

3

Women in B.C. Unions pg 1.

3

Historians writing about this early period of women's organization in the province have ~~develop~~ develop varying interpretations of the barriers which women experienced in trying to become unionized workers. Some have stressed the intensity of women's workday, the pressure of domestic labor the isolated conditions of women's work ~~situations~~ situations, the intense hostility to women organizing on the part of employers, the shorter term nature of women's sojourn in the labour force and therefore the constant need to reorganize unions and the isolation of women within a male-dominated labour movement whose strategies were geared to industrial situations. These writers have traced the organizing attempts of women despite these barriers and stressed the significance of the fledgling unions created in a surprisingly large number of the sectors where women worked. Others have focused on the weaknesses of existing union outreach to working women, the tendency of unions to exclude minorities and women rather than to embrace them, the dominance of traditional notions of women's place within the attitudes and approaches of the unions towards women and the tendency to seek middle class women to speak for working women's needs and to devise protective strategies rather than to consult and organize with working women.

2

In fact, ~~the~~ the early union movement in B.C. did not have a uniform approach to working women. There is no question that women faced the ~~barriers~~ barriers of labour force structure ~~the~~ the demands of an intense domestic workload, a fluctuating labour market, high turnover, ~~a~~ a lack of social services and anti-woman employers when trying to devote time to union organization. They also faced barriers of social attitudes placing little value on the relative importance of women's wage labour, hostility towards married women in the workforce, sexism from men within the union movement, women's own conflicting views of their working lives, and differences in their needs around union structure and demands

2. Women's Trade Unions: The Early Period

from those of male unionists. However, they, like many working men of their time were often unskilled and struggled to simply attain a union and union recognition. Some sectors of the union movement saw it in their interests, either as craft workers sharing skills with women who might undermine them if non-union, or as industrial workers committed to the principle of organization for all workers (particularly if white) regardless of gender, to assist women with unionization, to incorporate women into their union or to, at least, not provide barriers to women's organization. Strategies towards women's organization ~~varied from union to union~~ varied from union to union at a given time and over the entire early period of B.C. unionism. This was true for both women themselves and the trade union movement as a whole.

① Women fought against terrific odds to sustain union organization. Women were a minority in the workforce, in many workplaces. B.C. employers were generally anti-union and particularly in regards to women. Unions were confused as to their desire for female members and did not always provide a consistent front in their defense.

Women and Trade Unionism: The Early Period

Women entered unionism in British Columbia at a time when craft unions had established themselves and industrial organization was underway. To some extent their demands corresponded with those of male workers; these included establishing union recognition, a closed shop, better wages, shorter hours of work and more control over the workplace. Male craft unionists had progressed with this latter issue through the creation of union-controlled hiring halls and apprenticeship programmes, while women faced a continual battle against high turnover in their sectors and employers' insistence on strict management rights.

The nature of B.C.'s economy elicited an early and militant industrial unionism amongst coal miners and construction workers, with later popularity amongst hard-rock miners, and woodworkers. This form of organization was a logical response to brutal employers who used centralized bargaining and lock-outs and to collectively shared complaints. B.C. unions rapidly formed labour centrals in order to coordinate workers; strategies against hostile employers and were very active within the province's political life, in an attempt to provide a legislative framework for working class struggles.

While industrial unions such as the Knight of Labour (1880's) expressed formal sympathy for women joining unions, and actively organized women in Central Canada, few women worked in industries which these unions organized in British Columbia. An exception to this was the Washresses + Ladies Cooks Local of the Workers (Local Union), established in 1898.

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Women in B,C, Unions 5.

In the Trades and Labour Congress of ~~Canada~~ Canada (TLCC) conventions in the 1880s unionists from the KOL argued that women should be organized wherever possible for better wages and shorter hours. In an attempt to address social attitudes towards women, One ~~man~~ delegate stated, "If the men of this country worked under the same disabilities as the working women, there would be a revolution." Forsey Delegates argued for equal pay for women on the basis that women should earn the same as men if they were capable of performing the same labour, that women were often better workers than their male counterparts, that women were as good unionists as men and that the low earnings of women encouraged them to seek a life of crime.

This latter theme emerges in this period as a major treatment of women workers by the unions, a theme that runs through discussions within both the B-C + Canadian union movement. Simply stated, (or implied) ~~was~~ the fear was that women would become prostitutes if poorly paid, not through willingness but to feed and clothe themselves and their families. On one hand, this was a progressive perspective when placed against the religious notions of contemporary social reformers who argued that prostitution was an evil to be cured through religion and state repression and who posed a natural immorality amongst the presumably ignorant labouring classes. On the other, it coincided with a moral reform position, in that it took as a starting point for bettering women's wages, the concern that women remained virtuous. This was directly tied to a broader concern with women's reproductive role as primary, and the resulting perspective of protecting women's value as untainted mothers and wives. Adjuncted to the demand for higher wages were concerns for women's reproductive health within industry. This was used at times to better factory conditions, but also used to mask a desire by male union members to exclude a female presence and competition in the male domain of industry. Unionists' actions could coincide, in fact, with those of the moral reformers, who sought to exclude women from certain types of work, place limits on hours and times of work for women and not for men (a defacto exclusion) and develop a Factory Inspector system that concentrated not on bettering overall conditions but on women workers appearance, and moral protection.

A major reason ~~was~~ for women's organization becomes the protection of female morality. Women unionists consistently argued, in the face of middle class concern for immorality, that they were indeed moral despite their poverty. All of these concerns tended to ~~raise~~ raise protective legislation as a ~~priority~~ priority, and place the actual unionization of working women on the back burner. Women workers again, contradicted this theme. While many supported protective legislation, they stated that it was only as good as women were organized and able to enforce better conditions and inspectors might recommend.

In 1888 the Knights of Labour pushed for the ~~creation~~ creation of female factory inspectors. The unions; ~~was~~ ^{fight} was ~~for~~ for inspectors who were appointed with union consultation and approval, and for in depth inspection of all levels of working conditions. Some of women's concerns around the limited nature of ~~even~~ even expressed at the TLCC convention, such inspection without unions to back it up was ignored in the debates, and discussion returned to the "debatable questions that were required to be asked female workers", that is questions of morality and harassment and ~~reproductive~~ reproductive health, and thus the need for women inspectors. The corrupt nature of manufacturers and the use of sexual coercion against women was a key concern. While this concern for sexual harassment was ~~progressive~~ ^{again} progressive the terms again were not, impinging on the protection of morality, not on women's sexual autonomy and right to be free from exploitation. ^{The calling up of "women's secrets" was an effective way to quash debate.} The result of inspection would serve ~~women's~~ women's interests if the concrete results were to remove sexual pressure ~~from~~ from the workforce. By 1901 inspection had been established in a number of provinces. ~~which~~ ^{which} the TLCC considered ~~disturbance~~ ^{disturbance} a victory. However, the fact that women inspectors earned but half ~~of~~ that of their male counterparts and worked harder was not missed by convention. It was clear that only organization could really change the ~~wage~~ wage question.

~~The~~ The early history shows a willingness to fight on the part of women and occasions where their militancy outdistanced ~~that~~ that of men in their industry. In an Ontario strike in the shoe manufacturing industry women fought

7.

Their employers ~~with~~ without backing down over the ^{employment} ~~irregularities~~ of non-union male immigrants at lower rates than theirs. The union men in their shop did ^{not} nothing to support them, in part because the employers treated them with deference and respect, while the women were heavily supervised and abused by management. Owners were willing to negotiate with the men's union, but refused recognition of the women's. Women warned the men working in their shop that their employer would divest them of their rights ~~and~~ eventually if they did not support the women. Several years later, a strike did occur, involving the male shoemakers over wage cuts such as the ^{Forsey} women had experienced.

Employers also threatened unionized domestic workers with the employment of Orientals or male servants, if they insisted on improving their working conditions. Even in ~~this~~ this early times. the divisions along gender lines within the labour movement were used to weaken unions.

Women were present within the early ~~craft~~ unions in British Columbia.

In 1891 ~~the~~ Joint(?) Tailors Union of America incorporated tailoresses and fifteen women in Victoria. Thirty-five men were in the union. The union's rates were recognized by the majority of the city's firms. Both sexes organized in ~~order~~ order to counteract the cutting of wages by either men or women in the ~~industry~~ industry. The union ~~was~~ disbanded in 1893 due to the severe depression. ^{The same process occurred in Vancouver where a union co-op was broken:} Wages were undercut. This is a trade where women had a long-term role in the workplace. When the union ~~was~~ reorganized several women were active for long periods of time; one a Miss McRae through to 1913 and Helena Gutteridge who was a consistent figure in the province's labour movement for many years.

In 1890 the Vancouver International Typesetters Union united both men and women around joint demands for the eight hour day. The next year the union went on record in support of equal pay for women and men. In both these craft areas men and women experienced similar conditions and a unity of demands. it was hard for either sex to sustain organization, both were ~~affected~~ affected by falling wages if there was no pay equality and both ^{wanted a shorter work week} ~~wanted~~ ~~a~~ ~~shorter~~ ~~work~~ ~~week~~.

The 1890s was a time of flowering for women's "clubs" in the province. They provided a social and literary function, an awareness of community, dignity and social order, and an important pressure for suffrage. It was also a time of great pressure for moral reform. Anti-Oriental campaigns mounted, and pressures for prohibition and crackdowns on prostitutes combined with white supremacist notions of a pure and wholesome race. The Women's Christian Temperance Union saw the saloon as an adjunct to prostitution and drink as the cause of poverty and immorality.

The Knights of Labour was a fading organization by the 1890s. Its membership was fleeing its structures in favour of the negotiations orientated job-based ^(craft) unions. In its eagerness to regain a base the order linked up with the WCTU to launch a campaign for temperance. In B.C. the analysis of the KOL and moral reform groups conflicted with a growing socialist trend within the unions. Rather than believing that drink created poverty the left thought that it was poverty that created the need for alcohol, as well as despair; workers were educated to depression and hopelessness, enforced by bad laws, poverty, and a lack of social organization. The solution lay in women's suffrage, workers compensation, good legislation, organization and eventually, social revolution. As well, the mostly male union membership were protective of their bars, seeing them as a haven against ^{work} and family. Such debates escalated through the early years of the 20th century as Vancouver was rife with intense anti-^{Orientalism,} a belief that the Chinese community was importing devices such as prostitution, male prostitution, gambling, drugs and alcohol in the innocence of Vancouver's white community. A rabid anti-prostitution campaign evolved based on a white slavery scare. In any case, it is clear that divisions existed amongst trade unionists as to whether or not middle class reformers were appropriate allies for the union movement.

Paternalistic attitudes towards women are ~~evident~~ evident in trade union actions of this ~~period~~ period. They were expressed ~~through~~ through a perspective which urged ~~legislative change~~ legislative change rather than organization. The myth that women were "unorganizable" prevailed amongst sectors within the union leadership. The stress on legislation, ~~was~~

~~must also be seen as an expression of the labour movement's growing realization of its potential power on the legislative terrain. Full suffrage for working people was relatively new and the period saw the growth of labour parties and candidates. ~~Workers were not yet disillusioned with bourgeois politics~~~~

While some sectors of the union movement favoured more radical political solutions and direct industrial actions, others were earnest in their support for democratic

Legislative reform at times meant collaboration with the Liberal Party *political reform*

and other middle class agents of social change. Thus, when the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council sought submissions from middle class women ~~for~~ for the Royal Commission on Labour Conditions in British Columbia, they were both bowing to middle class women's presumed knowledge of conditions and solidifying an alliance with a layer of society which had access to the political process.

~~The problem~~ The problem ~~was~~ with this first alliance was that labour did not define the ~~minimum~~ demands for minimum wages for women, and then ask support for its programme. Rather, middle class women, who identified with employers while wanting to better the lot of their working class sisters decided that women needed only \$7.50 and then \$5.00 a week on which to survive despite evidence from working women that ten dollars was a bare subsistence minimum. These women were clear in their submission on the needs of young trainees in the retail trade that they sought a "balanced account"; despite their 60 hour work week they felt that young trainees did not deserve a living wage because they were just learning the trade. *They were notably silent on the wages of domestic servants; not surprising given that they were their employers.*

Significantly, not all union men accepted legislation as a solution to the

Women in B.C. Unions 10.

low wages that women earned. At a lively meeting held by the Minimum Wage Commission in 1918 to address the wage levels of retail clerks working men expressed their skepticism at the commission's structure and capacity to set fair rates for women. Mrs. Ralph Smith, an independent labour MLA and the first woman to sit in a provincial legislature first argued the importance of minimum standards so that "young and tender" feet would not go "astray". She then stated that girls at home ought to be able to compensate their families for their care. This note struck home as fathers rose to say that their daughters were working for a mere eight dollars a week although minimum wages had been set eight months earlier. Participants criticized the slowness of the board and the lack of union representation. When Mrs. MacGill, the head of the board, said that "No government could go ahead of public opinion" a male unionist rose to say that in his experience the only way that you could get the government to move was "to put a club to them". He was received with roars of approval. The point was made that these wages were not living wages for one person, yet many women supported families, as deserted wives, widows, divorced mothers or women with sick husbands at home. The meeting felt that all workers should be paid for the work done and that it cost a single woman as much to live as a man. The workers ended with the demand that the Board incorporate representatives from the Retail Union in its hearings on standards in the industry, rather than picking only individual workers to state their case, at times on the recommendation of the employer.

From this meeting it is clear that men would support women's wage demands when it was in their interest to do so. Better wages for working children at home meant a higher standard of living for the entire family. It is also clear that there was a genuine sentiment of concern for the women and a mistrust of the government's ability to set standards without close scrutiny by the unions.

Union leaders betrayed women workers on a number of occasions by opting for legislation rather than following through on a strike situation to win a first contract which could be enforced.

Women in Unions in B.C.11.

Women's rationale for fighting for suffrage divided along class lines.

Middle class women saw the need for suffrage as a tool for political reform/ Working women supported suffrage and reform legislation but also favoured union organization. They were skeptical of legislative solutions because they had too often experienced the lax enforcement of minimum standards. Legislation could create an easier climate in which to organize, but it was the organization which was critical.

As Star Rosenthal suggests,

Women's organization cut across all of the currents within the early labour movement. Women tended to favour "industrial unionism"; however women were also active in traditional and conservative craft unions such as the Hotel and Restaurant Workers Union and their own autonomous organizations such as the Household and Domestic Employees Union. No matter which structure women chose, they inevitably appealed to the broader male dominated labour movement for funds to assist in organization.

There were two waves of organization by women, the first from 1902-1908 and the second from 1910-1920, with a downturn during the 1915 depression.

Telephone operators in the province joined with electrical workers and linesmen in the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers when initial organization began at the New Westminster and Burrard Inlet Telephone Companies. In the first wave of struggles both the men's union and the women's local operated as one bargaining unit, despite their different working conditions. The company did all it could to undermine this unity, which won a closed shop for all telephone workers in 1902. On November 26, 1902 the linesmen and operators walked out to demand higher wages, shorter hours and union recognition. The men and women had been meeting separately to pinpoint key demands. Women sought a \$2.50/month increase and men \$5.00-\$10.00/month more. New West and Victoria went out in sympathy with the strikers. The operators achieved a complete shut-down of the system because they struck suddenly, leaving the company with no time to hire and train strikebreakers.

Women and Unions in B.C. 12.

Operating was no easy task; it involved complex technology and without its workers the company was disarmed. When the company did hire strikebreakers the weather knocked the system out of commission. The strikers received overwhelming support from the public, and from the business community who resented the monopoly the telephone company held in the communications industry.

A business men's group offered to take over and run the company with the assistance of operators who volunteered for this task while the strike was settled through negotiations. The union agreed to the proposal but the company refused, further alienating the public.

The company capitulated to the union's demands, granting recognition for Local 213, including the operators; and 8 hour day; wage increases; a ten day probation period for trainees; \$20/mth. for city operators and \$30 after 2½ years; 3 days a month sick leave; Saturday afternoon off and a closed shop, the major union demand of this period. Elaine Bernard, who writes of this strike, suggests that the workers won after only two and one half weeks because of the economic power of the strikers, the crucial role of the operators, the increase in public sympathy through the strike and the lack of time that the company had to recruit scabs.

The IBEW local had welcomed women from its inception in B.C. The operators' local was established as "Auxiliary One" of the IBEW, but despite its name, functioned as a full and democratic local of the union. It elected its own officers, chose its own priorities. Two representatives from the men's local attended the meetings, in what may have been an at times paternalistic, at times organizationally useful liaison relationship. This organizational model lined up with the International's policy of establishing separate women's divisions and locals. What was crucial in the first strike was that despite separate locals, the union fought for joint demands and recognition as a bargaining unit. This was essential around the closed shop.

In the years 1902-1906 management constantly harassed the operators local.

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It refused to recognize the closed shop which the union had ~~in~~ fought to establish. The company routinized the work, introducing intensive monitoring and supervision, isolating workers from each other and making communication difficult. As was typical of the female labour force of that time, many young women left the trade to marry, and were replaced by women who had no experience with trade union and certainly with the intricacy of the previous ~~in~~ strike.

It seems that the men's local did not retain a consistent relationship with the women, who were isolated within a male dominated trade union movement and experiencing constant harassment. Apparently there was discussion of "whipping the operators into shape" and of the ~~in~~ strategic importance of the women being unionized. In any case, ~~in~~ with the assistance of the IBEW Local the auxiliary was reshaped. The existence of separate locals became a problem as the union moved into its second strike. Men were not really conscious of the pressures exerted by the company against their sisters. The company apparently saw the women's desire to organize as a threat to its management rights; it sought to entice women with courtesies, lounges and a "family ideology" rather than ~~the~~ the right to a union. Operators were forced to sign an agreement stating that they would not join a ~~union~~ ^{union} or be fired. This so enraged the women that they went to the men's local for assistance. The union had, unfortunately not enforced its closed shop agreement for the operators. The men fully supported the women but on the basis of union recognition, not on the basis of a closed shop and joint bargaining unit.

There are two interpretations of the ensuing strike. ^{developed} One, ^{by Marie Campbell,} argues that the male unionists failed to support the women and crossed the picket lines, leaving the women vulnerable and forcing a defeat. Sexism defeats the women's determination in this perspective. The other point of view, developed by Elaine Bernard, suggests that the union made a strategic error in not enforcing the joint bargaining unit of both groups of workers and that they underestimated the company opposition to their strike and the length of time that it would take to win the dispute this time. ^{The initial economic power of} ~~the operators had diminished with the despoiling of their jobs.~~ ~~these~~ ^{indeed failed} ~~is~~ poor tactics ~~indeed failed~~ the women, but tactics in part deriving from tradition

14. Women in B.C. Unions

al practices of craft organization and ^{sexist} attitudes ^{which saw women's work & union identities as} ~~separate from the interests of male workers.~~

When the workers struck on Feb. 22, 1906, twenty craftsmen and thirty-four operators hit the bricks. The company was prepared for the conflict and hired strikebreaker. Business interests unified ~~up~~ against the strikers this time, industrial relations had grown up in B.C. and the bosses understood on ~~which~~ side their bread was buttered. The international vice-president of the region supported the strike. The VILC and one newspaper supported the operators. ~~_____~~
~~_____~~ The women and men stayed out through the ~~the~~ spring ~~and~~, summer and most of the fall. By November the linesmen began to return to work. The operators had lost their strike ~~_____~~ and their jobs. It would take over ten years for ~~_____~~ the local to be rebuilt. ~~_____~~

Other groups of working women organized at this time. From 1902-1904 the Retail Clerks Association gained seventy-two members, but ~~_____~~ eventually disbanded. The Shirtwaist and Laundryworkers International Union ^{of Vancouver} was active from 1902-1903, fighting strikes at several laundries to win closed shop agreements. The Victoria local struck for back wages in 1905. The majority of the strikers were women and other unionists supported them with donations of food for themselves and their children. This union also disbanded.

The Waitresses and Ladies Cooks Union elected a woman officer in 1903. It was part of the craft union movement. This union had a strong history of opposing oriental labour in the province. While Marie Campbell suggests that this was a result of manipulation by male union leaders, ^{However, anti-orientalism} it may well have been because unionized white women waitresses saw oriental unorganized shops as competing against them and ^{Unfortunately,} undermining their wages. The logic of exclusion, rather than organization may have appealed ~~_____~~ as strongly to white women as male workers when their jobs were threatened. Anti-orientalism was also espoused ~~_____~~ by laundry workers. ~~_____~~ Employers did not hesitate to threaten women with replacement by ^{immigrant workers,} ~~_____~~, who laboured without citizenship rights. ^{*} There is no question that men would be more likely to ~~_____~~ assist in organizing when they shared a trade directly & feared competition & undercutting.

After 1900 there is increased evidence of women workers' organization, with varying strategies emerging. Both ~~industrial~~ ^{industrial} and craft workers supported legislative as well as negotiated solutions to women's low wages and unprotected conditions.

Even when women organized there was an underestimation of the values of women's work. By the 1910's inequal wages between male and female workers had become institutionalized, even in union sectors. Thus, when the Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union won a new contract in 1913, male waiters won \$15-18/week, waitresses \$10-\$12/week and chambermaids only \$25/month, a 17¢/day increase. This was half of a living wage for ~~the~~ that period. The report to the VTLC recognized this settlement as inadequate for the women, but saw ~~it~~ the package as a whole as a ~~victory~~ victory.

However, consciousness about equal pay for women began to emerge in this period, ~~from one hand~~ ^{from one hand} because of the impact of the war, but on the other because of the struggle by women for Minimum wages and decent wages levels in union contracts.

In 1918 in the B.C. Federationist a series of articles expound the importance

of equal wages for women in industry, ~~many~~ many unions supported this in order to protect the interests of soldiers overseas and union men still at work. ^{As well, they recognised that better-paid & would buy products which in turn stimulated further production, guaranteeing} The demand for equal pay for women was one of a set of demands that sought the

of pre-war conditions from industrial conscription and legislated war time conditions.

There is however, a different, more radical stream of thought about women's wages. Writers argue that men and women have the same needs, that women have the same dependents as working men. Women should be paid for the work that they performed. ^{and that it cost a single woman as much to live as a single man.}

Organized women remained a minority within their trades as well as within the labour movement. In 1910 out of 300 women working in ^{Vancouver} hotels, & restaurants, only 13 were present at a union meeting. By August of that year 5 hotels employed union waitresses. The married, female delegate to the VTLC pushed for union hiring, but the union found that there was a great demand for workers than they could supply. ^{In 1914 the waitresses merged with the men's local.}

As well, they recognised that better-paid & would buy products which in turn stimulated further production, guaranteeing the employment of women. Both unions' movement were learning the importance of a "home market".

Women In B.C. Unions 17.

The lack of support for women and their specific needs manifested itself in more concrete ways. Even traditional craft unionists such as the Hotel and Restaurant Sisters made ardent and frustrated pleas for male unionists to assist them in organizing. The domestic workers union pressed for men to increase their level of support for their campaign. ~~_____~~ Helena Gutteridge, who was a very active woman unionist, ~~_____~~ resigned as a women's organizer. She ran into an number of policy disputes with men in the movement; Gutteridge argues that women should be drawn together in a conference to address their needs while male leaders opposed this idea, seeing it as undermining elected representation. They believed that both men and women should form policy on "women's issues", and only if they were elected delegates.

Women were also in a difficult position when determining the type of strategy appropriate for their organization. Industrial ~~_____~~ unionism offered the possibility of semi-skilled and unskilled workers being organized. However, in ~~_____~~ B.C., the industrial were located in work areas where women simply played no role, and often outside of the urban centres where the only jobs for women were to be found. There were strong, ^{vocal} ~~_____~~ women in the industrial movement, women like Sarah Knight from the One Big Union, for example. On the other hand, the more traditional union movement included women like Helena Gutteridge who were hardened fighters for women's rights and craft unions where women had played a role for years, such as the HREU and the Tailoresses. ~~_____~~ *Helena Gutteridge opposed The One Big Union movement and was active in organizing the craft unions against the OBU.* Rather than chose between either model, some women innovated. The Household and Domestic Employees Union ~~_____~~ organized fairly autonomously, though it made use of the labour temple, and asked for financial aid ~~_____~~ from other unions. It posed itself as an industrial union, incorporating cooks, governesses, nursemaids etc., it sought uniform conditions such as 9 hour day, Minimum Wage, the recognition of domestic servants as industrial workers, the creation of a hiring hall for the industry, ~~_____~~ ~~_____~~ also embraced the popular B.C. notion of cooperatives, but adapted this to be a cooperative boarding house.

Women in B.C. Unions 10.

The women fought hard to win recognition of women's domestic work as valuable to society, arguing that the home had a tremendous impact on the community. They also supported the right of married women to receive fair wages and be employed. No surprisingly they sought both organization but also legislative protection, a recognition of the isolated conditions of domestic workers and the need for standards.

The dependency on family structure undoubtedly played an important role in determining women's activity. If fathers permitted and even encouraged young women to be active in a union, then a major barrier was removed. Interestingly, because so many young women lived at home and contributed to the family income, fathers saw higher wages for girls as being in their interest as well. Whatever their attitude towards working women in general, there was clear support from union fathers for minimum wages for women.

Said elsewhere

Women were critically involved in miners' strikes. While women did not work in any capacity in mining towns, they understood well what it was to administer a household on meager wages, and even worse, to lose a husband, father or brother through accident. The structure of mining communities was more stable than the lumber camps of this early time, this community identity lent itself to union organization. Mining unions were quick to establish auxiliaries or branches of the Women's Labour League. In the 1912-1914 strike on Vancouver Island, women supported their coal miner husbands ardently, participating in attacks on scabs and company thugs.

A number of factors dominated this period. The unions were confused in their orientation to women's unionism: some chose paternalism or exclusion, others genuinely supported women workers. Men controlled much of the access which women had to unions: traditional ideas of women's place and lack of organizational competency were strong; women deferred to male experience and authority, the unions were a new terrain for them; women were isolated numerically within the labour movement. Women faced harsh employers in their fight to organize. Turnover amongst women was extremely high because women only worked when young and single, thus unions required constant rebuilding.

Women in B.C. Unions 19.

attention to maintain. Women fought again and again for the most basic of demands: decent wages, union recognition and a closed shop. Men and women unionists had different interpretations of the same demands: equal pay for women meant a living wage and respect, for men it meant protection of other men's jobs. Legislation was both a positive vehicle for women, but one when substituted for organization left women with little more than paper protection. Unions relied too much on middle class women as spokespeople for working class women's needs. Women were hit hard in ^{periods} ~~periods~~ of recession because of their position in the labour market, this in turn undermined organization because of competition for scarce jobs. Once organized women were militant and willing to saty out until they won, as evidence by both the telephone workers and laundry workers' strikes. When women did organized themselves (HDEU) it was usually in exclusively female sectors. Important innovations in how to effectively organize women developed out of this process. Where ~~unions~~ unions did exist where women worked there were weaknesses in the approach to women; organization, for example the structure of the IBEW versus the needs of the women, ~~unions~~ ~~unions~~. No matter what barriers existed, women were heroic in their struggle to organize against violent opposition from employers and discomfort from trade union brothers.