
**A Submission
to the Task Force on Pay Equity
by**

**The Canadian Union of Public
Employees
British Columbia Division**



November 30, 2001

CUPE BC SUBMISSION TO THE TASK FORCE ON PAY EQUITY NOVEMBER 2001

INTRODUCTION

The BC Division of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) welcomes this opportunity to address the issue of Pay Equity through the request for submissions made by the Task Force on Pay Equity.

The issues surrounding Pay Equity are of vital importance for the Canadian Union of Public Employees and its' members. CUPE British Columbia is the province's largest union and represents 65,000 members.

Women's economic inequality is an issue that must concern all of us in society. Achieving Pay Equity is a major piece of that inequality and any remedy must be inclusive: private and public sector, union and non-union workplaces.

Some CUPE members have seen pay equity addressed in their work places through government policy and although The Task Force mandate is to examine private sector Pay Equity, it is important to state that thousands of public sector workers are still subject to wage discrimination.

The request for submissions asks a series of questions to help facilitate discussion. CUPE British Columbia offers the following input to these questions, as well as practical solutions for the consideration of the Task Force.

To begin, we can state that there has not been significant Pay Equity gains in British Columbia and that the elimination of wage discrimination is taking too long.

With 58% of women over the age of 25 in the work force, wage equity must be established. Pay Equity is not about more money. It is about discrimination. In order for pay equity to be achieved in British Columbia, there must be a provision in law that requires the elimination of wage discrimination. CUPE BC is open to looking at new and different ways of achieving Pay Equity. How we get to the result is not as critical as achieving the elimination of wage discrimination. It is clear that Employers will not voluntarily eliminate systemic gender wage discrimination from their wage structures. Therefore, it is necessary Government make it mandatory.

EDUCATION

Wage Inequity as Discrimination

A major hurdle in the pay equity struggle is attitudes. There remain myths and misunderstandings about what equal pay for work of equal value is. Because this issue is not understood, it is not seen as discrimination. Therefore, the elimination of this form of discrimination does not have the support that eliminating other forms of discrimination does.

.../2

It is critical there be consistent and accurate information available to everyone. Widespread and accessible education programs that place the pay equity struggle in historical and social context are an important part of achieving public awareness of pay inequity as a form of workplace discrimination. Any education must extend to politicians and policy makers, many of whom are Employers.

Large organizations with greater resources could assist smaller, like organizations by sharing educational programs and trainers. Those doing education must be trained not only on the technical aspects of pay equity, but also on how to train joint committees on the content and concept of a new law.

There are successful models for standard training of joint committees in work place health and safety.

Clear and concise resource material is also important.

PAY EQUITY AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

CUPE locals have achieved some pay equity gains at the bargaining table over the past 20 years but often Employers and/or their bargaining agents refuse to address the issue. In the Lower Mainland, the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) who negotiates for most municipalities and libraries, stated in the 2000 round of negotiations, Pay Equity was not a problem and it would not be dealt with.

Wage discrimination is a Human Rights issue and is appropriately dealt with through law. International Human Rights Law requires that all women have access to equal pay. Government does have a role in regulating the workplace and has a responsibility to end all forms of discrimination. It is unacceptable that employees should be forced to take on their employers either at the bargaining table or through complaint-based Human Rights Law.

CUPE believes it is desirable for Pay Equity plans to be arrived at through the mutual agreement of the parties but it should be done away from the bargaining table and should not impact any gains made during the collective bargaining process. A central body should review Pay Equity plans to ensure they meet standard requirements.

IMPLEMENTATION OF A RESULTS-BASED APPROACH TO PAY EQUITY

CUPE BC supports the ideas in the submission presented by the BC Federation of Labour. In addition, we offer the following view.

All positions within organizations should be identified as male dominated or female dominated and then reviewed by an internal joint Pay Equity committee based on four criteria: knowledge, skill, responsibility, and working conditions. There should then be

.../3

an initial matching of equally valued classifications. A target pay equity rate should then be established using the previously identified male dominated positions.

CUPE believes that pay equity cannot be achieved by lowering male rates of pay. Once the target pay equity rates are established, the joint committee would establish a schedule of payment based on the following:

By the end of the 1st year – the wage gap will be reduced by 50%

By the end of the 2nd year – the wage gap will be reduced by 75%

By the end of the 3rd year – the wage gap will be reduced by 100% - eliminated.

The new process could begin with larger employers. A deadline would be established for filing a plan.

The Government should establish a Pay Equity Office that would be responsible for:

- Maintaining a central registry of pay equity plans
- Ensuring the registry is updated on a regular basis
- Making trainers available to assist workplaces with pay equity reviews and education
- Maintaining a list of larger organizations, public and private sector, who have resources available to share with smaller organizations
- Reviewing pay equity plans to ensure they meet a minimum standard required by law

The Employer and their Employees/Unions would be responsible for:

- Negotiating pay equity plans that meet the legal requirements and are manageable for their work sites
- Filing plans with the Pay Equity Office
- Maintaining a functional Pay Equity Committee

The Job Evaluation Committee would be responsible for:

- Evaluating and comparing job classes
- Calculating compensation adjustments
- Posting results
- Answering questions or inquiries from employees
- Establishing operating rules (meetings, training, remedies)
- Meeting and holding training

CUPE BC believes legislation must include the following principles:

- Pro-active, mandatory pay equity law
- Prohibits discrimination by paying employees of one sex differently than employees of the other sex for performing work of equal value

.../4

- Requires that employers continue to maintain pay equity once it has been achieved
- Prohibits the lowering of wages to achieve pay equity
- Includes the right to find equivalent, outside comparators if there are no male-dominated jobs within the establishment
- Prohibits the lay-off of workers to fund pay equity
- Staggers implementation deadlines
- Provides strong penalties for non-compliance

OTHER ACTIONS REQUIRED TO CLOSE THE WAGE GAP

Women head 83% of all single parent families. Affordable, accessible childcare is essential if these women are to provide for their families. Government's recent actions of removing child care subsidies and freezing funding for additional childcare spaces will hold women back from fully participating in the labour market. When examining women's economic equality, the issue of childcare must be taken seriously.

Access to education must be improved. Affordable post secondary and technical training is essential to achieving this goal. Affordable and accessible childcare goes hand in hand with access to education.

The recent introduction of the "first job wage" is also a step backwards in the goal of women's economic equality. CUPE BC supports the increase of the minimum wage to \$8.00 per hour and believes it should rise automatically with the cost of living.

There are serious skill shortages in many occupations. As workers are laid off through re-organization, privatization, trade impacts, and government cutbacks, training and retraining options for displaced workers must be enhanced.

Access, for women, to the entire workforce will only occur with the continuation of education and Employment Equity programs. A series of changes to strengthen Employment Standard, Labour, and Human Rights Laws must also be made if there is to be a serious progress made in achieving women's economic equality and security.

CONCLUSION

The time for consultation is over. It is time for action on this issue.

Women cannot be expected to continue to subsidize the economy by working for 27% less than their fair share. Business and Employers will reap the reward of providing workers with a discrimination-free workplace. Reduced worker turn over will result in higher retention, reduced costs associated with employee recruitment, and increased productivity as worker loyalty and morale rises.

Women will know they have achieved equality when they can put money back into the economy by purchasing food, gas, clothing, shelter, and when they can afford to pay for childcare.

.../5

Women will have achieved equality when they can continue to upgrade their skills and education, can support manufacturers, retailers and service companies by purchasing their products and services and when they can buy the most nutritional food for their families. Pay Equity is the keystone to these changes. As long as employers may legally discriminate against women in the workplace, there is no hope for equality in our society.

Eliminating the wage gap is a challenge. After 25 years of debate and consultation, it is time to do the right thing.

CUPE BC would be pleased to provide additional details and information if required by The Task Force on Pay Equity.