company reinstate Gardner in the location of her choice, hire a more representative workforce, and "ensure a harassment free environment for all workers."<sup>62</sup> This demonstrated support for Gardner's cause, and also encouraged the general public to discuss sexual

---

<sup>60</sup> "Stop Sexual Harassment at Safeway: Defend Pam Gardner's Job" no date, M-8990-794, Box 4, File 36, CDLC Fonds, GA.

<sup>61</sup> Correspondence from S'ean Gillen and Beth Wiwchar to Canada Safeway Human Resources Department, 8 August 1994. M-8990-794, Box 4, file 36, CDLC Fonds, GA.

<sup>62</sup> Correspondence from S'ean Gillen and Beth Wiwchar to Canada Safeway Human Resources Department, 8 August 1994. M-8990-794, Box 4, File 36, CDLC Fonds, GA.

harassment as a problem that needed to be dealt with not just by individuals, but also within public realms and workplaces like Canada Safeway.

The WC was not alone in its efforts to eliminate sexual harassment and violence against women and children, and to bring these important issues to light within the province's labour movement. The group's actions were part of a larger movement taking place in unions, labour councils, and federations in Alberta and across Canada that were creating and adopting policies that took direct stands against sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and violence against women. In May of 1991, the AFL endorsed a paper written by its own Women's Committee, a "Policy Statement on Violence Against Women." The paper had a section on the role of the labour movement and laid out a plan of action that included lobbying the provincial and federal governments for education programs in schools, increased funding for shelters and counselling, increased funding for treatment shelters for abusive men, and providing information on assistance for victims of abuse among the AFL's membership.<sup>63</sup> Some men within the AFL were vocal in their support of such calls from feminists within their organization; in a 1990 issue of the Federation's newsletter, *The Activist*, some of them publicly expressed their concerns and commitment to change their own workplaces so that they were safer and more equitable for women:

We, as men and trade unionists, must speak and act against men who physically, mentally, or emotionally assault women. We must affirm equal rights for women, and defend women's rights to freedom from violence, freedom from economic hardship, freedom of choice, and the freedom to participate fully and equally in all aspects of our society<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> Letter to the CDLC from Audrey M. Bath, AFL, 29 November 1991. M-8990-779, Box 3, File 8, CDLC Fonds, GA.

<sup>64</sup> "Union Men Speak Out," *The Activist*, March 1990. 98.808, Box 8, File 112, AFL Fonds, PAA.

Beginning in 1988, the AFL Women's Committee had also assembled an information kit on women's issues that was updated yearly with resources and information on sexual harassment as well as several other issues including affirmative action, women and part-time work, and connections between sexism and racism.<sup>65</sup> This Alberta-wide context is important for understanding the WC because the group's actions did not exist independently from other labour movement activists. Members of the WC were also active within the AFL, both within the wider organization and the AFL's Women's Committee, including Brown, as well as McCallum-Miller, Keeley, and Karpowich, all of whom went on to serve on the AFL executive.

## **Conclusion**

Whereas the Sisters from Hell were primarily a fundraising, "fun"-raising, and community building group within the labour community, the WC of the CDLC was more organized and structured in its many approaches to bringing concerns of women into Alberta's labour movement. Member experiences of networking and relationship-building helped to inform their activism. Also important for understanding the group's efforts was the main body of the CDLC itself, despite the negative memories expressed by Keeley recalling her first time running for council president. The CDLC was an important element in some of the organizing efforts of the WC through its campaigns for anti-GST activism in 1990 and its support for the Break the Cycle Campaign in 1992. It also foreshadowed some of the initiatives of the WC prior to its formation in its support for the Seven Jamaican Mothers in 1977, and the Women into Stelco Campaign in 1979-80. The WC was part of a larger group that was generally open to

---

<sup>65</sup> "Union Women: Introduction." 98.908, Box 3, File 33, AFL Fonds, PAA.

supporting initiatives that concerned working women, however given Keeley's negative experience, as well as the particular needs that women in the labour movement were addressing, a women's caucus within the larger Council was necessary. The WC's concern over economic restructuring, which informed their support for the AUPE local 6 strike, helped to advance discussions about how cutting social services impacted women on two different fronts: their employment, and their use of the services that those striking workers provided. In the group's campaign for Pam Gardner, the WC's actions brought forth discussions regarding the impact of workplace sexual harassment. All of these initiatives demonstrate how these working women in Calgary brought the concerns of women into the labour movement; however, the way in which they carried out their activism varied. SFH was a group concerned with educating members about women's issues, but it did double duty in also fundraising for labour efforts. The WC was more organized in its approach, but it also existed within a larger organization that tended to support causes that impacted working women. Taken into consideration with the less conventional methods of SFH, these two case studies showcase the broad tactics that feminist union activists employed in advocating for matters that they felt were important for working women in the province. In the next chapter, both advocacy methods and the variety of participants were broadened through the initiatives of those involved in the Pay and Employment Equity Conference, as well as the Pay and Employment Equity Coalition.

#### CHAPTER 4: “A FELT NEED”: ADVOCATING FOR PAY AND EMPLOYMENT EQUITY IN ALBERTA

But the pay and employment equity conference, that was a biggie for us . . . It grew organically out of the experiences, I think, of women on the committee. As feminists they really paid attention to what was happening to women who were organized and unorganized. . . The need for pay and employment equity here in Alberta was a felt need, we knew it had been, [as] that kind of legislation had been passed in other parts of the country.<sup>1</sup>

Rosemary Brown recalled the group’s desire to act on inequities in payment and employment opportunities faced by women, as well as other marginalized groups including Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, and persons from visible minority groups. The group’s concern came from the fact that Alberta was, and continues to be, one of the few provinces in Canada without a law or framework concerning pay or employment equity. Legal scholar Kathleen Lahey has explained why groups like the WC were concerned with this lack of legislation. In a report published in 2015, Lahey noted the differences between the average wages for men and women in Alberta and found that the average income for women remained between 54 to 56 per cent of the average income for men between the years of 1986 to 1996.<sup>2</sup> When compared with women across Canada her report acknowledged some positive trends, noting that since the middle of the 1970s women in the province have had consistently high levels of employment, and in the 1970s and 1980s they also had the highest average incomes compared with other women in the rest of Canada. However, these income levels did not remain consistent, and in 1993, they began to decline.<sup>3</sup> As the previous chapter has discussed, cuts by the provincial Progressive Conservative government beginning in 1993 had a

---

<sup>1</sup> Brown, Interview with author, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Kathleen Lahey, *The Alberta Disadvantage: Gender, Taxation, and Income Inequality* (Edmonton: Parkland Institute, 2015), 11.

<sup>3</sup> Lahey, *The Alberta Disadvantage*, 9-10.

particularly negative impact on women who made up a large proportion of public sector jobs. Several women engaged in paid work experienced decreased wages or layoffs because of the provincial government's deficit reduction measures.

The WC was not alone in its efforts to remedy pay and employment gaps in Alberta. As I have argued in previous chapters, women in labour activist circles in the province had close ties with other grassroots organizations, many of which were also concerned with the gendered wage gaps in the province's workforce and the employment experiences of other marginalized communities. These networks brought forward a variety of concerns and were important in organizing "Breaking Through the Barriers," a conference on pay and employment equity that took place in Calgary in May 1991. These concerns were further emphasized with the creation of the Pay and Employment Equity Coalition, a province-wide advocacy group that was organized at this conference. The coalition consisted of several organizations throughout the province and was active until the provincial election of 1993. This chapter will discuss how different labour organizations rallied around a goal to create a more equitable and diverse workforce in Alberta. By working together with these grassroots organizations for the conference, and then with the coalition, these groups not only helped to bring the concerns of working women into the province's labour movement, but also those concerns of Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, and persons from visible minority groups.

Raising awareness about the need for pay and employment equity legislation in Alberta was part of a broader Canadian movement. Justice Rosalie Silberman Abella, at that time a judge on Ontario's Court of Appeals, was hired by the federal government in 1983 to report on employment equity issues across Canada. As a result of this report, in 1986, the federal

government passed Bill C-62, *An Act Respecting Employment Equity* and launched the Federal Contractor's program, which I will explore in this chapter. Other provinces across Canada enacted pay equity legislation: Manitoba in 1985; Prince Edward Island in 1988; New Brunswick and Nova Scotia in 1989; Ontario in 1990; and Quebec in 1996. Ontario also enacted a short-lived Employment Equity Act from 1994-1995. I will begin with a discussion of national movements and the differences between pay equity, employment equity, affirmative action, equal pay for equal work, and equal pay for work of equal value. This provides context for how both the conference and coalition brought the voice of the women, and in this case those of Indigenous persons, persons with disabilities, and persons from marginalized groups into Alberta's labour movement.

### **National Context: The Abella Report and the Employment Equity Act of 1986**

Carol Agocs noted in her research on Canadian federal initiatives for employment equity legislation that, "a legislative and policy framework has evolved in Canada to address systemic discrimination in employment in federal jurisdiction, and in organizations that sell goods or services to the federal government."<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Colleen Sheppard has argued that beginning in the 1980s, a series of proactive legislative initiatives that were aimed at identifying and preventing discrimination in employment were enacted, including Bill C-62, the Federal Contractor's Program (FCP), and provincial initiatives on pay equity.<sup>5</sup> This greater movement

---

<sup>4</sup> Carol Agocs, "Canada's employment equity legislation and policy, 1987-2000" *International Journal of Manpower* 23, 3 (2002): 265.

<sup>5</sup> Colleen Sheppard, *Inclusive Equality: The Relational Dimensions of systemic discriminations in Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 6. Jennifer D. Beaudoin, "Minding the Gap: Pay Equity and the Role of Law in Narrowing Canada's Gender Wage Gap" (Masters Thesis, University of Western Ontario, Canada, 2018), 66-67.

took place alongside the patriation of Canada's *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* that recognized Indigenous and linguistic minority rights and affirmed multiculturalism and gender equality. Such a shift also brought about new discourse around how equality for marginalized communities could be understood; rather than treating everyone the same by simply eliminating formal discriminatory barriers, equality was discussed as acknowledging and accommodating differences within marginalized communities and included the notion that systemic barriers had a negative impact on the employment opportunities available to members of those communities.<sup>6</sup> However, with the neo-liberal turn that began in the 1980s, governments became increasingly concerned with deficits by downsizing, consolidating, or eliminating state agencies – including those human rights bodies overlooking discrimination complaints – and began to emphasize individual responsibility and more traditional formal notions of equality.<sup>7</sup>

Judge Abella was hired as sole-commissioner of the Royal Commission on Equality in Employment at a time when the Canadian government was beginning to question how much it was supposed to interact with Canadians in their daily lives. Despite this transition to more market-based economic policies that encouraged greater personal responsibility and less government intervention, many Canadians – particularly women, Indigenous persons, persons with disabilities, and persons from visible minority groups – pressured the federal government to implement legislation requiring employers to better diversify their workplaces. The final report of Abella's single-person Commission documented the feedback she received during the

---

<sup>6</sup> Carol Agocs, *Employment Equity in Canada: The Legacy of the Abella Report* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 5.

<sup>7</sup> Sheppard, *Inclusive Equality*, 142. Agocs, "Canada's employment equity legislation and policy, 1987-2000," 257.



extensive consultations she held with Canadians from the four designated groups across the country, as well as many federal employers, including federal crown corporations and government-owned corporations. It broke down how those designated groups faced systemic discrimination in their employment opportunities and helps to explain why advocates like those involved in the Calgary conference and Alberta coalition saw the need for pay and employment equity legislation. The report noted that women were substantially under-represented in high-income occupations, and that Canadians who identified as Indigenous generally had low labour force participation rates, high unemployment rates, and lower income levels than non-Indigenous Canadians.<sup>8</sup> While the report noted that the available information on visible minority groups demonstrated substantial differences in their employment characteristics – for example, Canadian males who identified as Japanese were among some of the highest earners in Canada – some visible minority groups clearly faced systemic discrimination within employment opportunities.<sup>9</sup> It also stated that although data for disabled persons was incomplete, this group's unemployment rate was estimated to be at more than 50 per cent.<sup>10</sup> The report explained that while all of these groups were diverse in their employment needs and experiences, employment equity programs needed to be designed to concentrate on those populations where the needs of women, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, and persons from visible minority groups had been demonstrated.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Rosalie Silberman Abella, *Equality in Employment: A Royal Commission Report: General Summary*. Ottawa: Commission on Equality in Employment, 1984, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Abella, *Equality in Employment*, 2, 85.

<sup>10</sup> Abella, *Equality in Employment*, 2.

<sup>11</sup> Abella, *Equality in Employment*, 46.

The report also discussed how Abella's recommendation for "employment equity" was different from the concept of "affirmative action" that existed in the United States as part of Executive Order 11246, found in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. While both concepts addressed the potential for discrimination in employers' hiring practices, affirmative action required businesses with contracts with the American Federal government to establish "goals and timetables" for increasing minority and female employees, particularly where they were "under-utilized."<sup>12</sup> Abella was concerned about recommending such a system in Canada, mainly because she found the target communities of such a policy could be limited to lower-paying positions.<sup>13</sup> Instead, she found taking that concept and making it more suitable for Canada would be more advantageous over a longer period of time:

You would be asking civil servants to say: 'Let's see, you have 12 occupational categories, so you'll need two of these, four of these. . .' And I thought, isn't it better just to make sure that the rate of change over time is reasonable, based on who is in the workforce, how many openings you have, etc.<sup>14</sup>

Her recommendations for a more Canadian approach to eliminating discrimination included the following components: a mandatory requirement for federally regulated employers to take steps to eliminate discriminatory employment practices; a requirement for such employers to collect and file annually data on participation rates, occupational distribution, and income levels of employees in their workforces; and some type of enforcement mechanism.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Alfred W. Blumrosen, "Six Conditions for Meaningful Self-Regulation," *American Bar Association Journal* 69 (September, 1983): 1266.

<sup>13</sup> Agocs, *Employment Equity in Canada*, 22.

<sup>14</sup> Rosalie Silberman Abella, "Reflections on the Abella Report: 25 Years Later," Koskie Minsky University Lecture in Labour Law, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, 30 October 2009, quoted in Agocs, *Employment Equity in Canada*, 22.

<sup>15</sup> Abella, *Report of the Commission on Equality in Employment*, 203.

As Abella was hired to report on and recommend actions regarding possible employment equity legislation in Canada, in 1986 Bill C-62, *An Act Respecting Employment Equity*, or the Employment Equity Act (EEA), was passed by Prime Minister Brian Mulroney's Progressive Conservative government. The Federal Contractor's Program (FCP) began alongside the implementation of the EEA. The FCP required businesses with more than ten employees that wished to sell goods or services to the federal government valued at \$200,000 or more to implement a plan for employment equity as a condition of their contract bids. Similarly, the stated purpose of the EEA was to achieve equality in the workplace to ensure that "no person shall be denied employment opportunities or benefits for reasons unrelated to ability" and "to correct the conditions of disadvantage of employment experienced by women, aboriginal peoples, people with disabilities, and visible minorities."<sup>16</sup> As the next section of the chapter will demonstrate, the groups that organized "Breaking Through the Barriers" and the Alberta-wide Pay and Employment Equity Coalition saw these federal actions as having the potential to create more diverse and equitable employment opportunities for members of the four designated groups in Alberta.

---

<sup>16</sup> Canada, *Employment Equity Act of 1986*, section 4 (b), quoted in Mentzer, "The Canadian Experience with Employment Equity Legislation," *The International Journal of Value-Based Management* 15, 1 (January 2002): 37. Agocs, "Canada's employment equity legislation and policy, 1987-2000," 259-260: Agocs has debated whether the EEA was an effective mechanism for achieving greater diversity in these areas of employment. Agocs has studied Abella's report, as well as both iterations of the EEA, as 1996 saw a new version passed through parliament after further evaluation and public consultations. Agocs has argued that the pre-1996 version of the Act did not make for more equitable employment opportunities for members of the four designated groups. This was primarily due to important components of Abella's report that were left out of the final legislation in 1986. These included an effective monitoring and enforcement capacity, sanctions for failure to implement employment equity, and supportive programs such as public day care. She also critiqued the 1996 version of the EEA, noting that despite its inclusion of compliance audits of federal employers without employment equity plans and the expansion of employers falling under the legislation, it was still not being implemented by employers and was also not effectively enforced.

## Pay Equity Legislation in Provincial Jurisdictions

That some provincial governments began to develop policy to address pay and employment inequities primarily faced by women was important for the WC and the coalition in their hopes that similar, but more effective, legislation could be passed in Alberta. Provincial legislation that was implemented in other parts of Canada was primarily concerned with pay equity, which aimed to address gendered pay differentials for men and women working not only in the same occupations, but also within jobs that carried similar value within their respective workplaces. In this context, pay equity as a concept was more than simply “equal pay for equal work,” which ensured that men and women working the exact same or very similar jobs were paid equally. Pay equity, in these cases of provincial legislation, meant “equal pay for work of equal value.” To achieve this jobs were classified by how much value they brought to workplaces and pay differences were adjusted accordingly. It is significant that most pay equity legislation in Canada has been concerned with differences primarily in pay on gendered lines, and not those concerning Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, or persons from visible minority groups.<sup>17</sup> Pay equity as a concept complements employment equity, which has focused instead on increasing diversity in occupations that have tended to be demographically homogenous. Ontario has been the only province to implement employment equity legislation. The Ontario NDP government, led by Bob Rae, passed a provincial Employment Equity Act in 1993, which attempted to remedy employment inequities faced by

---

<sup>17</sup> Pay Equity Commission of Ontario, “Pay Equity and Equal Pay: What is the Difference?,” Pay Equity Commission of Ontario ([http://www.payequity.gov.on.ca/en/AboutUs/Pages/the\\_difference.aspx](http://www.payequity.gov.on.ca/en/AboutUs/Pages/the_difference.aspx) accessed 18 January 2019).

the four demographic groups. This legislation was repealed by Mike Harris' Progressive Conservative government shortly after it was elected in 1995.<sup>18</sup>

Pay equity legislation, however, has been passed in several other provinces by a variety of political parties and within different employer jurisdictions in each province. Most legislation, excluding Ontario and Quebec, only concerned public employees. The first province to implement such legislation was Manitoba in 1986, under Howard Pawley's New Democrat Party, and it covered public sector workers, including the Crown, the civil service, and every external provincial agency. It applied only when a job class had ten or more women in a female dominated job category that was comprised of at least 70 per cent female workers, and vice versa for men in male-dominated job categories.<sup>19</sup> Prince Edward Island was the next province to implement pay equity into law in 1988 under Premier Joe Ghiz's Liberal party and similarly only applied to employees in the public sector.<sup>20</sup> New Brunswick's Liberal government under the leadership of Frank McKenna, passed pay equity legislation a year later in 1989 that was similar to that of Manitoba and P.E.I., as it also did not cover public sector employers with fewer than ten employees. The only Progressive Conservative government to pass pay equity legislation was the provincial government of Nova Scotia, also in 1989, which had slightly further reach than that of Manitoba, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia. It applied to public sector employers of all sizes, and included the civil service, Crown corporations, hospitals, education entities, universities, municipal enterprises, and public-sector corporations.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Pay Equity Commission of Ontario, "Pay Equity and Equal Pay: What is the Difference?"

<sup>19</sup> Beaudoin, "Minding the Gap," 70.

<sup>20</sup> Beaudoin, "Minding the Gap," 71.

<sup>21</sup> Beaudoin, "Minding the Gap," 71.

Ontario and Quebec passed legislation that covered employees in the private sector as well as those in the public sector. Ontario's New Democrat Party, under the leadership of Premier Bob Rae, passed the province's *Pay Equity Act* in 1987. Employers with ten or more employees were subject to the legislation, and companies with more than one hundred employees were required to establish pay equity committees as well as a pay equity plan. Four commonly used factors for job assessment were to be used by employers to determine the value of work: skill, effort, responsibility, and working conditions. Female and male job classes in the same establishment were compared to determine whether or not pay equity existed in each job class. Like Manitoba's *Pay Equity Act*, job classes were determined by evaluating the percentage of male versus female workers; if a class had 60 per cent male or female employees in Quebec, or 60 per cent females or 70 per cent males in Ontario, wages were evaluated.<sup>22</sup> Quebec's *Pay Equity Act*, passed in 1996 under the Parti Quebecois government of Lucien Bouchard, had many similarities with that of Ontario, but Ontario's legislation reached even further by also allowing for proportionate pay for work of proportionate value, which applied when similar comparisons were not possible. For public sector jobs, it also allowed for proxy comparisons across different establishments and employers when comparisons in specific establishments could not be made.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Beaudoin, "Minding the Gap: Pay Equity and the Role of Law in Narrowing Canada's Gender Wage Gap," 72, 75-78.

<sup>23</sup> Beaudoin, "Minding the Gap," 72-74.

## Alberta's "Felt Need" for Legislation

Taking this national context into account, pay and employment equity legislation in Alberta, as Rosemary Brown had stated, certainly was "a felt need."<sup>24</sup> A report from the provincial group Alberta Community Development called "Women in Alberta: Selected Statistics" from 1993 outlined the occupational categories of women in the province, as well as their average income relative to that of men. The report noted that while women in Alberta had the highest labour force participation rate in Canada at 64 per cent, most women were still employed in "traditional female occupations" that generally paid less than those traditionally employed by men; these occupations were primarily related to office work, sales, and service. The single largest concentration of all women in the labour force was in clerical occupations, which accounted for 34 per cent of all women employed in 1991, compared to 6 per cent of men employed in similar jobs. The next largest concentration of women in the labour force was within service related jobs, which saw 18 per cent of all women employed, versus 10 per cent of employed men in Alberta. When the report was published in 1993, women were beginning to gain ground in occupations that were historically dominated by men, which required higher levels of education and skill and consequently paid more. Some of the higher paid occupations saw small percentages of employed women, with women making up 14 percent of dentists, 10 percent of police officers, and 8 percent of engineers/architects in 1991. However, in all occupations, women consistently earned less than men, even when they were employed in the same or similar job roles.<sup>25</sup> These statistics demonstrate the "felt need" that motivated

---

<sup>24</sup> Brown, Interview with author, 2017.

<sup>25</sup> "Women in Alberta – Selected Statistics, Alberta Community Development – Women's Policy and Programs, December 1993." M8792, Box 2, File 61-81, CDLC Fonds, GA.

members of the WC and the coalition to advocate for greater government intervention in these gendered labour issues. Alberta women were not only under-represented in higher-income job categories, which demonstrated the need for greater diversity in well-paying occupations through employment equity legislation, they also received lower remuneration than their male counterparts, which demonstrated the need for pay equity legislation as well.

Alberta's provincial government ignored these statistics and never seriously considered implementing pay or employment equity laws. Provincial debates in the province's legislature as early as 1986 reveal that the Progressive Conservative government was hesitant to adopt pay equity laws. MLAs were concerned about "the economy, the effect on jobs, and the ultimate effect on women," and put off making a decision until the outcome of Manitoba's experience with pay equity legislation could be evaluated.<sup>26</sup> One year later the official opposition brought forth *Bill 213: The Public Service Pay Equity Act*. The Progressive Conservative government expressed concern over the bill, which would have introduced pay equity in Alberta's public sector. PC MLA Greg Stevens argued that passing such legislation would "destroy women's initiative," "damage the market system," and that "arbitrarily increase[ing] wages," would burden Alberta's taxpayers.<sup>27</sup> In 1991, when the Alberta New Democrats proposed an Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value Act, the government rejected the idea that it was even necessary. Minister of Labour Stockwell Day, stated:

---

<sup>26</sup> Legislative Assembly of Alberta, *Alberta Hansard*, 10 July 1986 (Dennis Anderson), 490. ([https://www.assembly.ab.ca/Documents/isysquery/666fd2ab-8dc3-4182-a0fd-96f2c91aa857/16/doc/19860710\\_1430\\_01\\_han.pdf#xml=https://www.assembly.ab.ca/Documents/isysquery/666fd2ab-8dc3-4182-a0fd-96f2c91aa857/16/hilite/](https://www.assembly.ab.ca/Documents/isysquery/666fd2ab-8dc3-4182-a0fd-96f2c91aa857/16/doc/19860710_1430_01_han.pdf#xml=https://www.assembly.ab.ca/Documents/isysquery/666fd2ab-8dc3-4182-a0fd-96f2c91aa857/16/hilite/) accessed 9 January 2019).

<sup>27</sup> Legislative Assembly of Alberta, *Alberta Hansard*, 30 April 1987 (Greg Stevens), 934-940 ([https://www.assembly.ab.ca/ISYS/LADDAR\\_files/docs/hansards/han/legislature\\_21/session\\_2/19870410\\_1000\\_01\\_han.pdf](https://www.assembly.ab.ca/ISYS/LADDAR_files/docs/hansards/han/legislature_21/session_2/19870410_1000_01_han.pdf) accessed 9 January 2019).



Women who believe they're underpaid have to act as men who believe themselves underpaid would act; they should seek higher paying work, look for opportunities for education, enhancement, and that type of thing. Those opportunities are made abundantly here in the province by this government <sup>28</sup>

Similar denials of the need for such laws were made by other MLAs during the 1993 provincial election campaign. PC MLA Ken Kowalski told listeners on a radio show that pay equity was “a communistic approach,” and that “it just means that everybody in society will get the same amount of money.”<sup>29</sup> In response to a 1993 survey conducted by the University of Alberta, Premier Ralph Klein stated, “I don’t know where we don’t have pay equity . . . in the public service”<sup>30</sup> and PC MLA Dianne Mirosh argued that Alberta women “prefer to work through this issue through with their own consultation process rather than force legislation.” The survey found that 94 per cent of Alberta women and 84 per cent of Alberta men supported pay equity legislation.<sup>31</sup> Commentary on behalf of Alberta’s PC government demonstrates that it had no intention of passing any law, policy or framework, regarding pay or employment equity.

### **Women of the 90s: The Pay and Employment Equity Conference**

Despite the provincial government’s refusal to implement equity standards in any form, women carried on in their advocacy for legislation. They argued that Mirosh’s comments demonstrated that she was not “a woman of the 90’s” and that it was necessary to push for a

---

<sup>28</sup> Legislative Assembly of Alberta, *Alberta Hansard*, 6 June 1991 (Stockwell Day), 1535 ([https://www.assembly.ab.ca/ISYS/LADDAR\\_files/docs/hansards/han/legislature\\_22/session\\_3/19910606\\_1430\\_01\\_han.pdf](https://www.assembly.ab.ca/ISYS/LADDAR_files/docs/hansards/han/legislature_22/session_3/19910606_1430_01_han.pdf) accessed 9 January 2019).

<sup>29</sup> Todd Kimberly, “Kowalski labels pay equity ‘a communistic approach’,” *Calgary Herald*, April 8, 1993.

<sup>30</sup> Sherri Aikenhead, “Klein rules out pay equity legislation,” *Calgary Herald*, May 26 1993, B7.

<sup>31</sup> Legislative Assembly of Alberta, *Alberta Hansard*, 26 January 1993 (Dianne Mirosh), 1866 ([https://www.assembly.ab.ca/ISYS/LADDAR\\_files/docs/hansards/han/legislature\\_22/session\\_4/19930126\\_1430\\_01\\_han.pdf](https://www.assembly.ab.ca/ISYS/LADDAR_files/docs/hansards/han/legislature_22/session_4/19930126_1430_01_han.pdf) accessed 9 January 2019).

more fair and equitable workforce in the province.<sup>32</sup> This activism, similar to other efforts on behalf of the WC and Sisters From Hell, is an example of the broad tactics employed by women's labour activist groups in Alberta to bring issues that specifically concerned working women into Alberta's labour movement. The initiatives discussed in this chapter, however, move beyond gender-based inequities; the groups who organized the conference, as well as the Alberta coalition also brought forth the concerns of Indigenous persons, persons with disabilities, and persons from visible minority groups into the province's labour movement as well. As discussed in Chapter 2, the WC had initially planned to hold an educational forum on the broader theme of "women and the shrinking dollar," but the forum evolved into one that focused on the relationship between women and employment and pay equity. Economic inequalities and the priorities of other women's groups informed the decision to focus on employment inequality, and members of the WC, through their networks, learned that other groups in Calgary, such as Women Looking Forward, were also interested in organizing a forum to advocate for equity-based legislation.<sup>33</sup> Aware that Alberta was unique in its lack of such legislation or framework, members of these groups also wanted to advocate for more than pay and employment equity for women. The recommendations of the Abella report inspired them to advocate for Indigenous groups, disabled persons, and visible minority groups in the province.

---

<sup>32</sup> Minutes of the Alberta Pay and Employment Equity Coalition (Calgary), 17 February 1993. M-8990-786, Box 3, File 10, CDLC Fonds, GA.

<sup>33</sup> Minutes of the Calgary Labour Council's Women's Committee 11 June 1990. M-8395-332, Box 3, File 8, CDLC Fonds, GA.

The groups that organized “Breaking Through the Barriers” grew in both number and diversity through the caucus’ efforts to reach out and create “a big organizing committee that brought in other people in the community.”<sup>34</sup> The result was a collective that was “quite a broad and diverse group of women, from labour and from other community organizations.”<sup>35</sup> These organizations included the Calgary Association of Women and the Law, the Calgary Immigrant Women’s Centre, the Calgary Society of Immigrant Workers, the Independent Living Resource Centre, and the Women’s Secretariat of the Canadian Hispanic Congress.<sup>36</sup> Activists from these groups demonstrated their commitment to end inequities for women – as well as Indigenous persons, persons with disabilities, and visible minority groups – by including them in the organizing committee. The structure of the conference itself was also inclusive of the voices of these four groups and featured speakers and workshop facilitators from Calgary as well as elsewhere in Canada.

“Breaking Through the Barriers” focused on both single-speaker presentations and workshops “to educate, unite and mobilize those people traditionally targeted by employment and pay equity programs to make their needs and desires known to the provincial government and industry.”<sup>37</sup> Presenters and workshop leaders spoke on a range of topics, including their own experiences of inequities in the labour force, lobbying for legislation, and working within structures that had implemented some type of pay or employment equity law or framework.

---

<sup>34</sup> Brown, Interview with author, 2017.

<sup>35</sup> Brown, Interview with author, 2017.

<sup>36</sup> Proceedings of the Pay and Employment Equity Conference: Breaking Through the Barriers. 3-4 May 1991, M8792-3, CDLC Fonds, GA.

<sup>37</sup> Proceedings of the Pay and Employment Equity Conference: Breaking Through the Barriers. 3-4 May 1991, M8792-3, Box 3, File 17, CDLC Fonds, GA.

Workshops were designed to encourage participation from the conference delegates and “focused on identifying real barriers to workplace equity in Alberta and developing innovative solutions and approaches to overcoming these barriers.”<sup>38</sup> Although their lobby for legislative change in Alberta was unsuccessful, details of the presentations and workshop discussions reveal that grassroots organizations in Calgary were concerned with payment and employment equity within Alberta’s workforce. Their willingness to share their experiences during the conference, and their work together within the larger provincial coalition, brought this important women’s issue into the province’s labour movement.

### **Shifting Paradigms: Racism, Colonialism, and Ableism in Canada’s Workforce**

The Conference included individual presentations by prominent community members from the four designated groups, including Esmerelda Thornhill from the Congress of Black Women of Canada, Phil Fontaine, Grand Chief of the Manitoba Assembly of Chiefs, and Joan Meister from the DisAbled Women’s Network. Thornhill, Fontaine, and Meister spoke about their experiences with employment inequities. By including the perspectives of these individuals at the Conference, participants were given an opportunity to broaden their understanding of the challenges that the four designated groups faced in Canada’s workforce. These perspectives informed later advocacy efforts that sought not only to correct gendered inequities, but also to create a workforce that was more representative of the province’s population.

---

<sup>38</sup> Proceedings of the Pay and Employment Equity Conference: Breaking Through the Barriers. 3-4 May 1991, M8792-3, Box 3, File 17, CDLC Fonds, GA.

Thornhill, Fontaine, and Meister spoke primarily about the barriers that their communities faced. While Meister and Fontaine discussed particular statistics and specific problems that disabled Canadians and Indigenous Canadians faced seeking adequate employment, Thornhill took a much more allegorical approach. Thornhill's aim during her presentation was to "graphically depict how racially identified persons, and in particular, visible minority women, perceive the material reality of racism."<sup>39</sup> The two hypothetical examples she used in her presentation symbolize Thornhill's assertion that Canadian women of colour, specifically African-Canadian women, had been both left behind and left out of important aspects of Canada's narrative. She explained that racism informed Canada's history of employment inequities and the nation's overall narrative.<sup>40</sup> She described the obstacles that visible minority women needed to overcome to achieve equity in Canada by using the analogy of an oval-shaped racetrack. Noting that the lanes on the inside of the track were shorter than those that were on the outside, she explained that a wide, overall perspective was necessary to understand why participants had varying starting points to allow for a fair competition. Similar to implementing employment equity initiatives for visible minority women in particular, by allowing starting points on those lanes on the outside of the track to be ahead of others, identifiable and quantifiable odds would be corrected, and this would create "equal

---

<sup>39</sup> Proceedings of the Pay and Employment Equity Conference: Breaking Through the Barriers. 3-4 May 1991, M8792-3, Box 3, File 17, CDLC Fonds, GA.

<sup>40</sup> Marlene Epp and Franca Iacovetta, eds. *Sisters or Strangers? Immigrant, Ethnic, and Racialized Women in Canadian History* 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016). In the book's introduction, Epp and Iacovetta discuss the increasing inclusion and different analytical approaches to immigrant and racialized women in the last thirty years of Canadian historical writing. Peggy Bristow and others 'We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up': *Essays in African Canadian Women's History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 3-12. The book's editors discuss the lack of inclusion of both black people in general and black women in particular in mainstream Canadian history.

opportunities for every contending runner so that each one, given his or her potential, has an equal chance to win.”<sup>41</sup> Arguments for employment equity laws within Canada’s workforce aligned with Thornhill’s racetrack analogy; providing reasonable accommodation to visible minority women, as well as members of the other three designated groups, was similar to allowing race participants on the outside lanes of the track to have beginning points ahead of those in the inside lanes.

Thornhill presented another analogy that explained the systemic discrimination that African-Canadian women experienced through omission in Canada’s history that ultimately increased the inequality of opportunity that they faced in Canada’s workforce. She utilized a hypothetical story book written about humanity that was not inclusive of all realities, pointing out that “the book on humanity does not include the chapter about the trials and tribulations of me and mine,”<sup>42</sup> which drew the audience’s attention to the absence of Canadians of African descent in historical narratives. By ignoring aspects of Canadian history that directly addressed legacies of colonialism and racism, Canadians were not given the proper context to understand the discrimination experienced by visible minorities and Indigenous persons. Thornhill argued that because this “factual historical information . . . [is still] unknown . . . even when we come to a corrective like employment equity, it becomes extremely difficult to effectively attack the reality of racism unless we name it upfront.”<sup>43</sup> Failure to identify this gap had led those who

---

<sup>41</sup> Proceedings of the Pay and Employment Equity Conference: Breaking Through the Barriers. 3-4 May 1991, M8792-3, Box 3, File 17, C DLC Fonds, GA.

<sup>42</sup> Proceedings of the Pay and Employment Equity Conference: Breaking Through the Barriers. 3-4 May 1991, M8792-3, Box 3, File 17, CDLC Fonds, GA

<sup>43</sup> Proceedings of the Pay and Employment Equity Conference: Breaking Through the Barriers. 3-4 May 1991, M8792-3, Box 3, File 17, CDLC Fonds, GA

were included in mainstream narratives to assume that everyone would have shared their own realities and experiences. She noted that even the Abella Report was “guilty by omission when it comes to racism” by not offering remedies to address the reality of racism in employment practices.<sup>44</sup>

Phil Fontaine of the Grand Chief of the Manitoba Assembly of Chiefs, and Joan Meister from the DisAbled Women’s Network both took a more quantitative approach in their presentations. As Grand Chief of the Manitoba Assembly of Chiefs, Fontaine highlighted statistics concerning the province’s Indigenous communities to illustrate high unemployment in Indigenous communities, noting that these communities suffered from 30 to 90 percent unemployment, and that they were over-represented within Canada’s foster care system at five times the national average.<sup>45</sup> These statistics drew attention to the lack of opportunity that Indigenous populations in Canada experienced that indirectly disqualified them many from meaningful, or even adequate, employment opportunities. While Fontaine brought a wider perspective of Indigenous Canadians to the conference, Martha Manygreyhorses and Vicki English-Currie discussed how gender and race discrimination made Indigenous women’s experiences in the workforce even more difficult. They noted that when Indigenous women in Canada were able to secure employment, their wages were significantly lower than both Indigenous men and non-Indigenous women at 72 per cent and 48 per cent respectively;

---

<sup>44</sup> Proceedings of the Pay and Employment Equity Conference: Breaking Through the Barriers. 3-4 May 1991, M8792-3, Box 3, File 17, CDLC Fonds, GA

<sup>45</sup> Proceedings of the Pay and Employment Equity Conference: Breaking Through the Barriers. 3-4 May 1991, M8792-3, Box 3, File 17, CDLC Fonds, GA.

Indigenous men were not necessarily at an advantage, however, as the workshop also noted that their average earnings were 60 per cent of those of non-Indigenous men.<sup>46</sup>

Meister's presentation noted that very little statistical information was available about the employment of people with disabilities, further emphasizing the systemic nature of the discrimination these Canadians faced. Persons with disabilities participated in the labour force at a rate of 38 per cent, compared to 78 percent labour force participation for the non-disabled population.<sup>47</sup> She also highlighted specific examples of how systemic discrimination disqualified such high numbers of disabled Canadians from meaningful and adequate employment opportunities. In her presentation, she provided some examples of remedies such as providing better aids for those with mobility, hearing, and visual impairments. She used individual stories to explain how complicated working conditions could be for disabled Canadians. Specifically mentioning a disabled woman who was covered by a long-term disability clause in her union contract, Meister went into great detail to describe the difficult decisions that disabled Canadians have to make in their employment experiences:

Due to fatigue which results from her neurological disease, she is unable to work full-time. Although she is capable of working flex hours and has in fact acquired new computer skills since being on disability, she is not willing to risk her financial security for the rest of her life by returning to a non-union, temporary, part-time position with no long-term disability protection.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> Proceedings of the Pay and Employment Equity Conference: Breaking Through the Barriers. 3-4 May 1991, M8792-3, Box 3, File 17, CDLC Fonds, GA.

<sup>47</sup> Proceedings of the Pay and Employment Equity Conference: Breaking Through the Barriers. 3-4 May 1991, M8792-3, Box 3, File 17, CDLC Fonds, GA

<sup>48</sup> Proceedings of the Pay and Employment Equity Conference: Breaking Through the Barriers. 3-4 May 1991, M8792-3, Box 3, File 17, CDLC Fonds, GA



Meister also highlighted how the intersecting identities of gender and disability impacted the wages of disabled Canadians. She noted that in 1986, 51 per cent of disabled women earned less than \$5,000 per year, and that 11 per cent earned more than \$20,000 per year, compared to disabled men of whom 25 per cent earned less than \$5,000 and with 40 per cent who had earned more than \$20,000 per year.<sup>49</sup> Hearing the particular experiences of disabled Canadians on behalf of Meister, as well as those Indigenous Canadians and African-Canadians during Fontaine's and Thornhill's respective presentations was another avenue for labour activists to bring these important issues into Alberta's labour movement. While Thornhill and Manygreyhorses and English-Currie's presentations specifically focused on the experiences of women, all of these presentations helped to transition the issue of equity in the workplace from one that specifically concerned women into one that had the potential to impact many Canadians involved in the workforce.

**“A bad pay equity law is no better than no law at all”: Effective Equity Laws for Alberta<sup>50</sup>**

Workshops to learn about how pay and employment equity laws and policies had worked in other parts of Canada were central in how workshop participants could plan for an effective pay and employment equity law in Alberta. Some workshops were led by advocates from other provinces and focused on pay inequities, as opposed to employment inequities, due to the nature of the leaders' experiences with pay equity legislation in other provinces. The experiences of advocates from other provinces were important for workshop participants

---

<sup>49</sup> Proceedings of the Pay and Employment Equity Conference: Breaking Through the Barriers. 3-4 May 1991, M8792-3, Box 3, File 17, CDLC Fonds, GA

<sup>50</sup> Proceedings of the Pay and Employment Equity Conference: Breaking Through the Barriers. 3-4 May 1991, M8792-3, Box 3, File 17, CDLC Fonds, GA

because advocates in Alberta wanted to ensure that if a pay and employment equity law was passed in the province, it would be effective.<sup>51</sup> They helped to explain why equity laws were needed by discussing what types of barriers advocates faced when lobbying for this type of legislation. Sandy Howell, a pay equity officer with the Equal Opportunities Department of CUPE in Ottawa led such a workshop, as did Nancy Sullivan, who worked as Manitoba's Pay Equity Commissioner when the province's Pay Equity Act was passed in 1986. To ensure a variety of perspectives were present at the conference, some workshops were also led by locally-based leaders. These included Norma Farquharson, Doreen Spence, Linda Karpowich, Catherine McCreary, and Brenda Aries, representatives from Alberta's labour movement; Sandy MacDonald from the WC, as well as Carol Clarke, the University of Calgary's Employment Equity Officer. Discussions in these locally-led workshops were focused on both pay and employment equity policies, and effective legislation for Alberta.

Addressing barriers to pay and employment equity legislation was an important topic for conference participants, and they felt that deep-rooted societal notions of appropriate gender roles was one of the most significant. In order to pass effective pay equity legislation, they agreed that all parties involved needed to recognize that work traditionally performed by women was considered less valuable than work traditionally performed by men. Howell noted that deep-rooted conceptions of women as mothers and wives, and society's view of men as primary breadwinners were some of the main reasons for the gendered wage gap.<sup>52</sup> Sullivan

---

<sup>51</sup> Proceedings of the Pay and Employment Equity Conference: Breaking Through the Barriers. 3-4 May 1991, M8792-3, Box 3, File 17, CDLC Fonds, GA

<sup>52</sup> Proceedings of the Pay and Employment Equity Conference: Breaking Through the Barriers. 3-4 May 1991, M8792-3, Box 3, File 17, CDLC Fonds, GA

discussed how Manitoba's pay equity law worked and made similar points about these longstanding gender norms. For example, a mechanic's job, typically dominated by men, was traditionally thought of as a more dangerous and physically challenging job than that of a nurse; however, a job evaluation as part of a pay equity law would recognize that nurses also work under similar circumstances as they come into contact with contagious diseases, can face threats from physically violent patients, spend long hours on their feet, and do a great deal of heavy lifting.<sup>53</sup>

Another important barrier was the definition of terms within legislation. Defining terms like "employee" and "wages" were crucial in negotiating the creation of pay equity laws. When defining an "employee," policymakers had to decide whether to include part-time, casual, or contract employees. In Manitoba's case, part-time and casual employees were included, but contract workers were not. The definition of "wages" was also crucial, because bonuses, vacation pay, payments in kind, and contributions to other plans could be considered part of a wage package in addition to basic salary considerations. Even determining whether a job class had a gender imbalance was a potential barrier. Manitoba's strategy was controversial because under Manitoba's Pay Equity Act, a job class needed to have a 70 percent gender population level to be considered male or female dominated.<sup>54</sup> Effective pay equity legislation could also be hampered by minimums that were required for evaluating job classes. Howell discussed Nova Scotia's legislation that left out job classes with fewer than ten people, so many female-

---

<sup>53</sup> Proceedings of the Pay and Employment Equity Conference: Breaking Through the Barriers. 3-4 May 1991, M8792-3, Box 3, File 17, CDLC Fonds, GA

<sup>54</sup> Proceedings of the Pay and Employment Equity Conference: Breaking Through the Barriers. 3-4 May 1991, M8792-3, Box 3, File 17, CDLC Fonds, GA

dominated job categories were not covered by the province's legislation. The definition of "pay" in the Nova Scotia Act also did not include benefits, which ultimately neglected a critical component of compensation packages.<sup>55</sup>

Locally led workshops allowed workshop participants to brainstorm about what effective workplace equity legislation could look like for Alberta. Strategies included defining collective bargaining points for establishing a pay equity policy; focusing on how to advocate for reasonable accommodation and special measures for implementing employment equity; and discussing a real-life example of how the University of Calgary's Employment Equity Commission was implemented. Sandy Macdonald, a member of the WC and an employee with the Public Service Alliance of Canada, helped to define specific collective bargaining points. They included bargaining for a general "no discrimination" clause which would forbid discrimination on the basis of sex; requiring employers to set up pay equity funds to alleviate gendered wage discrepancies by allocating one per cent of payroll for a period of four to five years; and adjusting how pay scales and wage increases worked in workplaces that fell within the law.<sup>56</sup> Pay scale adjustments entailed increasing the province's minimum wage, and participants articulated that "across-the board dollar wage increases should be negotiated in favour of percentage increases. . . otherwise the pay gap simply grows."<sup>57</sup> Other strategies to create an effective pay equity law that were discussed were gender-neutral job evaluations and

---

<sup>55</sup> Proceedings of the Pay and Employment Equity Conference: Breaking Through the Barriers. 3-4 May 1991, M8792-3, Box 3, File 17, CDLC Fonds, GA

<sup>56</sup> Proceedings of the Pay and Employment Equity Conference: Breaking Through the Barriers. 3-4 May 1991, M8792-3, Box 3, File 17, CDLC Fonds, GA

<sup>57</sup> Proceedings of the Pay and Employment Equity Conference: Breaking Through the Barriers. 3-4 May 1991, M8792-3, Box 3, File 17, CDLC Fonds, GA

a proxy-job comparison method, similar to Ontario's legislation discussed earlier in the chapter. This solved the issue of workplaces that had no male-dominated jobs to compare against predominantly female job categories, such as childcare workers.<sup>58</sup>

Strategies that focused on how to reasonably accommodate job candidates from the four concerned groups, especially within occupational categories where they were underrepresented, were discussed by conference participants in locally-led workshops.<sup>59</sup> These discussions were led by Norma Farquharson, Doreen Spence, Linda Karpowich, Catherine McCreary and Brenda Aries, who were all active in the Alberta labour movement. They focused on reasonable accommodations to ensure the four designated groups discussed in Abella's report were represented in "the upper echelons of all kinds of businesses" and also "to increase the number of women in so-called non-traditional jobs, which many include everything from digging ditches to engineering."<sup>60</sup> This idea of reasonable accommodations was present in both Abella's Report and the 1986 Employment Equity Act (EEA), both of which explicitly mentioned the importance of accommodating differences "so that the differences that kept people out are now looked at in order to bring them in."<sup>61</sup> Ideas discussed included designing recruitment and training strategies to increase members of designated groups in occupational categories where

---

<sup>58</sup> Proceedings of the Pay and Employment Equity Conference: Breaking Through the Barriers. 3-4 May 1991, M8792-3, Box 3, File 17, CDLC Fonds, GA

<sup>59</sup> Report of the Women's Committee of the Calgary Labour Council, Submitted to the January 1991 Annual General Meeting of the Council. January 1991, M8990-773, Box 2, File 5, CDLC Fonds, GA. This report referenced a survey conducted by Women Looking Forward in 1990, which found that women in Calgary wanted more reasonable accommodations to increase diversity in Alberta's workforce.

<sup>60</sup> Proceedings of the Pay and Employment Equity Conference: Breaking Through the Barriers. 3-4 May 1991, M8792-3, Box 3, File 17, CDLC Fonds, GA

<sup>61</sup> Rosalie Silberman Abella, *Equality in Employment: A Royal Commission Report*. 7-8. Canada, *Employment Equity Act* 1986, section 2 mentions "employment equity is more than treating persons in the same way but also requires special measures and the accommodation of differences."

they were underrepresented, improving their access to and quality of career counselling, recognizing more foreign qualifications, demonstrating more cultural sensitivity in interviewing and hiring processes, and keeping job advertisements gender neutral.<sup>62</sup> While participants in this workshop specifically referenced Abella's report, they differed with Abella in their acceptance of quotas as a viable option for ensuring employment equity.<sup>63</sup> They noted that quotas were "essential to the success of an employment equity program" primarily because they agreed that the 1986 EEA was not effective for the workplaces that fell under its jurisdiction. For participants in this workshop, effective implementation of an employment equity law for Alberta could only be achieved through "goals and timetables for the representation of the designated groups in the workplace's employment categories."<sup>64</sup>

Workshop participants were given an opportunity to discuss a real-life example of an employment equity policy with Carol Clarke, which helped them to further their own understanding of effective policy for Alberta. Clarke was hired as the University of Calgary's Employment Equity Commissioner in 1989, as the institution fell under the Federal Contractor's Program by receiving more than \$200,000 of funding from the federal government and having more than one hundred employees. One of Clarke's first moves was to implement a communications strategy that promoted and explained employment equity to staff at all levels. Between October 1989 and January 1990, she held educational sessions, wrote informative

---

<sup>62</sup> Proceedings of the Pay and Employment Equity Conference: Breaking Through the Barriers. 3-4 May 1991, M8792-3, Box 3, File 17, CDLC Fonds, GA

<sup>63</sup> Rosalie Silberman Abella, "Reflections on the Abella Report: 25 Years Later," Koskie Minsky University Lecture in Labour Law, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, 30 October 2009, quoted in Agocs, *Employment Equity in Canada*, 22.

<sup>64</sup> Proceedings of the Pay and Employment Equity Conference: Breaking Through the Barriers. 3-4 May 1991, M8792-3, Box 3, File 17, CDLC Fonds, GA

newspaper articles, arranged meetings, and distributed a variety of print materials to promote and explain employment equity to faculty and staff.<sup>65</sup> Throughout this communication process she received both positive and negative feedback, including negative feedback from some members of the Advisory Committee and other faculty members. Within the University's newspaper *The Gazette*, critic Ted Morton from the Department of Political Science, expressed weariness explaining that he was concerned about the university's ability to maintain an employment equity policy while also hiring "the best qualified candidate for a position, regardless of race, religion, sex, etc."<sup>66</sup> He was worried that "unnecessary employment systems that exclude objectively qualified candidates [could] impede the search for the best."<sup>67</sup> Debate ensued, however, with other faculty members, including another political scientist Rainer Knopff, who noted that a universal definition of "the 'best'" does not exist. Furthering Knopff's view, Faculty of Law professor Richard F. Devlin argued that "the best" are chosen, the criteria upon which these choices are made are partisan," and that "prejudice does not operate simply at the level of intentional vulgar hostility."<sup>68</sup> Despite such debates, However, Clarke pointed out that she was able to use the negative feedback to anticipate the concerns of those who did not agree that employment equity was positive for the University.<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> Proceedings of the Pay and Employment Equity Conference: Breaking Through the Barriers. 3-4 May 1991, M8792-3, Box 3, File 17, CDLC Fonds, GA.

<sup>66</sup> Ted Morton, "Employment equity: Let's temper our enthusiasm," *The Gazette* 19, 29 (15 Jan 1990): 4. ACC 65.001, University Communications Fonds, University of Calgary Archives (UCA), Calgary, Alberta.

<sup>67</sup> Rainer Knopff, "The Montreal tragedy and employment equity: a response," *The Gazette* 19, 30 (22 January 1990): 4, ACC 65.001, University Communications Fonds, UCA.

<sup>68</sup> Richard F. Devlin, Letter to the editor, *The Gazette* 19, 30 (29 January 1990): 2, ACC 65.001, University Communications Fonds, UCA.

<sup>69</sup> "Implementing Employment Equity: The University of Calgary Experience," M-8792-3, Box 3, File 17, CDLC Fonds, GA.

Clarke also explained how the University used a survey, sent to all faculty and staff, to collect information on the employment status of designated group employees by occupation and salary levels; these results were compared with the survey results of the 1986 census data on the labour force. Results revealed that women were significantly under-represented by 29 percent in the occupational group “Professionals,” which included university teachers, and by 22 percent in the “semi-professionals and technicians” categories. She also noted that visible minorities were under-represented in four job categories, the largest of which was 10 percent in both the “service workers” and “supervisors” groups; persons with disabilities were underrepresented in seven categories, most significantly by 4 percent in the group “semi-professionals and technicians;” Indigenous persons were under-represented in all occupational categories by 1 to 3 per cent except for “other manual workers.”<sup>70</sup> Wage disparities for university employees were significant; the average levels of salaries for women were less than those of men in every occupation group, while the salary comparisons with the other three designated groups were varied with about half being higher than the average salary and about half being lower.<sup>71</sup> Clarke also discussed the institution’s plans for outreach recruitment for persons from the four designated groups, a review of potential systemic barriers to support staff training programs, and a study of the training and development needs of designated group members in staff and faculty positions.<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>70</sup> “Compliance Review Report – Employment Equity,” Report number 1551, June 1990. Office of Gender and Equity Issues (OGEI) Fonds, UCA.

<sup>71</sup> “Compliance Review Report – Employment Equity,” Report number 1551, June 1990. Digital OGEI UCA.

<sup>72</sup> Proceedings of the Pay and Employment Equity Conference: Breaking Through the Barriers. 3-4 May 1991, M8792-3, Box 3, File 17, CDLC Fonds, GA



Workshops during “Breaking Through the Barriers” helped advocates to understand the intricacies of creating effective policy that would help the province’s workforce become more diverse, and also to correct gendered pay imbalances. By discussing how complex inequities in employment could be as well as tangible solutions in Alberta, workshop participants helped to bring this important issue that not only concerned women, but also Indigenous persons, persons with disabilities, and persons of visible minority groups, into Calgary’s and Alberta’s labour movements. Both this understanding of complex inequalities in employment, and tangible solutions to those inequalities informed the initiatives of the Pay and Employment Equity Coalition.

**“Equity in the broadest sense of the term”: Alberta’s Pay and Employment Equity Coalition<sup>73</sup>**

The networking and brainstorming at the “Breaking Through the Barriers,” conference inspired the foundation of The Pay and Employment Equity Coalition, which was active from May 1991 until the end of the Alberta provincial election in May 1993. In part due to the austerity measures that immediately followed the election of Ralph Klein’s Progressive Conservative government in 1993, the coalition was not successful in convincing the provincial government to pass pay or employment equity legislation in Alberta. Efforts on behalf of the coalition, however demonstrate how these activists had brought these important issues that concerned women and other marginalized groups into Calgary’s and Alberta’s labour movements. Pay and employment equity had the potential to impact all Albertans, regardless of their gender, ethnic origin, or ability. Despite this recognition, however, the goals and

---

<sup>73</sup> “Union Women Facts: Challenging Racism and Sexism with Pay and Employment Equity,” Flyer, 98.908, Box 3, File 33, Alberta Federation of Labour Fonds (AFL), Provincial Archives of Alberta (PAA).

policies of the coalition were still primarily oriented towards making Alberta's workforce more equitable and fair for the four designated groups, while also recognizing that workplace inequities had the potential to impact all working Albertans, no matter their identity. The remainder of this chapter will discuss the membership and goals of the coalition's campaign for workplace equity legislation in Alberta. These elements of the coalition help to articulate how an idea that originated as a women's issue in the Alberta labour movement was turned into a campaign that could have impacted a broader section of Alberta's workforce.

Workplace equity advocates built on the momentum that had been created during "Breaking Through the Barriers," as the Pay and Employment Equity Coalition was formed at the conference.<sup>74</sup> Although it was not officially launched until 1992, coalition member Rosemary Brown, who also assisted in organizing the conference, recalled that concerned individuals were interested in uniting their efforts right away: "Part of the goal [of the conference] was education, building relationships and links, and also to have a pay and employment equity coalition emerge from that. . . We started work and planning on how we were going to take this to the government."<sup>75</sup> This work and planning involved creating more networks with groups in other parts of Alberta. Members of the Alberta coalition were from familiar organizations involved in other advocacy efforts for working women, like the WC, the AFL and its Women's Committee, Calgary Status of Women Action Committee, and Women Looking Forward. CUPE and AUPE locals also had representatives on the coalition.<sup>76</sup> Other

---

<sup>74</sup> The Alberta Pay & Employment Equity Coalition, Flyer, 98.908, file 60, box 6. AFL Fonds, PAA.

<sup>75</sup> Rosemary Brown, Calgary Alberta, November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017, interview with author.

<sup>76</sup> Minutes of the June 26, 1991 Pay and Employment Equity Coalition Meeting, 26 June 1991. 98.908, Box 5, File 60, AFL Fonds, PAA.

members were from Arusha, a grassroots organization from Calgary that focused on anti-racism advocacy as well as both local and international social justice issues, and the Calgary chapter of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association and the Independent Living Resource Centre, both of which advocated for the rights of disabled Canadians.<sup>77</sup> Members were also from a variety of Edmonton-based groups, including Edmonton Working Women, a grassroots group from Edmonton focused on women's issues in Edmonton's labour movement, and the Edmonton and District Labour Council.<sup>78</sup> Some coalition members were not from traditional grassroots organizations, but from institutions and workplaces like the University of Alberta and Alberta Career Development and Employment.<sup>79</sup>

The coalition continually tried to attract more members from demographically-diverse communities from the outset of the group's existence. Susan Keeley, former President of the CDLC and one of the founding members of the WC, had just recently moved to Edmonton in 1990 and was active in the coalition. She recalled becoming involved through her work with the AFL's women's committee, and that the coalition "had various other groups – some of the immigrant women's organizations in Edmonton were involved;"<sup>80</sup> these groups included: the Association of Spanish Speaking Women; the El Salvadorean Women's Association; and "Changing Together – A Centre for immigrant Women," a non-profit organization for immigrant

---

<sup>77</sup> Minutes of Pay and Employment Equity Meeting, 5 October 1991, 98.908, Box 5, File 60, AFL Fonds, PAA.

<sup>78</sup> "Minutes of Provincial Pay and Employment Equity Coalition Meeting held Feb, 15, 1992," 98.908, Box 5, File 60, AFL Fonds, PAA. Alberta Pay and Employment Equity Coalition (Edmonton) Minutes – May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1992, 98.908, Box 5, File 60, AFL Fonds, PAA. "Alberta Pay and Employment Equity Coalition (Edmonton) Minutes – June 29<sup>th</sup>, 1992," 98.908, Box 5, File 60, AFL Fonds, PAA.

<sup>79</sup> "Minutes of Pay and Employment Equity Meeting, October 5, 1991," 98.908, Box 5, File 60, AFL Fonds, PAA.

<sup>80</sup> Keeley, Interview with ALHI, 2008.

women who were both newcomers and citizens of Canada.<sup>81</sup> Minutes of coalition meetings indicate that members were interested in creating more connections with visible minority groups and Indigenous organizations. Coalition members from Edmonton requested that “a special note and invitation [should be given] for immigrant women and women from visible minorities to attend meetings to ensure their concerns around employment equity [were] addressed.”<sup>82</sup> Calgary members also utilized their networks to spread awareness of the coalition within Calgary’s Indigenous communities; they met with representatives from the Native Employment Services (NES) at the beginning of 1993, and provided them with information about the goals, strategies, and membership of the coalition. Representatives from NES opted out of joining because they were concerned about whether their involvement in the coalition would impact funding that they received from the government, as well as the reactions of employers with whom they placed some of their clients.<sup>83</sup>

The structure of the coalition itself also reflected the group’s commitment to inclusion, as it was “dedicated to the removal of systemic and societal barriers that [had] traditionally restricted access to employment and equitable pay.”<sup>84</sup> Members formed three sub-committees: the executive; pay equity; and employment equity.<sup>85</sup> Members within the executive sub-

---

<sup>81</sup> “Minutes of Provincial Pay and Employment Equity Coalition Meeting held Feb, 15, 1992,” 98.908, Box 5, File 60, ALF Fonds, PAA. Alberta Pay and Employment Equity Coalition (Edmonton) Minutes – May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1992, 98.908, Box 5, File 60, AFL Fonds, PAA. “Alberta Pay and Employment Equity Coalition (Edmonton) Minutes – June 29<sup>th</sup>, 1992,” 98.908, Box 5, File 60, AFL Fonds, PAA.

<sup>82</sup> “Minutes – Alberta Pay and Employment Equity Coalition (Edmonton), May 20<sup>th</sup> 1992.” 98.908, Box 5, File 60, AFL Fonds, PAA.

<sup>83</sup> “Minutes: Alberta Pay and Employment Equity Coalition (Calgary) February 17, 1993,” M-8990-786, Box 3, File 10, CDLC Fonds, GA.

<sup>84</sup> “The Alberta Pay & Employment Equity Coalition,” Flyer, 98.908, Box 5, File 60, AFL Fonds, PAA.

<sup>85</sup> “Minutes of the June 26, 1991 Pay and Employment Equity Coalition Meeting,” page 4, 98.908, Box 5, File 60, AFL Fonds, PAA.

committee discussed “suggestions for how the coalition [would] function [which included] membership, communication, relationships among sub-committees, decision making, acknowledgement of diversity, and how to handle tension and conflict.”<sup>86</sup> Members agreed that consensus and “democratic and non-hierarchical” methods were required for making decisions as a group, and that “there has to be total equality among members. . . and discussion [had] to be open.”<sup>87</sup> However, the first coalition meeting acknowledged that the size of the coalition, as well as the purpose and timing of meetings would impact how decisions would be made. They noted that a “feedback mechanism” between the coalition and its member groups needed to be established given these variables. Addressing the potential for conflicts and tensions, members also noted that they needed to be able to “knock down barriers” amongst each other, that “there should be no hidden personal agendas,” and that members would “need to learn to listen.”<sup>88</sup> This complete openness at the outset of the coalition, along with efforts on behalf of members to build a diverse membership base, demonstrate that the group prioritized including the voices of all four designated groups within this important labour issue. It also demonstrates the gradual shift of pay and employment equity advocacy as an issue that primarily impacted women, into an issue that affected all of those involved in Alberta’s labour movement, including men, as the coalition had male members.

The coalition’s Pay Equity Sub-Committee and Employment Equity Subcommittee were both committed to addressing systemic and societal barriers that prevented access to

---

<sup>86</sup> “Minutes of the June 26, 1991 Pay and Employment Equity Coalition Meeting,” page 4, 98.908, Box 5, File 60, AFL Fonds, PAA.

<sup>87</sup> “Minutes of Pay and Employment Equity Meeting, October 5, 1991,” 98.908, Box 5, File 60, AFL Fonds, PAA.

<sup>88</sup> “Minutes of the June 26, 1991 Pay and Employment Equity Coalition Meeting,” 98.908, Box 5, File 60, AFL Fonds, PAA.

employment and equitable pay for disadvantaged Albertans. Both Sub-Committees called for legislation in the “broadest sense of the term” in fliers that were released for the general public. For members of the Pay Equity Sub-Committee, “in the broadest sense of the term” included goals that went beyond emulating the gender-neutral job evaluation schemes that other provinces had established. They included increasing wages for entry level positions in female-dominated jobs categories, eliminating percentage-based pay increases and replacing them with a combination of percentage and absolute dollar amount increases, and setting aside funds to provide for these measures by setting aside one per cent of workplace payrolls for four to five years.<sup>89</sup> They also called for stronger labour laws and measures that would positively impact disadvantaged Albertans in general, such as fighting for the removal of barriers to unionization, for government mandated employment standards that would provide adequate benefits for all employed persons in the province, accessible and universal child care, an increase in the minimum wage, and employment equity.<sup>90</sup>

The Employment Equity Sub-Committee wanted to break down systemic and societal barriers that had prevented access to employment and pay equity for disadvantaged groups in the province. Legislated goals included implementing a process that went further than the one outlined in the federal Employment Equity Act (EEA). First, an Employment Equity Commission “made up of a majority of members from each designated group, including the Chief Commissioner” would be established to collect data on the province’s workforce and enforce

---

<sup>89</sup> “Union Women Facts: Challenging Racism and Sexism with Pay and Employment Equity,” Flyer, 98.908, Box 33, File 33, AFL Fonds. PAA.

<sup>90</sup> “Union Women Facts: Challenging Racism and Sexism with Pay and Employment Equity,” Flyer, 98.908, Box 33, File 33, AFL Fonds, PAA. “Fighting the Wage Gap,” *Challenging the Barriers: Edmonton Working Women’s Newsletter* Fall 1993, M-8792, Box 3, File 96, CSWAC Fonds, GA.

the proposed legislation.<sup>91</sup> If employers violated the measures outlined in the proposed legislation, they would be “penalized with fines up to 5% of their payroll or \$100,00, whichever is greater (with double penalties for repeat offenders).”<sup>92</sup> All private sector employers, in addition to all provincial departments, agencies, and crown corporations, were included in the proposed legislation. Next, the process would include implementing special measures such as targets and timetables to hire more staff from the four designated groups; such special measures would require each employer to “reflect the working age population of target groups in the Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) in which the organization [was] located” through a mandatory formula that took into account “the local population data, the hiring and turnover rates, the internal workforce mobility, and other factors considered significant by the Commission.”<sup>93</sup> Reasonable accommodation was another important measure. The committee insisted that the needs of persons with disabilities “must be accommodated in a manner which must respect their dignity up to a point that [would] not create undue hardship for employers.”<sup>94</sup> These accommodations included having support services such as interpreters, flexible hours and modified job duties, retrofitting of employer premises, and establishing a central accommodation fund.<sup>95</sup> Establishing measures that would implement employment equity “in the broadest sense of the term” also included more broad-based goals such as universal and accessible child care, offering retraining opportunities for immigrants with

---

<sup>91</sup> “Minutes of Pay and Employment Equity Meeting, October 5, 1991,” page 6, 98.908, Box 5, File 60, AFL Fonds, PAA.

<sup>92</sup> “Minutes of Pay and Employment Equity Meeting, October 5, 1991,” page 6, 98.908, Box 5, File 60, AFL Fonds, PAA.

<sup>93</sup> “Minutes of Pay and Employment Equity Meeting, October 5, 1991,” page 6, 98.908, Box 5, File 60, AFL Fonds, PAA.

<sup>94</sup> Employment Equity Sub-Committee Statement,” 2 April 1992, 98.908, Box 5, File 60, AFL Fonds, PAA.

<sup>95</sup> “Employment Equity Sub-Committee Statement,” 2 April 1992, 98.908, Box 5, File 60, AFL Fonds, PAA.

overseas training certifications, and reforming Alberta's education system to reduce perpetuating systemic barriers that members of the four designated groups faced.<sup>96</sup>

The coalition's eventual call for a more fair and equitable workforce for all, which included men who had traditionally been in advantageous positions within the province's labour movement, broadens the population that the group was trying to impact with its advocacy efforts. Members recognized that "to a degree there are men in these positions suffering the same problems" and that "the issue of part-time work was also becoming a job ghetto and that this crosse[d] genders."<sup>97</sup> Before the official launch on 2 May 1992, members discussed how the coalition was "not intended to be gender-based coalition – the issues we hope to address affect everyone."<sup>98</sup> These discussions around the concern for all working Albertans reflected the changes that the province's labour movement was undergoing with the increasingly market-friendly policies that were being established in the province. With demographic changes and stagnation in private sector unionization, Alberta union membership saw large increases of women and people of colour, and decreasing numbers of "white male goods-producing worker[s]."<sup>99</sup> Gendered labour force statistics supported this; between 1985 and 1993, female union density increased from 23.7 per cent to 27.1 per cent while those same

---

<sup>96</sup> "Union Women Facts: Challenging Racism and Sexism with Pay and Employment Equity," Flyer, 98.908, Box 33, File 33, AFL Fonds. PAA.

<sup>97</sup> "Minutes: Alberta Pay and Employment Equity Coalition (Edmonton) Minutes," 98.908, Box 5, File 60, AFL Fonds, PAA.

<sup>98</sup> "Minutes: Alberta Pay and Employment Equity Coalition (Edmonton) March 16, 1992," 98.908, Box 5, File 60, AFL Fonds, PAA.

<sup>99</sup> Jason Foster, "Revolution, Retrenchment, and the New Normal: The 1990s and Beyond," in *Working People in Alberta: A History*, ed. Alvin Finkel, (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2012), 207.



years saw male union density drop from 29.1 per cent to 26.7 per cent.<sup>100</sup> Despite this eventual shift of affected groups, the purpose of pay and employment equity legislation would still primarily impact the four designated groups that had traditionally been marginalized by systemic discrimination in the province's work force.

These resolutions identified the desire for a law that would reach further than any of the laws that had been passed in other parts of the country. Resolutions also clearly articulated the need for the province's workforce to be more inclusive of women, Indigenous persons, persons from visible minority groups, and persons with disabilities. Such articulations eventually transferred into a call for this type of legislation to benefit all working Albertans, despite their gender, ethnicity, or ability, although the sort of law the coalition was lobbying for would ultimately impact the four designated groups the most significantly.

### **Conclusion: "That fateful spring election" and the End of the Coalition<sup>101</sup>**

The momentum that was first created by "Breaking Through the Barriers" and then continued on through the efforts of the Pay and Employment Equity Coalition ended with the election Ralph Klein's Progressive Conservative Party in May 1993. During the campaign, Klein promised to "reduce the amount of bureaucracy Albertans must face" with the austerity measures that have been described in earlier chapters.<sup>102</sup> While members of groups like the WC were still "keeping active and current on the status of women's issues" after "the fateful Spring

---

<sup>100</sup> Statistics Canada, Table 14-10-0187-01: Number of unionized workers, employees and union density, by sex and province" (<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/cv.action?pid=1410018701#timeframe> accessed 9 January 2019).

<sup>101</sup> "Standing Committee Reports," 18 October 1993. M-8990-786, Box 3, File 10, CDLC Fonds. GA.

<sup>102</sup> "Ask the leaders: Pay Equity," *Edmonton Journal*, 29 May 1993, A8.

election,” the coalition came to a formal close.<sup>103</sup> Susan Keeley recalled the priorities after the election:

It just started getting bogged down with Ralph Klein. When you started getting the cutbacks, then the issue of pay equity sort of took a back seat. That’s when the coalition sort of died out, because there were other issues. And that’s one of the things we’ve had within the labour movement. We start fighting for a really important issue and then something even worse happens.<sup>104</sup>

Similarly, Rosemary Brown recalled the coalition’s inability to bargain with the Progressive Conservatives:

And you know, who were you going to lobby with? It’s one thing to . . . lobby with politicians who have an open mind around the issues, but to lobby with a group of people who’ve said, forget it, we’re not doing it . . . They’re not going to budge on these issues . . . so it faded, the coalition . . . it formally came to a close<sup>105</sup>

Despite the end of the coalition, pay and employment equity were important issues within grassroots women’s organizations in both Calgary and the rest of the province. Not only did the efforts of these groups bring the voice of women into Calgary’s and Alberta’s labour movements, but also those of Indigenous persons, persons from visible minority groups, and disabled persons. This was done through the continuation of Calgary’s and Alberta’s extensive networking circles that existed around concerns for working women, and through working together to plan and execute “Breaking Through the Barriers” in May, 1991. By focusing on the individual experiences of the outside speakers, conference participants were able to participate in discussions around how overlapping identities impacted the experiences of Canadians within the four designated groups. They were also able to parse out specific details of what pay and employment equity legislation could look like for Alberta.

---

<sup>103</sup> “Standing Committee Reports,” 18 October 1993. M-8990-786, Box 3, File 10, CDLC Fonds. GA.

<sup>104</sup> Keeley, Interview with ALHI, 2008.

<sup>105</sup> Brown, Interview with author, 2017.

These discussions were significant factors in the creation of the Alberta Pay and Employment Equity Coalition, which would go on to try and lobby the provincial government to implement a Pay and Employment Equity law in the province. Again, through the use of extensive networking circles, the coalition grew to be a province-wide effort, and one that focused on including a broad range of voices, including those of Indigenous persons, persons from visible minority groups, and disabled persons as well as those of women in the labour movement. The goal of bringing the voice of women into the labour movement eventually materialized with the coalition's desire to create legislation that would not only impact the four designated groups, but also all Albertans, despite their gender, ethnicity, or ability.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The three case studies presented in this thesis demonstrate how feminist labour activists navigated the changing relationship between women and work in Alberta. Seeing themselves as agents of change, they advocated for the particular needs of working women by bringing the voices of this diverse group into the province's labour movement. When assessed collectively, the three groups employed broad tactics to bring an awareness of these needs into more public arenas. Many of these tactics included establishing networks among various activists and social justice groups that established solidarity and created a strong sense of community and purpose in their initiatives. The strength in these networks existed in how they brought groups together to brainstorm ideas about how to create a labour movement in the province that was inclusive of the changing demographic of working Albertans. These actions culminated in the Pay and Employment Equity Coalition that came to include not only the concerns of women, but also Indigenous persons, persons from visible minority groups, persons with disabilities, and even unemployed and under-employed men in the province. However, these networks were not without their limitations. When addressing such a large and multi-faceted group of concerns brought about by women in the provincial labour movement, although networks could help activists to define those issues, the members of the various groups needed to employ tangible strategies to demonstrate the change they wished to see. These strategies required execution, not simply discussion, which these groups employed through their various campaigns.

The Sisters From Hell took a less conventional approach to bringing the issues and concerns of women into the province's wider labour movement by seizing an opportunity to

educate other union members about the types of experiences that women faced both in their union activities and in their workplaces. Especially with change in the demographic make-up of the province's workforce, and increasing rates of unionization for women, Alberta's labour movement was also dealing with how to address the needs of these more recent participants engaging in paid work.<sup>1</sup> While scholars have discussed how organizing women workers was historically not a priority of the mainstream labour movement, a shift to acknowledge the concerns of working women began with organizations like SFH.<sup>2</sup> The founders saw an opportunity to create an exclusive group to which members had to take on a female, non-derogatory name, and raise funds for various labour causes across Canada through the sale of "Sisters From Hell" buttons. Members employed humour in their efforts by creating venues that allowed Sisters From Hell to express themselves through their "secret" handshake, and their "swearing at" ceremony. With the group's activity primarily taking place between 1989 and 1996, the networks that were created within SFH also had a prominent impact on the other two case studies analyzed within this thesis. These networks were able to materialize into actionable objectives by the Women's Committee, and the organizing efforts behind the Pay and Employment Equity Conference along with those of the coalition. As the chapters on these groups demonstrate, their actions helped to ensure that issues impacting working women came to the foreground of the province's labour movement.

In the second case study presented here, both the Women's Committee and the Calgary and District Labour Council were more organized in their methods to bring the voice of working

---

<sup>1</sup> Doiron and Riddell, "The Impact of unionization on male-female earnings differences in Canada," 505.

<sup>2</sup> Schiebelbein, "Women, Labour, and the Labour Movement," 253. Stephen, *Pick One Intelligent Girl*, 4.

women into Alberta's Labour movement by employing traditional tactics. With the CDLC's history of generally supporting initiatives that had positive impacts on working women, such as the campaign for the Seven Jamaican Mothers in 1978 and Women Into Stelco Campaign in 1979-1980, they created a supportive environment for the Women's Committee which formed in 1989. This history took place while the Canadian government was embracing the neo-liberal turn that included establishing free-trade agreements with other North American countries, as well as privatization and regulation of services that were previously run by the federal government. Adding to stresses brought about by these changes were the intense fluctuation of global oil prices, as well as the attempts on behalf of the federal government to regulate the price of oil throughout Canada, the latter of which mainly resulted in alienating Albertans from government regulation. This structural readjustment meant that the WC was advocating for women workers within a provincial labour movement that was already facing a political climate that was more resistant to government involvement in economic affairs, which included attacks on workers' rights, and increasingly business-friendly policies.<sup>3</sup> In their initiatives that supported striking social workers in the illegal 1990 strike, their anti-GST demonstrations that same year, and their campaign to bring the topic of sexual harassment as one that was both appropriate and necessary to be discussed within the labour movement in the early 1990s, they clearly demonstrated that they wanted to positively affect the changing relationship between women and work in Alberta. Like SFH, the networks that members within both the WC and the

---

<sup>3</sup> Kaye, *Goodlands*, 285.

CDLC established with other organizations in Calgary, and eventually Alberta, were also important for the last large initiative that is discussed in this thesis.

The push for Pay and Employment Equity legislation from organizations in Calgary with the “Breaking Through the Barriers” conference in 1991, and then the Alberta-wide Pay and Employment Equity Coalition – established shortly after the conclusion of the conference in 1991 – demonstrate the largest and most diverse tactic employed by feminist labour activists in Alberta. While some provinces across Canada, as well as the federal government, had passed various forms of pay or employment equity legislation in their own jurisdictions, Alberta had never passed any type of law that would alleviate gendered pay imbalances between the same or similar types of occupations, nor one that would assist in increasing the diversity within occupations that saw underrepresentation within the four designated groups identified within the Abella report.<sup>4</sup> Subsequent provincial governments in Alberta leading up to and during the advocacy efforts of the coalition were also clearly resistant to implementing these types of laws in the province. With the collaboration between various women’s groups in Calgary, and the scope of the coalition’s efforts that expanded to include more than simply women and their relationship to paid work, the third chapter of this thesis discussed the most wide-ranging tactic employed by grassroots organizations in Alberta. The scope was expanded to such an extent that the focus of those involved in organizing “Breaking Through the Barriers” also advocated for improving both pay and employment opportunities for Indigenous peoples, persons from visible minorities and disabled persons, in addition to women. By listening to the experiences of

---

<sup>4</sup> Abella, *Equality in Employment*, 2, 19.

prominent members of those groups – Esmerelda Thornhill, Phil Fontaine, and Joan Meister – conference participants discussed ways to create legislation proposals that they felt would create a more fair and diverse work force for all the aforementioned groups in Alberta. Seizing on the momentum from the conference, the Pay and Employment Equity Coalition was created shortly after. By focusing on a more inclusive structure of the coalition itself, as well as on broadening its membership base to include groups from other parts of Alberta, the coalition was en route to create a policy proposal for a pay and employment equity law in Alberta, which would have been the first of its kind in Canada. The ambition of the group also broadened its target demographic for such legislation, contributing to the largest and most diverse tactic employed by the large cohort of Albertans by also including concern for under-employed or unemployed men in the province. What started off as a plan for a conference about women and the changing dollar became a province-wide, demographically diverse coalition that was focused on providing what, in their minds, was a more fair and equitable route to a better quality of life for working people in Alberta.

Expanding on this research offers several paths, but they all begin with the understanding that any geographic location offers a variety of perspectives, and the people that live in those locations see themselves as contributing to that region in myriad ways. In memories of her own activism in the 1980s in Alberta, WC member and conference organizer Rosemary Brown recalled: “I just found myself as part of that because it’s what I believed in. I mean, I’ve considered myself a feminist for a long, long time.”<sup>5</sup> Keeping with the theme of

---

<sup>5</sup> Brown, Interview with author, 2017.



women and work, looking specifically at types of occupations that primarily employed women, such as domestic workers offers other paths to understanding the goals of these various groups in Alberta, especially for groups of migrant women. Examining how the government interacted with dealing with working women is another area that is worthy of more study. Analysing the different pieces of legislative proposals that official opposition parties brought to Alberta's government, specifically those that would mandate pay and/or employment equity initiatives across the province is also an area that can offer a glimpse into how Albertans concerned themselves with the changing relationship between women and work across the province.

The implications of these three case studies demonstrate how some Albertans wanted "democracy to play out" in the late 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>6</sup> Albertans saw economic prosperity in their province during the 1970s under the Peter Lougheed Progressive Conservative government mainly due to steady natural resource revenues. However, they were faced with a harsher reality beginning in 1982 with an economic recession due to a worldwide decrease in the value of those resources. The Don Getty Progressive Conservative government was forced to contend with some of the first deficits of the party's government in 1986, running deficits until Getty was replaced by Ralph Klein as party leader in 1992. With the success of Klein's PC government winning the provincial election in 1993 on the promise of dealing with the province's massive deficit, scholars have argued that the provincial government, the business community, and many Albertans felt "a growing sense of crisis."<sup>7</sup> This crisis contributed to the

---

<sup>6</sup> Abe C. Tinney, "The Discourse of economic crises: policy making in Alberta, 1983-1993." Master's thesis, University of Lethbridge (2015), 51.

<sup>7</sup> Patrick Impero Wilson, "Deficit Reduction as Causal Story: Strategic Politics and Welfare State retrenchment," in *Social Science Journal* vol. 37, issue 1 (2000): 101.

overall sentiment that all Albertans were in line with reducing government expenditures, including public sector jobs – many of which involved working women – and creating a more business-friendly and market-driven economic climate.<sup>8</sup> The election outcomes of the 1990s and into the 2000s do not deny that the majority of Albertans voted in favour of the Klein government's promise to eliminate the province's deficit with severe measures – including privatizing industries which ultimately decreased the size of government. However, groups like those studied here offered a different perspective on what some grassroots organizations were calling for while a large portion of the province primarily concerned itself with economic matters. Taking this into consideration, the outcome of the tactics that were employed by the three groups studied in this thesis is not the focus of this study, but rather to demonstrate how the Albertans within these groups saw themselves as expressing and acting on a their own sets of values. Whether they were raising awareness for the concerns of working women through humour, more organized methods, or broad and diverse initiatives, the tactics employed by these groups are reminders that Albertans are a multi-faceted population and these alternative perspectives and initiatives are important parts of our provincial history.

---

<sup>8</sup> Wilson, "Deficit Reduction as Causal Story: Strategic Politics and Welfare State retrenchment," 101.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Primary Sources

#### Archival Electronic

Rise Up Feminist Archive. "Sexual Harassment: Why it's important to negotiate clauses on this issue," *CUPE The Facts* 4, 3 (March, 1982): 19-21 (<https://riseupfeministarchive.ca/activism/issues-actions/labour-movement-and-womens-equality/cupe-1982-sexualharassmentimportanttonegotiateclausesarticle/> accessed 15 November 2018).

#### Archival Printed

Glenbow Archives. Calgary and District Labour Council fonds.

Glenbow Archives. Calgary Status of Women Action Committee fonds.

Provincial Archives of Alberta. Alberta Federation of Labour fonds.

University of Calgary Archives. Office of Gender and Equity Issues fonds.

University of Calgary Archives. University of Calgary Communications fonds.

#### Government Documents

Abella, Rosalie Silberman. *Equality in Employment: A Royal Commission Report: General Summary*. Commission on Equality in Employment, 1984 ([https://www.crrf-fcrr.ca/images/stories/Equality\\_in\\_Employment.pdf](https://www.crrf-fcrr.ca/images/stories/Equality_in_Employment.pdf) accessed 9 January 2019).

Abella, Rosalie Silberman, *Equality in Employment: A Royal Commission Report*. Commission on Equality in Employment, 1984 (<http://equalpaycoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Equality-in-Employment-A-Royal-Commission-Report-Abella-Complete-Report.pdf> accessed 9 January 2019).

Canada. Statistics Canada. *Number of Unionized workers, employees and union density, by sex and province*. Table 14-10-0187-01. 1985-1993 (<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/cv.action?pid=1410018701> accessed 9 January 2019).

*Employment Equity Act, Statutes of Canada* 1986, sections 2-4.

Legislative Assembly of Alberta. *Alberta Hansard*, 10 July 1986 (Dennis Anderson) ([https://www.assembly.ab.ca/Documents/isysquery/666fd2ab-8dc3-4182-a0fd-96f2c91aa857/16/doc/19860710\\_1430\\_01\\_han.pdf#xml=https://www.assembly.ab.ca/Documents/isysquery/666fd2ab-8dc3-4182-a0fd-96f2c91aa857/16/hilite/](https://www.assembly.ab.ca/Documents/isysquery/666fd2ab-8dc3-4182-a0fd-96f2c91aa857/16/doc/19860710_1430_01_han.pdf#xml=https://www.assembly.ab.ca/Documents/isysquery/666fd2ab-8dc3-4182-a0fd-96f2c91aa857/16/hilite/) accessed 9 January 2019).

Legislative Assembly of Alberta. *Alberta Hansard*, 30 April 1987 (Greg Stevens) ([https://www.assembly.ab.ca/ISYS/LADDAR\\_files/docs/hansards/han/legislature\\_21/session\\_2/19870410\\_1000\\_01\\_han.pdf](https://www.assembly.ab.ca/ISYS/LADDAR_files/docs/hansards/han/legislature_21/session_2/19870410_1000_01_han.pdf) accessed 9 January 2019).

Legislative Assembly of Alberta. *Alberta Hansard*, 6 June 1991 (Stockwell Day). ([https://www.assembly.ab.ca/ISYS/LADDAR\\_files/docs/hansards/han/legislature\\_22/session\\_3/19910606\\_1430\\_01\\_han.pdf](https://www.assembly.ab.ca/ISYS/LADDAR_files/docs/hansards/han/legislature_22/session_3/19910606_1430_01_han.pdf) accessed 9 January 2019).

Legislative Assembly of Alberta. *Alberta Hansard*, 26 January 1993 (Dianne Mirosh). ([https://www.assembly.ab.ca/ISYS/LADDAR\\_files/docs/hansards/han/legislature\\_22/session\\_4/19930126\\_1430\\_01\\_han.pdf](https://www.assembly.ab.ca/ISYS/LADDAR_files/docs/hansards/han/legislature_22/session_4/19930126_1430_01_han.pdf) accessed 9 January 2019).

### Interviews

Bue, Lynn. Interview with the Alberta Labour History Institute (ALHI). Edmonton, Alberta. 14 October 2012 (<http://albertalabourhistory.org/moving-forward-alberta-women-and-work/women-of-cupw/lynn-bue/> accessed 9 January 2019).

Brown, Rosemary. Interview with author. Calgary, Alberta. 6 November 2017.

McCallum-Miller, Cindy. Interview with ALHI. Edmonton, Alberta. 11 November 2008 (<http://albertalabourhistory.org/moving-forward-alberta-women-and-work/women-of-cupw/cindy-mccallum-miller/> accessed 9 January 2019).

McCallum-Miller, Cindy. Interview with author. Calgary, Alberta. 20 November 2017.

Keeley, Susan. Interview with ALHI. Edmonton, Alberta. 2007 (<http://albertalabourhistory.org/calgary-laundry-workers-strike/susan-keeley-2007/> accessed 9 January 2019).

Keeley, Susan. Interview with ALHI. Edmonton, Alberta. 21 May 2008 (<http://albertalabourhistory.org/calgary-laundry-workers-strike/susan-keeley-2008/> accessed 9 January 2019).

Keeley, Susan. Interview with author. Calgary, Alberta. 10 October 2017.

### Newspapers

*Calgary Herald*. 1990, 1993, 1994.

*Canadian Press Newswire*. 1995.

*Edmonton Journal*, 1993.

*Globe and Mail*. 1978.

## Secondary Sources

- Abrams, Lynn. *Oral History Theory*. New York: Routledge, 2010.
- Agocs, Carol. "Canada's employment equity legislation and policy, 1987-2000" *International Journal of Manpower* 23, 3 (2002): 256-276.
- Agocs, Carol. *Employment Equity in Canada: The Legacy of the Abella Report*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014.
- Anderson, Kathryn and Dana C. Jack. "Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses" in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, eds. Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Beaudoin, Jennifer D. "Minding the Gap: Pay Equity and the Role of Law in Narrowing Canada's Gender Wage Gap." Masters Thesis, University of Western Ontario, Canada, 2018.
- Blake, Raymond B. "Introduction" in *Transforming the Nation: Canada and Brian Mulroney* ed. Raymond B. Blake. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007.
- Blumrosen, Alfred W. "Six Conditions for Meaningful Self-Regulation." *American Bar Association Journal* 69 (September 1983): 1264-1269.
- Bristow, Peggy and others. *'We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up': Essays in African Canadian Women's History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994.
- Chastko, Paul. "Anonymity and Ambivalence: The Canadian and American Oil Industries and the Emergence of Continental Oil." *The Journal of American History* 99,1 (2012): 166-176.
- Dacks, Gurston, Joyce Green, and Linda Trimble, "Road Kill: Women in Alberta's Drive Toward Deficit Elimination." *The Trojan Horse: Alberta and the Future of Canada* eds. Trevor Harrison and Gordon Laxer. Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1995.
- Doiron, Denise J. and W. Craig Riddell. "The Impact of unionization on male-female earnings differences in Canada," *Journal of Human Resources* 29,2 (Spring 1994): 504-534.
- Doyle, Michael William. "Staging the Revolution: Guerrilla Theatre as a Countercultural Practice, 1965-68," *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960's and 70's*, eds. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle. New York, Routledge, 2002.
- Epp, Marlene and Franca Iacovetta, eds. *Sisters or Strangers? Immigrant, Ethnic, and Racialized Women in Canadian History* 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016.
- Foster, Jason. "Revolution, Retrenchment, and the New Normal: The 1990s and Beyond," in *Working People in Alberta: A History*, ed. Alvin Finkel. Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2012.
- Gereluk, Winston. "Alberta Labour in the 1980s" in *Working People in Alberta*, ed. Alvin Finkel. Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2012).

- Harder, Lois. *State of Struggle: Feminism and Politics in Alberta*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2003.
- Henderson, Stuart Robert. "Making the Scene: Yorkville and Hip Toronto, 1960-1970." PhD. Dissertation, Queen's University, Canada 2007.
- Heron, Craig. *The Canadian Labour Movement: A Short History*, Third Edition. Toronto: James Lorimer & Company Ltd., 2012.
- Janovicek, Nancy . "'If you'd told me you wanted to talk about the '60's, I wouldn't have called you back': Reflections on Collective Memory and the Practice of Oral History" in *Oral History off the Record: Towards an Ethnography of Practice*, eds Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013.
- Kaye, Frances W. *Goodlands: A Meditation and History on the Great Plains*. Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2011.
- Kirby, Ryan J. "Dramatic Protests, Creative Communities: VVAW and the Expressive Politics of the Sixties Counterculture." *Peace & Change: A Journal of Peace Research* 40, 1 (January 2015): 33-62.
- Lawson, Erica. "The Gendered Working Lives of Seven Jamaican Women in Canada: A Story about 'Here' and 'There' in a Transnational Economy." *Feminist Formations* 25, 1 (Spring 2013): 138-156.
- Lahey, Kathleen. *The Alberta Disadvantage: Gender, Taxation, and Income Inequality*. Edmonton: Parkland Institute, 2015.
- Loch Drake, Cynthia. "Jailed Heroes and Kitchen Heroines," in *One step over the line toward a history of women in the North American Wests*, eds. Elizabeth Jameson and Sheila McManus. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2008.
- Luxton, Meg. "Feminism as a Class Act: Working-Class Feminism and the Women's Movement in Canada." *Labour/Le Travail* 48 (Fall 2001): 63-88.
- Mentzer, "The Canadian Experience with Employment Equity Legislation." *The International Journal of Value-Based Management* 15, 1 (January 2002): 35-50.
- McMaster, Lindsay. *Working Girls in the West: Representatives of Wage Earning Women*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008.
- Nemeth, Tammy. "1980: Duel of the Decade," in *Alberta Formed, Alberta Transformed Volume II*, ed. Michael Payne, and others. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2005
- Nicols, Leslie J. "Alliance Building to Create Change: The Women's Movement and the 1982 CUPW Strike." *Just Labour: A Canadian Journal of Work and Study* 19 (Autumn 2012): 59-72.
- Pay Equity Commission of Ontario, "Pay Equity and Equal Pay: What is the Difference?," Pay Equity Commission of Ontario.

([http://www.payequity.gov.on.ca/en/AboutUs/Pages/the\\_difference.aspx](http://www.payequity.gov.on.ca/en/AboutUs/Pages/the_difference.aspx) accessed 18 January 2019).

- Portelli, Alessandro. "What Makes Oral History Different?" in Alessandro Portelli, *Oral history, oral culture, and Italian Americans*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Porter, Ann. *Gendered States: Women, Unemployment Insurance, and the Political Economy of the Welfare State in Canada, 1945-1997*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003.
- Roach Pierson, Ruth. *'They're Still Women After All': The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986.
- Roome, Patricia. "Amelia Turner and Calgary Labour Women, 1919-1935," in *Beyond the Vote: Canadian Women and Politics* ed. Joan Sangster and Linda Kealy. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989.
- Sangster, Joan. "Radical Ruptures: Feminism, Labor, and the Left in the Long Sixties in Canada." *American Review of Canadian Studies* 40, 1 (March 2010): 1-21.
- Sangster, Joan. *Transforming Labour: Women and Work in Postwar Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010.
- Sangster, Joan. "Reflections on the Politics and Praxis of Working-Class Oral Histories," in *The Canadian Oral History Reader* eds. Kristina R. Llewellyn, and others. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015.
- Schiebelbein, Joan. "Women Labour, and the Labour Movement," in *Working People in Alberta*, ed. Alvin Finkel. Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2012.
- Selby, Jim. "Delaying, Disarming, and Deceiving the Union: The Lougheed Government, Alberta Government Employees, and the Public Services Employee Relations Act, 1977." *Labour/Le Travail* 75 (Spring 2015): 75-100.
- Sethna, Christabelle and Steve Hewitt. "Clandestine Operations: The Vancouver Women's Caucus, the Abortion Caravan, and the RCMP." *The Canadian Historical Review* 90, 3 (September 2009): 463-495.
- Sheppard, Colleen. *Inclusive Equality: The Relational Dimensions of systemic discriminations in Canada*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010.
- Smith, Julia. "An 'Entirely Different' Kind of Union: The Service, Office, and Retail Workers' Union of Canada (SORWUC), 1972-1986." *Labour/Le Travail* 73 (Spring 2014): 23-65.
- Sorensen, Maiken Jul. "Laughing on the Way to Social Change: Humor and Nonviolent Action Theory." *Peace & Change* 42, 1 (January 2017): 128-156.
- Stephen, Jennifer A. *Pick One Intelligent Girl: Employability, Domesticity, and the Gendering of Canada's Welfare State, 1939-1947*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007.

- Thorn, Brian T. *From Left to Right: Maternalism and Women's Political Activism in Postwar Canada*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016.
- Tinney, Abe C. "The Discourse of economic crises: policy making in Alberta, 1983-1993." Master's thesis, University of Lethbridge 2015.
- White, Julie. *Sisters and Solidarity: Women and Unions in Canada*. Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, 1993.
- Wilson, Patrick Impero. "Deficit Reduction as Causal Story: Strategic Politics and Welfare State retrenchment." in *Social Science Journal* 37, 1 (2000): 97-112.
- Yow, Valerie . "'Do I like them too much?' Effects of the oral history interview on the interviewer and vice-versa," in *The Oral History Reader*, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson. New York: Routledge, 2006.



## APPENDIX

### **Oral History Method of Recruitment: Letter of Initial Contact – sample email**<sup>1</sup>

Dear Sir/Madam, I am a current master's student in the Department of History at the University of Calgary. My thesis topic is on feminist activism in Calgary in the 1970s and the 1980s, and I'm interested in doing an oral history project.

I'm sending you this email because I'd like to recruit either current or former members of your organization that may have been active in organizing for women's rights and women's equality in the 1970s and 1980s. I would like to interview these activists about their experiences as members of your organization and their involvement in initiatives concerning women's rights and women's equality in whatever capacity they felt existed.

My project looks at women's activism through three different themes. These themes include: sexual health education within the Calgary Birth Control Association (now known as the Calgary Sexual Health Centre); union activism and gender equality in the workplace within CUPE Local 38 and the Women's Committee of the Calgary District and Labour Council; and advocacy for recently landed immigrant women within the Alberta Network of Immigrant Women. Although my focus is on activism through initiatives within community organizations, I'm also interested in understanding how (former)members of your organization saw themselves as actors within the wider women's movement which called for greater equality between the sexes in all aspects of society (social, economic, and political).

In asking for these interviews with former and current members active in the 1970s and 1980s, I am requesting that you'd be able to forward them the following paragraph, as well as my contact information should they wish to participate in this study:

Erin Hrynuik, a master's student in the Department of History at the University of Calgary, is doing her thesis on feminist activism in Calgary in the 1970s and 1980s. She's looking at past community initiatives within our organization that were concerned with women's rights and women's equality in any or all aspects of society (social, economic, political). She's interested in interviewing either current or former members of this organization who were active in the time period under study to do an oral history project, and she's chosen this organization because she has reason to believe that such activism took place within our membership. If you are interested in participating, or if you have any general inquires, you can contact Erin by requesting more information.

I have also included a consent form that has the approval of the Research Ethics Board at the University of Calgary, and a list of questions that I intend on asking participants.

---

<sup>1</sup> Please note, my topic changed substantially from the initial project. I eventually narrowed it down to only include feminist labour activism in Alberta.

Please don't hesitate to ask if any part of this request is unclear, or if you'd like more information regarding my project. Any help you'd be able to provide in this request is surely appreciated. Thank you so much for your time.

Kind regards,

Erin Hrynuik

**Oral History Method of Recruitment: Participant Contact – sample email**

Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank you so much for responding to my request through your organization's executive.

Attached to this email is a consent form which outlines what I'll be doing with the information that I collect during interviews. I've also attached a copy of the questions I'll be asking.

If you have any questions about anything regarding this project, the consent form, or the questions, please don't hesitate to ask. I'm happy to speak with you via email, or telephone. My mobile phone number is listed on the consent form.

Kind Regards,

Erin Hrynuik

### **Oral History Interview Questions**

1. Why did you decide to participate in your community organization?
2. How old were you when you decided to participate in your community organization? Do you recall the first and last years of your activity?
3. Did you receive any post-secondary education?
4. What specific initiatives on behalf of your community organization do you remember being particularly excited about?
5. What specific initiatives on behalf of your community organization do you remember having a particular impact within the population that you served?
6. Why did you feel these initiatives were necessary?
7. Did any controversies arise within your organization while you were active? If so, what were they and what did you think were they caused by?
8. How much diversity existed within the membership of your community organization? This includes race, socio-economic status, perceived class levels?
9. Do you recall experiencing any obstacles during your time within your organization?
10. Did you identify as a feminist activist during your involvement with your particular community organization? Why or why not?
11. Did you see yourself as contributing to a larger women's movement in Calgary, Canada, and the rest of the western world?
12. I'm also looking at other women's community organizations in Calgary during the same time period. These include the Calgary Birth Control Association, CUPE Local 38, the Women's Committee of the Calgary District and Labour Council, and the Alberta Network of Immigrant Women. Did you as an individual, or your organization as a collective, have any cross-organization involvement with these other two organizations, or any other women's organization in Calgary? This involvement could be anything from exchanging ideas and general conversations to leading shared initiatives between your respective organizations.



---

**Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:**

Erin Hrynuik, Master's Candidate, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of History

Telephone Number (mobile): [REDACTED]

E-mail Address: [REDACTED]

**Supervisor:**

Dr. Nancy Janovicek, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of History

**Title of Project:**

Feminist Activism in 1970s and 1980s Calgary

---

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study. Participation is completely voluntary. You are free to discontinue participation at any time during the study.

**Purpose of the Study**

This research project looks at feminist activism, and activism regarding women's-centred issues, in Calgary in the 1970s and 1980s. The activities and politics of different women's groups in the city of Calgary will be examined to determine the types of programs that these organizations implemented, and how members of these organizations saw themselves as actors concerned with women's equality and women's rights through three different themes. These three themes will be demonstrated by looking at three different types of women's organizations including: sexual health education within the Calgary Birth Control Association (now known as the Calgary Sexual Health Centre); union activism and gender equality in the workplace within CUPE Local 38 and the Women's Committee of the Calgary District and Labour Council (WCCDLC); and advocacy for recently landed immigrant women within the Alberta Network of Immigrant Women (ANIW). You were chosen to be part of this project because of your involvement with one of these organizations in the 1970s and 1980s.

## What Will I Be Asked To Do?

By agreeing to participate in this project, you agree to be interviewed by the author. The interview will take approximately 1-2 hours. The interview will be audio-recorded by the author to ensure accuracy of information provided by participants within the finished project. Because the accuracy of the information needs to be ensured by the author, an audio-recording of interviews is a necessary component of the interview. If you do not wish to have your interview audio-recorded, unfortunately you will be unable to participate in this project because of the author's need to ensure accuracy.

If you wish to contact me to clarify information after the interview is completed, or to withdraw from the project, please contact me on the mobile phone number or email address above. It may be necessary for me to do a short follow-up interview to clarify information collected in this interview. This follow-up interview is voluntary even if you wish to remain part of the project until its completion. If you agree to this follow-up interview now, you may also refuse participation in the follow-up interview, while still remaining as a participant in the project, if you change your mind later.

Would you agree to a short follow up interview?

Yes: ☐ No: ☐

Your participation is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this project. You may refuse to answer any questions. If you choose to participate in this study but later decide you no longer wish to participate, you may withdraw from this study at any point by contacting me up until December of 2017, approximately one month before the anticipated completion date. As this project is a master's thesis, the estimated completion date is January of 2018.

## What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?

Should you agree to participate, you will be asked to provide information about your gender, age, educational and political background, how you participated within the women's movement, and how you saw yourself as an actor for women's equality and women's rights. If you chose to remain anonymous, you can either choose your own pseudonym, or the author will provide one for you.

There are several options for you to consider if you decide to take part in this research. You can choose all, some, or non of them. Please review each of these options and choose Yes or No.

I grant permission to be audio-taped:

Yes: ☐ No: ☐

I wish to remain anonymous:

Yes: ☐ No: ☐

I wish to remain anonymous, but you may refer to me by a pseudonym:

Yes: ☐ No: ☐

The pseudonym I choose for myself is: \_\_\_\_\_

I grant permission for the researcher to choose a pseudonym for me:

Yes: ☐ No: ☐

You may quote me and use my name:

Yes: ☐ No: ☐

## Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?

Risks and discomforts associated with this project mainly concern mental fatigue or intense concentration as the questions in the interview deal with events that occurred in the 1970s and 1980s. I have a list of prepared questions for each interview so that you will be able to take your time and be prepared yourself for answering the provided questions. However, the nature of these interviews could potentially lead to discussions regarding subjects that could require you to recall events or memories that you may not have thought about since they actually happened. If this occurs during the interview process, I will be happy to provide adequate time for you to reflect on your answer. The recording device can be stopped at any point during the interview.

## **What Happens to the Information I Provide?**

I will transcribe the audio-recordings of the interviews into word documents. Those word documents and the audio-recordings will be encrypted with passwords, and will be stored on a laptop that is password protected. Only I will have access to these files. As this is a master's thesis, I will occasionally need to consult with my supervisor regarding the interviews. This consultation will consist of discussions and questions regarding the interpretation of the information collected within the interviews. However, my supervisor will never be able to access or look at the actual transcribed or recorded interviews, as these discussions regarding my own inquiries will take place verbally. For participants who have chosen to remain anonymous, I will refer to the participants as "Participant X" or their chosen pseudonyms in such discussions.

The information that you provide will be used for academic publications (a thesis, conference papers, and scholarly articles). If you have agreed to be quoted, then you will be identified in publications. If you have chosen anonymity, then your name will not be used, but your community affiliation and other demographic data may be used in publications. Please note that this project has anticipated a small number of participants. However, no identifying information will be disclosed within the project (for example, if you have a unique combination of certain demographic features) if it has the potential to undermine your anonymity.

After the research is completed, the interviews, both the audio and document files, with participants who do not wish to remain anonymous will be deposited to an archive so that future researchers will be able to use the data. The audio and document files of interviews of participants who wish to remain anonymous will be destroyed.

Participation is completely voluntary. You are free to discontinue participation. If you choose to withdraw from the project, I will not use the information from this interview in publications, and both the audio recording and word document forms of the interview will be destroyed. The estimated date of completion for the project is January of 2018. You can withdraw from the project at any point up until the beginning of December of 2017.

If you would like to receive a summary of the study's results, I can provide a link to a copy of the completed thesis via email.

Would you like to receive a summary of the study's results?

Yes: [ ] No: [ ]

If yes, please provide your contact information (e-mail address, or phone number)

---

---

---

## ***Signatures***

Your signature on this form indicates that 1) you understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) you agree to participate in the research project.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's Name: (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Name: (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Questions/Concerns**

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Ms. Erin Hrynuik, Principal Investigator

Department of History, Faculty of Social Sciences

\_\_\_\_\_

and Dr. Nancy Janovicek, Supervisor

Department of History, Faculty of Social Sciences

\_\_\_\_\_

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at \_\_\_\_\_; email \_\_\_\_\_. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.