

CUPE BC PAY EQUITY WORKING GROUP PRESENTATION TO CUPE LOCALS AND DISTRICT COUNCILS

Good evening Brothers and Sisters!

Thank you for allowing me a few minutes on your busy agenda to speak with you about pay equity.

- It is important to understand that the gender-based wage gap is a form of discrimination that affects many of you and many members of your family.
- Pay equity is the principle that women and men performing work of equal value should receive an equal wage based on skill, effort, responsibility and working conditions.
- Pay equity is *different* from the legal protection that we currently have in our Human Rights Code, which says that women and men doing *substantially similar work* should be paid equally. Pay equity is more properly defined as equal pay for work of equal value.

WHY WE NEED PAY EQUITY LEGISLATION

- The first reason why we need such legislation is that pay equity legislation is fundamentally an issue of discrimination against women and legislation is the tool that attempts to remedy this longstanding form of discrimination.
- Today the gender-based wage gap is between 71-73¢. This means that for every dollar earned by a regular full-time male worker in Canada, an equivalent female worker earns only 71-73¢.

WHERE DID THIS WAGE GAP COME FROM?

- Before WW II there were relatively few women in the Canadian workforce, largely because men and women had very different roles to play at home and at work, and the accepted reason for this difference was their gender.
- Women tended to work only while they were single, or after divorce, or the death of a husband when it was necessary to do so to survive.
- With WW II the participation rate of women in the paid economy increased dramatically.

- Women were considered to be a secondary and temporary labour force, even though the work that they were doing during the war encompassed the whole range of work that had previously been done – and sometimes only allowed to be done – by men.
- After the war women were systemically shut out from many employment opportunities, as employment ads were limited to men and employers would not even interview women.
- 80,000 Canadian women were laid off from good paying regular full-time government jobs to create jobs for returning soldiers, immediately after the war.
- In 1945 the prohibition against married women working in the federal public sector was reintroduced.
- The notion that men needed to earn a family wage while women’s wages were somehow secondary or “pin money” was widespread.
- In the 50’s the wage gap started growing because:
 - a) there were few jobs requiring “traditional feminine skills” that paid well;
 - b) women were disproportionately represented in part-time casual work;
 - c) women were disproportionately concentrated in the least organized, lowest skilled and lowest paid types of employment
- The segregation of women in lower paying jobs was even to the point where collective agreements had sex-specific wage schedules!
- By the 60’s salary scales became integrated and most employment ads now read “help wanted” rather than “men or women wanted”, but the reality was that sex-based occupational segregation and wage disparities continued.
- Understanding the history that gave rise to the wage gap helps us understand pay equity as a mainstream equality issue. Just as fair-minded trade unionists would be aghast if wages for jobs traditionally performed by a particular racial or ethnic group were underpaid, for reasons having absolutely nothing to do with the nature of the job, but everything to do with the person performing it, so too must the need for gender-based pay equity be understood.

PAY EQUITY LEGISLATION

- Pay equity legislation is not a new or radical idea, having been present for several years in 14 legal jurisdictions in Canada, with an additional administrative form of pay equity in 2 other jurisdictions.
- Pay equity legislation has been brought in by Conservative and Liberal governments as well as the NDP.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

- Secondly, our experience in CUPE over the course of the last 25 years shows us that it has been very difficult to close the gender-based wage gap through collective bargaining as we have seen in the recent struggles of CUPE's library workers in Vancouver and Victoria. Also, legislation would ensure that not just the lower paid women in CUPE's bargaining units such as social service workers, librarians and parks workers would benefit but non-unionized women who are at the end of the wage scale would benefit as well.

EMPLOYER ATTACKS ON BARGAINED PAY EQUITY

- Thirdly, even where CUPE *has* been successful in negotiating good pay equity contract language, employers have often reneged on what they agreed to at the bargaining table by vigorously undermining and challenging at arbitration any interpretation of pay equity other than the narrowest.

PAY EQUITY FOR ALL WOMEN

- Fourthly, in the labour movement we say that "what we desire for ourselves, we desire for all." That is why CUPE's position is that what is required is broad-based legislation, meaning legislation that would cover public and private sector workers, union and non-union workers and all workers including part-time and casual.
- While the negative impact on women of the policies of the current government has been well documented, the fact is that non-unionized women in this province are in a particularly vulnerable position, with alarming rates of poverty, and negligible pensions, if any. I have brought with me tonight a document which is a paper produced by 2 UBC professors talking about the impact of the Liberal policies on women in BC, which is really quite alarming.

- CUPE's position is that we require pro-active legislation, i.e. legislation that does not require an individual to file a complaint, but that requires employers to implement pay equity. For the other details of CUPE's position, I have brought with me copies of CUPE BC's Policy Statement on Pay Equity, so that you can read it.

WHAT WE ARE ASKING YOU TO DO

- We are asking you to support our campaign for pay equity legislation in 2 ways:
 1. By raising awareness of the need for pay equity legislation by
 - a. Inviting us to local and District Council and other Union meetings to make our presentations; and
 - b. Letting CUPE BC Executive Board members know that you support their pay equity legislative lobbying efforts.
 2. By lobbying for pay equity legislation by
 - a. Speaking with or writing to your MLA to stress the need for pay equity legislation, and with your local politicians to have them adopt pay equity as part of their political agenda; and
 - b. Writing letters to the editor of your local paper about the need for such legislation (we will leave some sample letters with you in this regard).

If you have any other questions about pay equity in general or CUPE's position in particular, I have also brought a question and answer sheet, copies of which I will leave with you.

Thank you for your time and if you have any questions, I would be happy to try to answer them.