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WOMEN

Double-shift workers

Today more and more women are going out to work. In 1951 one out of five women, and today one out of every three women in Nova Scotia works outside her home.

What's in store for us when we go out to work? Certainly not pleasant working conditions. Not good wages or fringe benefits. Not much by way of daycare services for our children. Just the opposite. There are hardly any benefits for working women. So why are we going out to work?

Some people say that we get jobs because household work and child-rearing are no longer a full-time job what with all the modern conveniences. So they say we're bored. Or that we're working for the family "extras". Still others think that we simply don't want to take care of our children. All of these people think that we have a choice, but we don't. The real reason we work is that we need to.

Women Support Families

"I don't make enough at this job (secretary) to pay someone to look after the baby. I may have to quit my job and go on welfare."

It's clear that women who do not have husbands need to work outside the home. Single, divorced, separated and widowed women must work to support themselves and in many cases their children.

In many cases women who must support families cannot afford to work. Available jobs pay so little that we cannot pay for the transportation, daycare (if it's available at all), additional clothing and the other unavoidable costs which result when we work outside the home. For this reason many female heads of household have no choice but to go on welfare. However, there is little doubt that those who are able to go out to work do so because they need to.

What About Married Women?

"I'm in a stew. I have to get out to work. I've been working since I was 14 and I'm 62 now. We can't keep up on what Jack makes. The bills mount up. I don't know how people with small children manage today."

Are married women working for the "extras" while their husbands support them? The answer is that many men in Nova Scotia, like everywhere else in Canada, are not being paid enough to support their wives and children. Over half of the incomes of Nova Scotia men fell below the poverty line in 1971. Most of these men were trying to support a family.

The majority (57%) of working women in Nova Scotia are married. It has been shown in Canada that it is the women with low family incomes who are most likely to enter the labour force. So, many of the men who are earning low wages are married to women who are earning even lower wages.

The poverty line for an average Canadian family of four in 1971 was \$4,697. Even then, some families with two people working still do not have incomes over the poverty line. Many other low-income families barely manage to keep above the poverty line only because both husband and wife are working.

In Nova Scotia, as elsewhere in the country, more and more families are finding it necessary to have more than one worker in the family in order to live adequately. And this second worker is usually the wife. Proof of this is the fact that employment of women in Nova Scotia was four times as high in 1971 as it was in 1951.

We Are Cheap Labour

Women work not only because we need the money but

also because the economy needs our labour. In the past few years there has been a huge increase in the demand for women in certain kinds of jobs such as clerical work. When an employer wants to hire a secretary he always looks for a female secretary.

Women are a useful type of labour for employers. We are cheap and available labour. Because we are not considered the main breadwinner we can be hired cheaply when needed and fired easily when not - World War II is a good example of how this works.

We can readily be used in part-time and seasonal jobs since we already have full-time jobs in the home. When we are no longer needed we often have no other choice than to return home. Since we return to the home, we do not become a "burden on the economy" as do men without jobs.

But this doesn't work out very well anymore. Today women who work outside the home need a job whether or not the economy is able to provide it. This is reflected in the increasing rate of unemployment among women which has tripled in the last six years.

On the one hand, then, there is an increasing demand for female labour and on the other hand there is a high rate of female unemployment. How can that be? The answer is that the demand for female labour occurs only in certain areas of Nova Scotia while the women who need to work are spread throughout the province. The demand is mainly in cities where there is a need for white collar and service workers and in small pockets of the province where female labour is needed in those industries which have traditionally used women such as textiles and fish processing.

There are reasons, then, why increasing numbers of Nova Scotia women are entering the labour force. The first reason is that we need to work in order to help support ourselves and our families. It is not a matter of just choosing to go to work! The second reason is that the economy needs us as a source of cheap labour in certain types of jobs and in certain areas of the provinces.

Low-skilled, Low-paid Jobs

"I've been cleaning other people's houses for thirty years, and I'm not making much more now than when I started."

Women have always been drawn into low-skilled, low-paid jobs. And this has not changed in recent years. The demand for clerical workers is almost three times greater than in 1951. Large groups of women are also employed as waitresses, cooks, and cleaners. While many women enter the professions, this is mainly in the lower paid ones like teaching and nursing.

Many jobs have become stereotyped as "Female jobs". These are the ones which require very little training, offer no opportunity for advancement, are often looked down on, and where the worker can easily be replaced. In such situations, women as individual workers have no bargaining power. They must accept the going wages or be replaced by another worker.

Equal Opportunity?

With all the publicity given to the increasing numbers of

women in the labour force, a false image of the working woman has been created. People are led to believe that women now enjoy equal opportunity and job status with men. Granted, some token women have made inroads in a few fields formerly considered the male domain such as law, architecture and medicine. These scattered success stories of individual women make the media headlines. This makes it appear that women's role in the work force has been completely transformed. But this image is only an illusion that serves to hide the real conditions of working women who are mainly used as a source of cheap labour.

Same Jobs, Different Pay

"I can't believe that he is making \$200 a month more than I am for doing practically the same book-keeping job."

Even in those jobs where women outnumber men, the men's wages are higher than the women's. According to Nova Scotia Department of Labour statistics, in 1971, 69% of all clerical workers in Nova Scotia were women. Yet their average income was \$4,040 while the average income of male clerical workers was \$6,271. In 1974 female sales clerks in Halifax retail food stores averaged \$115 per week while their male counterparts averaged \$171 per week.

When we consider the large numbers of single women who try to provide decent living conditions for themselves, and the many women whose husbands are ill, unable to find work, or low paid, the financial situation of working women in Nova Scotia looks pretty grim.

Having Jobs: The Price We Pay

"I know the kids are o.k. while they are in school but I worry about them after school. But what can I do? I have to work."

There is still more to this grim picture. Since most of the working women in Nova Scotia are married and many of them are mothers, they face problems over and above those of working men. This is because women are still almost always responsible for housekeeping and raising children. Whether a woman goes out to work or not, the work in the home still has to be done. Therefore a working woman really has two jobs.

But even though she still does a great deal of the work herself, there are certain things she can't do to maintain her family. Child care while she is on the job is one of them. This work has to be done by others, and it usually has to be paid for. This takes a large percentage of what she earns.

A working mother must not only face the economic problems of lower wages and having to pay someone to look after her children, but she must also pay the psychological cost of continually worrying about the quality of that care. Both these costs put an enormous strain on the entire family.

The Cost of Daycare

In many areas of the province, there are no daycare facilities. But even when it is available, those who need it most can afford it the least.

Full cost for daycare is \$6.55 per child per day. This comes to between \$136 and \$150 per month or about

THE MAINTENANCE ENGINEER

One Friday night it happened, years after we were wed,
When my old man came in from work; as usual I said,
"Your tea is on the table, clean clothes are on the rack;
Your bath'll soon be ready; I'll come and scrub your back."
He kissed me very tenderly and said, "I'll tell you flat,
The service I give to my machine ain't half as good as that."

CHORUS:

I'm not your little woman,
Your sweetheart or your dear.
I'm a wage slave without wages;
I'm a maintenance engineer!

And then we got to talking; I told him how I felt,
How I keep him running just as smooth as some conveyor belt.
The terms of my employment would make your hair turn grey;
I have to be on call, you see, twenty-four hours a day.
If I keep up full production with another kid or two,
Some future boss will have a brand new labour force to screw.

The truth began to dawn then, how I keep him fit and trim
So the boss can make a nice fat profit out of me and out of him.
And as a solid union man he got in quite a rage
To think that we're both working hard, but getting one man's wage.
I said, "And what about the full-time factory job I do?
That's three men that I work for, love—my boss, your boss, and you.

He looked a little sheepish and he said, "As from today,
The lads and me will see what we can do on equal pay.
Would you like a housewives' union? Do you think you should be paid
As a cook and as a cleaner, as a nurse and as a maid?"
I said, "Don't jump the gun, love; if you did your share at home,
Then I'd have lots of time to fight some battles of my own."

"I've often heard you tell me how you'll bring the bosses down;
You'll never do it, brother, while you're bossing me around.
Till women join the struggle—married, single, white or black,
You're fighting with a blindfold and one arm behind your back."
The message has got over; he has realized at last
That power to the sisters must mean power to the class.

