

Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada

by LANI

Women is looser. . . . You must have heard a lot That Men seem to end up on top.
— Janis Joplin

Canada is committed, in theory, to the principle that permits no difference between the rights and privileges of men and women.

Theory is a long way from practice, especially in this realm. The Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada was set up in February of '67 to inquire into these discrepancies between theory and reality. The Commission adopted four principles to assist them in looking into the problem:

1. Women should be free to choose whether or not to take employment outside their homes.
2. Care of children is a responsibility to be shared by the mother, the father and society.
3. Society has a responsibility for women because of pregnancy and child-birth, and special treatment related to maternity will always be necessary.
4. In certain areas women will for an interim period require special treatment to overcome the adverse effects of discriminatory practices.

Using these principles they looked at the role women play in the economy, the education they receive, their place in the family, their status under taxation, citizenship and criminal laws, and the effects of poverty upon them.

WOMEN IN ECONOMY

Economically women are second-class citizens, the Commission was told.

A brief from the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union stated that experienced female fish-workers would receive \$2.15 an hour while an experienced male fish-worker would receive \$2.83 an hour. An inexperienced male fish-worker received \$2.37.

Nursing Assistants care for women patients in hospitals. They must, in most provinces, have at least grade 10 or its equivalent and be provincially licensed or certified after completion of a training course (usually 10 months long). Nursing Orderlies care for male patients. Generally they have no such qualification requirements to meet and are given in-service training.

The Commission was told of situations in which Nursing Orderlies received higher pay than the Nursing Assistants. Moreover, Nursing Orderlies are automatically promoted to Specialist Orderlies with higher pay after their training and a period of satisfactory service; Nursing Assistants are not.

The United Electrical Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE) submitted this statement:

"We know of another instance where female and male employees do exactly the same job — winding coils. In this instance the female employees are paid eleven per cent less than the males. The job content is the same, but the females can only work on two shifts. Legislation protects women from having to work the midnight to morning shift. The fact that the men are required to do the job on the third shift is considered

enough of a change in job content to deny equal pay under the law as it now stands."

The above is a perfect example of the government discriminating against women under the pretext of helping them.

Although there are equal wage laws in existence, there are a number of factors which make the effective enforcing of the law almost impossible. It must be proved that the work is "identical or substantially identical" or, as some laws state, "the same work in the same establishment". The burden placed on the employee of proving that, under the law, a woman is entitled to equal pay is almost overwhelming:

"A large manufacturing firm whose workers are represented by our Union, employs people in the classification of 'Janitor' and 'Janitress'. The duties of these people are essentially the same, that is — to clean the respective male and female washroom facilities. Despite the fact that the jobs are virtually identical, the male Janitors' wage rates are five per cent higher than those of the female Janitresses. One small difference in the job content is that the Janitor must wheel the garbage from his work area to the disposal area, whereas the Janitress places the garbage from her work area outside the washroom from where it is taken to the disposal area by the male employee. This is not much of a difference, but it is enough to disqualify a claim for equal pay under present legislation." (UE brief)

Benefits to employees sometimes take the form of insurance protection to which both employee and employer contribute. Although the Commission found no differences for women and men in group health insurance, there were discriminatory provisions in group life insurance.

In one case, in the academic profession, a man's insurance was based on 250 per cent of his annual salary and a woman's insurance on only 100 per cent.

In another, although the percentages of salary were the same for men and women, the maximum insurance available for married men was \$15,000, for unmarried men \$7,500, and for all women \$5,000.

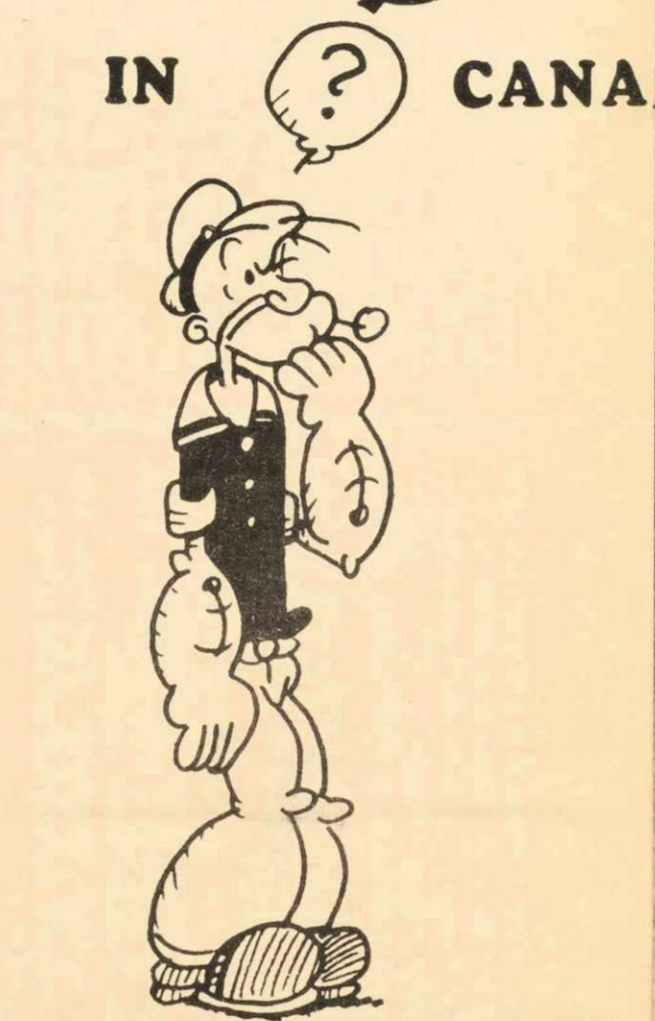
Why should an unmarried man be allowed more life insurance than an unmarried woman? Perhaps also, as the commission states, life insurance plans should realize that unmarried persons often have dependents that must be looked after. Unfortunately, the Report didn't make any recommendation on this point.

Although women tend to live longer than men, some companies require women to retire earlier.

Perhaps the hardest type of discrimination to fight comes from the many airlines. These companies without exception are advocates of the "Bunny Club" philosophy. Until 1965 marriage was cause for instant dismissal. In some airlines today, pregnancy is still reason for discharge.

Stewardesses are often required as a condition of employment to sign agreements permitting the employer to discharge them at age 30 or 32. Stewards and pursers are not subject to these provisions.

Often when firms go to Universities to look for employees they state that positions are only open to men. In an analysis of the 1969-1970 edition of Canada Careers Directory for University Graduates, the Workers



Bureau found that of the 3,268 vacancies listed by banks, insurance companies, pharmaceutical and chemical firms and manufacturers of soap and detergents, 2,024 positions were open only to men. (This left only 1,244 jobs in these companies for which the University Placement Offices would be able to arrange interviews for women.)

"In British Columbia in 1967, of the 245 principals in one area only five were women." (Brief # 237)

"In Alberta in 1966, a man was 7.5 times more likely to become a principal than a woman, although he was only 2.5 times as likely to have higher qualifications than a woman." (Brief #301)

"In Manitoba in 1968, although there were only seven men teachers to every 12 women teachers, there were almost three and one-half times as many men administrators as women administrators." (Brief # 372)

"In Ontario Teacher's Colleges there were 270 men masters and 102 women masters but no women in administrative posts; in Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology there were 1,365 men instructors and only 176 women; in the Department of Education 88 senior positions were held by men and one by a woman and there were 380 men inspectors and supervisors and only 27 women." (Brief # 342)

"In Quebec under the Catholic School Commission of Montreal, in 1968, 89 per cent of the elementary teachers were women but only 51.8 per cent of the principals were women; only 16.3 per cent of the staff of the Commission were women, none of whom held senior positions." (Brief # 434)

A brief presented by a group of women university teachers reported that a survey which they had conducted found that one out of every four full-time men faculty members was a professor but that only one out of 21 women was at that level.

The Canadian Woman's Press Club sent in a brief which documented the failure of women to reach senior levels in the mass media. The study covered 28 employers with a total of 1,147 employees, 23 per cent of whom were women. The women represented 73 per cent of the people earning below \$4,000 and only 2.5 per cent of those earning above \$12,000. Although 85 per cent of the women surveyed said they were willing to assume more responsibility, no women were editors, news editors, city editors or night editors on any city daily newspaper.

Regardless of their competence, women appear to be



promoted only in "women's interest" areas. This is not too different in the underground press. Women usually fill only the supportive end of the papers.

The government is not above discriminatory practices. Substantial differences were found in insurance plans of some Crown corporations and agencies. In one, a married or single man is covered for a base rate of \$3,000 plus an additional \$3,000 for every \$1,000 of his yearly salary. If he earns \$10,000 a year, for example, he is covered for \$33,000.

A woman, on the other hand, is covered for a base rate of \$3,000 plus an additional \$2,000 for every \$1,000 of her yearly salary. With a yearly salary of \$10,000 she is covered for only \$23,000.

In another Crown Corporation with a group life insurance plan, for single men and women and for married women with no dependants, the coverage is the equivalent of one year's salary up to a maximum of \$20,000. For a married man or a once-married woman with dependants, the coverage is the equivalent of two years' salary up to a maximum of \$40,000. A number of single women have requested coverage for their dependants. So far this has not been granted.

The recommendation by the Commission states only that different provisions on the basis of sex should be eliminated from superannuation and the insurance plans for federal Crown Corporations and agencies. However, this is not enough; there should be no discrimination on the basis of marital state.

Although women are not usually limited in applying for positions in the Public Service there is a restriction in bindery operations in the printing trades. Only women are appointed to bindery positions level 1 and they are called "journeymen". Only men are appointed to bindery positions level 2 (the next higher level) and they are called "journeymen". The Commission recommends that both positions be open to men and women on the same basis.

In the Federal Service women are never appointed as messengers or as protective staff. The physical demands of the work are given as the reason for ruling out women in these fields. (I can personally see why they could conceivably find some reason why women can't be protective staff — but messengers???)

Charwomen in the Federal Service are appointed only part-time and at an hourly rate. Men cleaners, on the other hand, work full-time and are paid an annual rate. The Commission recommended that sex-typing of occupations of employees working in the Federal Service be discontinued.

Although I have little interest in the Armed Forces and usually would hesitate to mention anything to do with them they have practices which are particularly offensive. A woman must be 18 years old and have grade 10 standing. A man need be only 17 years with a grade 9 standing. There is no reason why women should have to be better qualified.

Married women are not allowed to enter the Forces. The reasoning for this restriction is that married women have less mobility. It would be logical to assume that married women would not join if they felt they couldn't fulfill their obligations. The Commission recommends that married women be allowed to enter the Forces. They do not make any recommendations about unequal entry qualifications.

Married women are discriminated against in other fields. Nova Scotia and Newfoundland have some restrictions on civil appointments of women who don't need to support themselves.

Woman's position in chartered banks is extremely discriminatory. Two-thirds of the employees of the eight banks surveyed were women. Of these 89.7 per cent earned less than \$5,000 yearly in occupations such as teller and other routine office jobs, while 72.3 per cent of all men earned more than \$5,000. The over-all statistical picture suggests that the \$5,000 mark represents a threshold into career officer jobs, including positions in bank management and specialist bank occupations.

Male high school graduates are trained for a career in bank management or specialized occupations of equivalent rank. Female high school graduates are usually predestined for dead-end support functions. The Commission made recommendations to ensure qualified women get a chance at these higher paid managerial positions.

Women in the major department chain stores fair little better. The study was done of 38 stores, all regions of Canada were included. The study covered a total of 22,978 full-time employees (there were 3,000 more women than men in this group) and 25,035 part-time employees (there were four times as many women as men in this group).

It was found that women working full or part-time were predominantly employed in the lower-paid sales clerk positions (80 per cent) and as cashiers. On the other hand, 72.5 per cent of the higher paid sales positions were held by men. These were sales positions requiring detailed knowledge of products and considerable skill in salesmanship. Pay for such positions is often salary and commission or straight commission, and the products sold are usually higher priced goods such as furniture and power tools.

Women were in the majority in supervisory positions but more than three-quarters of the most senior departmental positions, those of managers and buyers, were held by men. Women's earnings were found to be consistently lower than those of men with the same or even fewer years of service. This was true in non-sales departments as well as sales.

A distinct pattern of the allocation of work to women and men in sales departments prevailed. Some was understandable, some wasn't. Women usually make the family decision about home furnishings (i.e. colour, model — not "Are we going to buy?") but furniture, most types of floor coverings and major electrical appliances are sold by men. Often the same division of work does not carry through to the functions of department manager and buyer. Women, for instance, sell material and books but men usually do the buying and managing of this merchandise.

The Commission's recommendations if implemented should relieve this separation of women from the managerial and buying positions.

The Minimum Wage Acts of Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick permit the establishment of lower minimum wages for women than men. There is no mention of certain occupations being omitted. British Columbia has separate minimum wage acts for women and men.

Although in British Columbia minimum wages are set by occupation and region, it does not necessarily stand that the wages will be different — but because there are two Acts, this could very well happen. The Male Minimum Wage Act excludes farm labourers and domestic servants; the Female Minimum Wage Act excludes farm labourers, domestic servants, and fruit pickers.

In its recommendations the Commission stated that Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and British Columbia have one minimum wage act for both men and women. In the case of British Columbia, only, does it state that there should be no sex difference in the occupations covered. There has yet to be any proof that a person in some occupations deserves less of a living wage than others. The Commission makes no reference to the fact that every occupation should be covered by a minimum wage by law.

Although the history of the job of secretary is not included in the Commission, I would like to give a brief outline of the changes throughout the years.

When the job first came into being, it was occupied by a man if the boss was a man. In many ways the position was that of apprentice rather than shitworker. In some instances, the secretary had a share in making the decisions. When the boss died or retired, the secretary, who by then knew the job, could take over.

Perhaps as our culture became more snobbish about positions and education men no longer started in the professions as secretaries, but further up the management line. Women took over the job and the pay and status decreased. Today, in the Public Service the level that a secretary can reach is based on the level of the person

she works for rather than the duties she performs. Since it is no longer an apprenticeship situation, there should be no reason why the level of a secretary's pay should be dependent on the pay received by others.

Although the Commission found that many women receive maternity leave of varying amounts none was paid leave. They feel that it is unfair that a woman suffer loss of earnings at a time when she incurs many expenses. Often a woman's salary is necessary to provide a decent living for the family.

The Commission bases a recommendation for paid maternity leave on the fact that society has some commitment to women because of child birth and pregnancy. They say that through the signing of the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, Canada is committed to the principle, not just of leave, but of paid leave.

This recommendation unfortunately applies only to women who are in the work force, or who are receiving unemployment insurance benefits. There is no aid to non-working women or to women whose unemployment insurance has run out without their finding a job.

If we are to state that society owes some protection to women when they are pregnant then it should be to all women not just the privileged few who happen to be producing value in the working force rather than producing value in the home. The Commission often states that although we profess to think in high terms of the work women do in the home (taking care of children, a most precious commodity) we actually give them little status or thought in our material-commodity oriented world. Unfortunately the Commission does the same thing. Throughout this entire chapter the commission has trouble breaking away from a traditional "material world first" attitude.

There is a very interesting thing happening with maternity leave. In some companies the father is given a day's leave with pay while his wife has a child. A mother receives no pay at all, even on the day of the birth of her child. And I ask you Who is doing the work? Not that I am against the fact that a man gets paid leave, he has every right to be at the birth of his child.

One recommendation made which was attacked by both the male members of the Commission was that the pay rates for nurses, dieticians, home economists, librarians and social workers employed by the federal government be set by comparing these professions with other professions in terms of the value of the work, the skill and the training involved.

All the above professions although they require a number of years of training are low paid because they are traditionally female. The government's policy is to set its wages equivalent with those of a GOOD employer outside the government.

The Commission feels that as long as women's occupations and professions are relatively low paid outside the Service they will remain so within the Service. They feel that the government should take the initiative since the mechanisms of the market are not always rapid enough to adjust to a need for higher pay in an occupation or profession. The professions mentioned are those which are having trouble finding workers because they are so ill paid for the qualifications, work and responsibility required.

In the Separate Statement Commissioner Jacques Henripin writes:

"... In my view, such departure from established practice can only be justified if some defect or malfunction of the labour market prevents it from operating for these professions as it does others. . . . The criteria advanced in the recommendation for salary adjustments are acceptable in principle, but they are incomplete, and one of them — the value of the work — seems little better than a tautology. . . . In my opinion, the only remedy for the situation described in the Report is for women to diversify their occupational choices and to escape, once and for all, from the confines of the so-called "female" occupations."

In a way I cannot but help agreeing with him on the last sentence but what about all those women who went through about 4 years of training to get into those professions? And what will happen to these professions if all the women leave and no men join because of inadequate pay? Already there is an acute shortage of nurses, dieticians, and social workers. Hospital patients and welfare recipients are suffering.

Many of the recommendations of the Commission have to do with special treatment and minimum quotas for women to help them get into the higher paying professions. Most of this special treatment entails making sure capable women are being advanced or are getting the training to advance.

Not one statement in the report implies women who are not qualified should be put into a position they can't handle. The need for quotas can be illustrated by the following paragraphs from the Report:

"To find out whether or not employers considering job applicants are influenced by their sex, officers

