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♀ and work in BC: conditions

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It was a small and isolated group of women who worked in the early days of this province. Women entered the work force later than their sisters in the Central Eastern provinces and did so in far less concentrated numbers. In the former area, women were a consistent part of the workforce from the 1880s onwards. In Toronto, for example, by 1875, women made up three quarters of the workers in the garment industry. The B.C. economy was based on resource extraction, with a notable dearth of ~~light industry~~ light industry, a traditional source of women's jobs. As industries grew and working class consumers developed, service sector jobs began to open for women. The early gold rush provided the first non-domestic jobs for women and the opening of the railroad, construction, mining and forestry provided, albeit indirectly, the possibility of additional work.

Repetitive

From its early beginnings, the BC economy has been resource-based. ~~The BC economy was dominated by~~ ^{beginning} Large companies dominated the economic terrain, ^{especially in mining + construction} requiring an unskilled and semi-skilled labour force and the need for specialized trades.

At the turn of the century B.C. still resembled a frontier; men dominated both the population and the economy. ^{Workers in} Railroad construction and forestry were ~~organized~~ organized

isolated in a male ghetto of work camps. Jobs for women were relegated to urban areas, where commerce & communications networks served hinterland industrial regions.

In 1891 women made up only 4.4 per cent of B.C.'s labour force; expanding to 8.07% by 1911. Given the economic terrain, it is not a surprise that the majority of ~~women~~ women who worked were domestics; this sector employed a higher percentage of women than in other provinces. The other categories which employed proportionately more women were skilled women's ^{"professions"} such as nursing, teaching, and stenography.

~~The~~ ^{This} dependency on the export of resources provided a guaranteed ^{vaccine} for economic instability. ~~This~~ Combined with the seasonal nature of many sectors, such as fishing and forestry, ^{this} created an episodic labour climate. Women ~~experienced~~ ^{experienced} economic fluctuations in numerous ways. Women provided part of the labour force ~~as~~ as seasonal workers, in fish canneries and the agricultural sector. At the same times, service jobs could fall dramatically

Fluctuating economy

with the business cycle, wither because industrial workers could not afford to consume in retail stores or cafes employing women or because firms such as laundries dependent on industrial contracts, or wealthy employers could no longer afford to pay women's wages. Women's employment ~~rose~~ in B.C. as the demand for workers as a whole ~~grew~~, but within this gradual increase there ~~was~~ ^{were} relative declines.

In both the depression of the 1890s and of 1905, ~~women's employment opportunities~~ for women diminished. Wage gains made by women in boom times (1910) evaporated as the female labour ~~market~~ glutted and women competed against each other for work.

The female labour market filled easily. When jobs were scarce women competed not only against ~~their~~ ^{to} employed workers but faced further competition from women at home who might seek work during a depression. When other work failed and women returned to domestic service, despite its low wages and prohibitive ^{the} hours. The price of domestic work was ~~low~~ ^{low} cyclically depressed, not because the work was deskilled but purely because it ~~was~~ an employers' market.

While most women were isolated in the female ~~job~~ ghetto, some shared a trade with men, for example bookbinding or tailoring. Women competed at times for the same work for lower ~~wages~~ rates, as low as one third to one half of the male rate. Vancouver and Victoria tailoresses eventually joined the union to fight for equal pay between the sexes. Men who they worked with ~~did~~ ^{saw} it as important to include women in their union so that their employment could be regulated and competition decreased.

There were many more men than women residing in British Columbia in this early period. There was this increased pressure on women to marry, thus there were fewer older single women in the labour force. *paragraph continues*

This group has been identified as historically keen on ^{promoting} union organization because they have a ~~an~~ long term interest in improving working condition and wages. The low numbers of such women in the province may have effected women's work ~~identities~~ identities and therefore unionization. There were a smaller number of women in the workforce due noth to population and marital status. Prohibitions against married women working did not relax until the Population distributin effected women's ~~careers~~ careers, 1920s. Women who lived outside of urban areas were often married. Both ~~the weight of domestic work,~~ attitudes ~~and~~ a lack of jobs for women kept most of these women outside of the labour force. The majority of women who worked were young. They sought marriage as a ~~way~~ means out of unclean and unhealthy working conditions and a life of low wages. Women who were young and single lived at home, their eages were essential to their family's economic survival. Employment as a domestic releived the family of thier support as well as providing a limited income to women. The close family structure also meant that attitudes towards women's working and unionization were important in determining women's labour activy. There is certainly evidence of family support for female unionism. for example, in early minimum wage debates, union fathers stood up and demounced the low wages and long hours entailed in thier daughters' employment. Married women ^{only} ~~only~~ worked or the if a tragedy struck their home, in the form of widowhood, serious illness ~~or~~ of a spouse. In 1911 in B..C. some 51.5% ^{women} of workers in the province were single, most of these were between the ages of 15-24. ALthough more married and ~~divorced~~ divorced women entered the workforce in the early twentites, ~~with~~ some 90% of women in the workforce remained single. This trend would contnue until World War II.

~~(A) (D)~~
 Bryan Palmer suggests that working life had a direct impact on the ways that family life was organized, both in terms of resources (economic, etc. 0

(4)

and structure (frequency of contact for example). These effects would be most evident when entire families were employed in an industry, or when separation was required for survival, such as the case of young ♀ who hired out as domestics. The commonly held belief that ♀'s place was the home meant that their workforce involvement was seen as secondary, ^{↓ supplemental.} when combined with the view of men as wage earners, this provided a strong rationale for low

wages for ♀, for they worked after all for "pin money". ^{maybe rather} Close family ties meant that family attitudes towards a woman's rights to work + to organize would affect her ability to be active in both work + in union.

The growth of workers wages + social reform of the 1920's was both a result of ongoing pressure from the organized labour + political movement + a realization by capital of the need for home markets. The working class family, according to Evans, became increasingly geared to consumption. ^{Despite higher wages, the majority of Canadian workers continued to earn (below) \$1000/year, well below the poverty line.} While domestic labour remained a heavy burden for ♀,

appliances began to appear on the market. Decreased hours of work probably helped ♀, who were both homemakers + workers

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to survive in the labour force, thus the beginning tend to married & divorced & entering the workforce, partly to fill newly created service jobs.

Conditions of f's work

Women workers faced 2 distinct sets of problem in the ways their workplaces structured the work experience.

f experienced either extreme fragmentation, isolated in small shops, offices or homes, under strict paternalistic (or in the case of domestics, maternalistic) supervision. f were forced, at worst, to toil at home or in others' homes. It was hard to locate one's co-workers. Alternately, f found employment ^{with} in

large corporations, for example telephone companies. Women's work was subject to ^{"Taylorism", that is} constant technological change & deskilling

& monitoring. The modern office was "a highly rationalized office in which deskilled jobs were defined as suitable for f's ^{Phillips} work."

The central expense for both small employers & large industries was f's wages, thus f encountered such intense rationalization;

29b

Consumer goods production, communications and service ~~sectors~~ employing women grew in the 1920's as union workers gained higher wages from corporations who had realized the importance of the domestic market. While women's job opportunities grew, the rationalization, and deskilling ~~of~~ of women's jobs also increased. Unionism was inhibited in offices ~~of~~ of telephone companies ~~where~~ where every word and gesture was monitored and sped up. On the other hand, the nature of some service work, such as ~~waitressing~~ waitressing for a working class clientele in cafes, opened avenues of communication for women through daily contact with ~~union~~ union men. One woman talked of gaining her union consciousness during the 1925 longshoremen's strike. ~~The~~ The cafe owners where she ~~worked~~ worked as a waitress served scabs- union men came in and through discussing the key issues in the strike convinced ~~her~~ her to cut off their service.

Common / Concl 5.

The fluctuating demand ~~for~~ for women's labour combined with women's limited experience in the workplace, and experience dependent on lifecycle as well as economic cycle, ^{This well} may ~~well~~ have ~~limited~~ limited the development of a committed work identity amongst women.

the ways

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speedup of work; an unprecedented hostility to new organization
This latter factor also stemmed from the fact that their employers
were male + accustomed to female subordination. The notion
that ♀ would organize was a direct challenge to this authority,
although ^{BC} men; ♀ shared employment by large, anti-union
companies, their conditions of work differed. Star Rosebud
sums up ♀'s work ^{in this period} location as "scattered, fragmented, no
space to congregate, no access to public life, no transportation
to work, no childcare + long hours of work.

In B.C., with a few exceptions, male; female workers experienced
an extreme separation as to where & how they worked. In some
jobs ♀ + men shared work force (domest, govt) but ♀ were
strictly relegated to the bottom rungs of the work hierarchy. This
separation led to a general lack of imagination on ♂'s parts
as to the conditions of women's work; the ^{specific} relevancy of unionization
to ♀.

⑦

Wage differentials between ♀ and men are an early feature of the Canadian labour market, with lower rates for ♀ rationalized by the age-old primary responsibility of ♀ for the home. The labour market was structured in descending order, beginning with craft workers, on to labourers, then ♀ + children (although ♀ sometimes earned the boys' rate). ♀ earned one tenth that of craft workers, in many instances. Discrepancies existed in union agreements as well, for example, in the HPEU in 1913 chambermaids earned \$25/mth, well below minimum survival rates; male waiters earned from \$60 to \$75/mth.

From ^{the days of} early waged work for Canadian ♀ the rationale that "brothers + fathers help ♀ live" served employers. ^{of the garment industry,} In an 1895-6 survey conducted by The Knights of Labour employers freely admitted paying as little as \$1.50 to 3.00 week to ♀ in sweatshop. Ethnic minorities experienced particularly harsh wage discrimination, but even the best-paying employers ^{paid} whitest workers earned all of \$5/wk.

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Manned ♀ took work home, to perform between domestic duties, & because of social prohibitions against their employment; They earned even less. Learners hired on at a lower rate, losing their jobs when the training period ended. Employers swore at ♀, forced them to wait for work, to work Saturday afternoons. Workers fainted from the pace of piece work. The Technological change hit the cigar industry with the introduction of the cigar mould in about 1888. Skilled men lost their jobs to ♀ and children. Employers proudly admitted beating ^{& humiliating} their workers to implement work discipline. Similar conditions existed in Vancouver. In 1902 the Vancouver Tice heard reports of The Millinery House on Cordova street where ♀ seamstresses worked for one year as unpaid apprentices. In 1902, the prevailing wage for ♀ clerks was \$2⁰⁰/month.

Between the years 1900-1921 Vancouver workers tried to keep

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pace with runaway inflation. Changes in work methods brought increased productivity but wages at times fell. When they rose they did so far behind the rate of inflation.

Falmer(?)

(yr?) 1918?

The Local Council of Women, themselves often employers of domestics & tied into ruling interests in B.C., estimated a living wage for a woman at \$7.50/week, that is \$5.00 for room & board, ^{interest on} ~~con~~ fare,

laundry & clothing. This figure was well below that estimated by

(Telephone operators, who were highly paid for \$, earned all of \$8.00/week in 1906 & had to conform to a strict & expensive dress-code & maintain excellent health.)
women as required for their survival. The Council dropped this figure to

\$5.00 per week as a submission to the Minimum Wage Board. Most

women, in fact, earned below the minimum. In the 1920s \$1200 - \$1500/year

was necessary for a family of 4 to survive. Eighty % of women earned

Falmer

below \$1000/year, as did 60% of Canadian working men.

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Telephone workers: conditions

When telephone service began in BC in the 1880s the Burrard Inlet & New West Telephone Co. first hired young boys to serve as both operators & messengers. Exchanges were located in stores.

As the service expanded, the company chose to hire ♀

instead. The youths were rude & playful, while the ♀ were

willing to work ^(long & hard) without pay for training + status of the job +

for the same \$ as the boys. An operating job was soon seen

as prestigious and socially valued work for young ♀.

As the telephone spread + subscribers grew in numbers the

work was more regulated. Monitoring enforced speed-ups +

a community connection w/ city operators disappeared.

The company brought in strict behavior codes for ♀ + ♀ continued

(an 8hr day w/ split shifts)

to work without sick leave, for low wages or none if trainees.

Management, in this sector, was viciously resistant

(11)

to organization. Most important to the company: waste ability to "manage", to retain control of technological change + training. It used constant reorganization of the workplace & a heavy dose of paternalism to attain this end. *

Operators were young (17-24) able to work under extreme discipline, educated, often with no previous work record, tall enough to reach the switchboard and in good health. Their training required memorizing 9600 phone facts & worked out responses to customers. This group so that they could wear the heavy headpieces, moved out of the workplace rapidly, taking their places in the ranks of married ♀.

* Elaine Bernard suggests that the companies pioneered the use of Taylorism, or scientific management, in B.C., that is the division of mental & physical tasks into simple, repetitive actions, allowing for continuous monitoring, speedups + increased productivity. There were contests, ^{the ongoing} compilation of statistics, & monthly reports on each operator.

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(12)

Laundry workers toiled in hot, unbearable conditions for low wages, standing all days

Many of the ♀ employed were immigrants. By 1914 there were over 700 women working in laundry on heavy machinery for a 9 hour day, earning at the most \$9/wk.

Domestic service was a low status occupation for ♀, despite ^{real} the level of skill needed to be a nursemaid, governess, cook or housekeeper. The women were constantly on the run, responding to employers' demands, working fourteen or more hours a day.

They lost wages if goods were broken. Instead of wages

women received room + board. They were ^{thus} unable to save enough money to leave domestic service + look for more lucrative work.

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recession, because ♀, thrown out of other service occupations

As well, agencies such as The Salvation Army brought in ^{women to work in domestic service,} immigrants would glut the domestic market. For example, in 1913, domestic

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Women made up the majority of B.C.'s teachers well into the 1930's.

Teachers earned low wages that failed to rise to meet inflation;

insufficient training; lack of tenure & disrespectful treatment

by employers. The ~~Administrators~~ Administrators excluded teachers

from school management & the formation of educational policy.

Teachers experienced constant external regulation & examination by

officials. While perceived as a profession, teaching was a low-

status, poorly rewarded job. ♀ teachers did not earn equivalent to

men in the field & were often relegated to one room schools

According to Rolf Knight, Indian ♀ began working in B.C.'s

fish canneries as early as 1870, providing the majority of

cannery workers until the 1890's, & continuing to dominate

operations north of the Fraser River throughout this early period.

Canneries would hire both Indian ♀ & 1st shoreworkers & their

husbands as fishermen. The cannery work system was

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The most developed form of factory production employing BC women.

Native + non-white immigrant ♀ found work as migrant labourers in hops fields, fruit picking + berry-picking, also working in canneries which processed these crops. Indians At Work

These ♀ faced a double stigma as workers. Racism in British Columbia was profound, with intensive colonization of native culture by white society and tremendous hostility & fear against oriental workers expressed by ^{the} white working-class & its organizations. This meant that non-white ♀ faced direct exclusion from unions which already questioned the validity of organizing ♀. It was only when their own communities organized that was forthcoming. The Enemy That Never Was

Women workers in general faced long hours, split shifts, a lack of control of their work environments, intensive supervision, competition for their jobs, high turnover & low wages.