

1900-2000

A CENTURY OF WOMEN AND WORK



A companion booklet to
 "A Century of Women and
 Work" Art Exhibit
 Sponsored by the Ontario
 Federation of Labour and
 the Workers Arts and
 Heritage Centre

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A Century of Women and Work is a joint project of the Ontario Federation of Labour and the Workers Arts and Heritage Centre. The project consists of artwork from 10 Canadian women artists and an accompanying booklet on the history of Ontario women and work. Together, these efforts bring to life the past 100 years of women's transformation of their work and their world.

- To reserve the art exhibit, please call the Workers Arts and Heritage Centre at 905-522-3003 x 22. For more information visit: www.wahc-museum.ca.
- To order copies of the booklet "A Century of Women and Work", please call the Ontario Federation of Labour at 1-800-668-9138. For more information visit: www.ofl.ca.

This booklet is dedicated to generations of Ontario working women who refused to take “No” for an answer. It is not meant to be a complete history of women’s long struggle for equality. Rather, we encourage others to use what we have presented as a starting point and to add to it.

A Century of Women and Work is a collective effort of many unions, activists and organizations whose contributions have produced a work that evokes both pride in our past and captures our resolve to fight for the future.

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Sue Brown, Ontario Public Service Employees Union

Leah Casselman, President, Ontario Public Service Employees Union

Christine Collins, Public Service Alliance of Canada

Lindsay Foley, OFL Vice-President, Youth

Sharon Hambleton, OFL Vice-President, Persons with a Disability

Linda Haslam-Stroud, President, Ontario Nurses' Association

Heather Kelley, International Association of Machinists

Marie Kelly, United Steelworkers

Rhonda Kimberley-Young, President, Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation

Elaine Mac Neil, First Vice-President, Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association

Kim Marshall, International Association of Machinists

Janice McClelland, Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union

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Candace Rennick, Canadian Union of Public Employees

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Carrol Anne Sceviour, OFL Women's Issues Director

Pam Frache, OFL Education Director and Project Coordinator

Introduction

A Century of Women and Work

Years ago nurses were little more than indentured servants and women teachers, for whom poverty was ever present, had to quit their jobs when they married. These women, and the telephone operators, women in the garment industry and the manufacturing sector, in health care, education, the public sector and civil service, and those who did office, domestic, and industrial work, were exploited (as millions still are) as cheap and expendable labour by governments, employers and captains of industry.

For the re-writers of history who are fond of making the past kinder and gentler and who view progress as inevitable, the story of this most profound social and economic revolution should serve as a reminder that there is absolutely nothing inevitable about progress. Every single social and economic gain—for over 100 years—has cost women dearly.

The progress women in Canada have made—including the hard-fought-for permanent access to the paid workforce—represents a triumph. So too does the 1988 decriminalization of abortion and birth control. It was a magnificent moment in Canadian women's history and followed long and arduous decades of struggle to control our own bodies. Women have fought for and won paid maternity leave, equal benefits and pensions for those in same-sex relationships, the right (but not the fact) to workplaces free of discrimination and harassment that is based

on race, gender, abilities, sexual orientation, gender identity, and the recognition of equal pay; in so doing, we have expanded our choices to live and love as we choose. And these are but a few of our achievements.

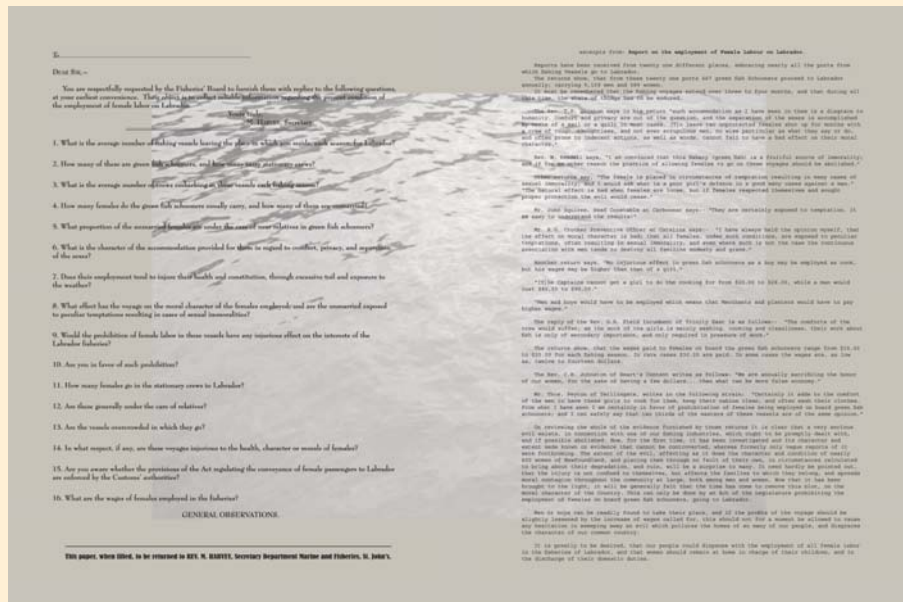
They represent accomplishments in the face of resistance and speak to women's courage, the risks they took, and their collective determination to change their dangerously subservient position in society. *A Century of Women and Work* is the story of women's aspirations and the transformation they themselves wrested from resistant and equally determined employers and governments.

To the younger generations of women who are not yet in the workforce, our message is a simple one: Take nothing for granted. History can unfold in many different ways. The women who came before us forced it to unfold in a way that is assumed to be normal, but remember, nothing, absolutely nothing, has ever been "given" to women. We have fought hard through generations for the gains that we have made.

On this International Women's Day, 2007, we celebrate the vitality, creativity and courage of our grandmothers and great-grandmothers and their collective accomplishments. We have won. We have lost. But we have always fought. In doing so, generations of working women have created a different—and better—future for daughters and sons, and for their children.

'TIS A TERRIBLE TALE OF TOIL: STORY OF OPPRESSION

From *The Toronto Daily Star's* 1894 exposé *Toiling Tailoresses Earn Starvation Wages*



Marlene Creates

"The females are better than two males in many cases, and not half the expense."

24" x 36"

Photography and found text (digital printing, laminated and mounted)

1900s

**“The females are better than two men in many cases,
and not half the expense.”**

The text in this work is drawn from historical documents from 1900-1901 regarding the employment of female labour on fishing schooners that traveled seasonally from Newfoundland to Labrador. These documents, found in the Maritime History Archive at Memorial University, reflect the attitudes, perspectives, and beliefs of their time.

Even so, it seems remarkable that in 53 pages of questionnaires, responses, reports, memorandums, charts, letters, and resolutions, there is no evidence that anyone asked the “females” what they thought of their working conditions and accommodations on board the vessels, or if there would be any “injurious effects” on them if female labour was prohibited. The enquiry was only concerned with “injurious effects” on the interests of the Labrador fishery. Indeed, the questionnaires that were sent—to clergymen, schooner owners, Preventive Officers, and the Societies of United Fishermen—were all printed with the salutation DEAR SIR.

My amazement doubled when I found that the solution proposed by the Fisheries Board was not to improve quarters for women and girls on the vessels, but to prohibit women and girls from working on them. Many respondents, though, opposed this measure. Why? Because: “cheap female labour is required” and “the fishery cannot pay a man to do a girl’s work”.

Marlene Creates

'TIS A TERRIBLE TALE OF TOIL: STORY OF OPPRESSION

From *The Toronto Daily Star's* 1894 exposé *Toiling Tailoresses Earn Starvation Wages*

A woman's place is in the home ... The weaker but more virtuous sex ... Subservient to men ... Working for pin money ... Biding her time until she finds her true calling of marriage and child rearing ...

The powerful and popular ideas about women—and what we should be doing with our lives—made it easy for the new industrialists and employers to define us as cheap and expendable labour and pay us accordingly.

We could not vote. We could not run for office. Abortion was illegal and so was the distribution and advertising of contraception. Divorce laws often made it impossible to escape abusive marriages. Married women remained under the power and control of their husbands, as did their children.

A combination of racism and sexism produced even harsher realities for racialized women.

Aboriginal women saw their children stolen from them and forced into the 64 residential schools created by the despised *Indian Act* of 1876. Regulations and policies made their birthright dependent on whom they married, and Band Council governments were created in which only men could vote and be elected—a severe departure from the traditional matrilineal organization of many First Nations societies.

Canada's overtly racist policies (slavery in Canada was only abolished in 1833) extended to immigration and produced a population that was almost 90 percent British and French ... and white, and Christian. If British Isles immigrants weren't available, other whites were sought. Black, Jewish,

and Asian peoples were among the least preferred.

Black women were left with little other choice than to work as domestic servants to help support the family. Aspiring nurses and teachers and other professionals trained at segregated black colleges in the United States, and once there, many did not return.

The prevailing laws and ideas about race and gender restricted women's opportunities for paid employment, seriously depressed wage rates, and produced the numerous ghettos of women's work that remain with us today.

WOMEN AS SERVANTS

The paid work available for women was restricted to jobs that were seen as an extension of women's work in the home. In fact, much of Canadian immigration in the 19th and early 20th century was aimed at ensuring an ample supply of female domestic servants.

Of the top ten occupations for women listed by the Department of Labour, domestic service topped the list at 41 percent of the female work force. It was grueling, low-status work. The long workdays, exhausting physical labour, lack of privacy, often squalid living conditions in the attics and basements of wealthy employers, and social isolation contributed to an emerging shift in women's paid employment as many looked to the new jobs opening up in factories, shops, and offices, or moved into caregiving professions such as teaching and nursing.

1904 I.A. of M Journal on the acceptance of Miss Nellie T. Burke as the first female machinist

The International Association of Machinists has long held as one of its fundamental principles—and it is a good trade union principle—that a woman should receive the same pay as a man when she renders similar service. In other words, no discrimination shall be made against women in the way of wages when she does the same work and as good work as a man. Her sex shall be no barrier to her progress.

STARVATION WAGES, HARSH WORK, RESTRICTED EMPLOYMENT

As our grandmothers and great-grandmothers began entering the paid workforce in the 1900s, women's pay rates were locked in at approximately half the pay rates of men.

The textile and clothing industries were the second largest employers of women. By 1871, in Toronto for example, women and children held 75 percent of garment industry jobs. The sweatshops, homes and small workplaces that developed to service this major industry were so notorious that a series of newspaper exposés were published and contributed to some of the first attempts to organize primarily women workers.

Where women had sufficient bargaining power, they were sometimes able to assert themselves to improve their wage rates and working conditions. One of the first recorded strike actions for a 55-hour work week took place at the Toronto Carpet Factory in 1902.

This was a remarkable action at the time and provided inspiration for other working "girls". In 1909, the independent Cloakmakers Union—a forerunner to the International Ladies Garment Workers Union—formed in Toronto. Ten years later, these women workers launched a strike for the 44-hour work week and for higher pay.

In 1907, 400 Bell Telephone operators walked out in protest over the employer's efforts to increase the daily hours of work and cut their hourly rates. The operators—all women—worked in incredibly stressful and often dangerous conditions. Each operator was responsible for 80 to 100 lines and handled 300 calls an hour, often stretching atop stools to reach their assigned plugs. The long distance lines frequently gave operators convulsion-inducing electric shocks.

As a result of the operators strike, city labour councils across the country began campaigning for payment to workers injured on the job. By 1920, most provinces had some scheme for Workmen's Compensation. Though the new laws referred only to "workmen", it was the young women strikers of 1907 that kick-started one of the most important advances made by the labour movement.

In the next decade, their sisters in Manitoba would be the first of 40 unions to join the solidarity call for the Winnipeg General Strike.

The Toronto Daily Star, Jan. 1894

Oppressive work, starvation wages

Further Revelations of the Evils of the Sweating System
— An investigation of Another Branch of Work in Which
Women are Extensively Engaged – The Low Prices Paid
and Excessive Hours of Work

The Toronto Daily Star, Jan. 13, 1894

"Must have organization"

"It is not justice that because a few poor women are in extreme poverty and consequently are glad to get a little work, if only for the barest possible existence, the whole of the trade should be reduced to that low level."

The Toronto Daily Star, 1894 Front Page

Their union booms

The Organized Tailoresses to Hold an Open Meeting
The Tailoresses' Protective Union held a very successful meeting in Temperance hall last night. A number of new members were initiated, and it was decided that the next meeting should be an open meeting, and to invite the members of the sister organizations of bookbinders, shoe-workers and Women's Union League to be present.

1010-1920

EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK

Generally speaking women wage earners are not convinced that the principle of higher pay to men as bread-winners works out justly. 1916 Report of Ontario Commission on Unemployment



Karen Tam

Rex vs. Quong

36" x 48"

Paper cutout

1910s

Rex vs. Quong

My work has always dealt with the history of the Chinese in Canada and has sought to raise awareness about their contributions to and the hardships they encountered in this country. I explore how the Chinese Canadian restaurant becomes a site for identity (mis)perceptions between Western and Chinese cultures.

While researching governmental restrictions on Chinese laundries, groceries, and restaurants in the 19th and early 20th centuries, I created *Rex vs. Quong* as my response to the 1912 enactment of the White Women's Labour Law by the government of Saskatchewan. It prohibited "any Japanese, Chinaman or other Oriental person" from hiring a "white woman or girl," and the governments of Manitoba, Ontario and British Columbia followed suit.

Quong Wing, who had become a "naturalized citizen" in 1905 and operated the C.E.R. Restaurant in Moose Jaw, had employed two "white" female waitresses prior to the statute. Quong's "Chinese-ness" and the definition of a "Chinaman" were debated and he was ultimately prosecuted. While the statute was enacted to minimize interracial social contact and to protect "white" businesses from competition, it was shocking to discover that the Supreme Court of Canada upheld and legalized racism and sexism. The statute was repealed in 1969.

Karen Tam

EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK

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Even as women were becoming a permanent part of the workforce, the *1916 Report of the Ontario Commission on Unemployment* expressed the “positive hope” that women would not stay in paid employment for too long.

Although the war years created more opportunities for work, black women still faced monumental obstacles to landing even temporary employment. In reality, segregation existed. There were always understandings, not only about the neighbourhoods in which black people could live and work, but also which schools they could attend. The 1850 law that created separate Catholic schools also facilitated the creation of separate black schools; the last one did not close until the 1960s.

Exploited by factory and business owners, governments, well-to-do employers of servants, school boards, hospitals and others, women took up the limited employment opportunities on offer and in so doing, began to re-shape their work—and their world.

EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK

The woman factory operative often becomes a waitress in a summer hotel, and women teachers are sometimes engaged in picking fruit in summer.

—1916 Report of Ontario Commission on Unemployment

Beyond factory and office work, teaching and nursing were the two main “professions” available to women, since these areas conformed to society’s predominant view of women as child-minders and care-givers. In fact, from 1891 to 1921, teaching ranked third on the list of leading occupations for women.

While teaching was thought to be suited to women’s “maternal talents” and “gentle natures”, there was nothing gentle about the profession in the early 1900s. It was rigorous and punishing. For teachers, the long hours, often miserable working conditions, universal lack of respect, school boards’ demands, and societal expectations of self-sacrifice seriously impaired women’s physical and mental health. Like their sisters in the factories, they were viewed as cheap labour and paid much less than male teachers. Women were dismissed if they married or if they engaged in “uncomely conduct”.

The dire consequences of teaching were being publicized as early as 1881 when a Toronto physician addressed the Ontario Educational Association on “the Morbid Results of Persistent Mental Overwork”. He noted that “the proportion of deaths from consumption among teachers was more than twice as high as among skilled workmen ... that the number of women teachers admitted to asylums for the insane was disproportionately high”.

Why are women with the same training and qualifications as men relegated to the less remunerative positions?

—Bertha Adkins, Secretary-Treasurer, at the 1918 inaugural meeting of the Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario

By 1918, there were 11,359 women teachers in Ontario, and all were earning only a fraction of what men made. The issue of salaries was so desperate, especially in 1918 when the cost of living spiked 60 percent from pre-war levels, that women teachers' associations formed a united front, to be known as the Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario (FWTAO).

In 1919, the inaugural meeting of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF) took place, organizing male and female teachers together. Just one year later, in 1920, the following motion was overwhelmingly adopted:

That the principle of equal pay for equal work be formally adopted into the general policy of this federation and that the adoption of this policy be at once made public through the press.

This kind of organizing among teachers was taking place at the same time that the Women's Suffrage Movement—the movement to allow women to vote—was gaining momentum in advancing a new vision of women's equality.

Women teachers were profoundly influenced by this early women's movement and many teachers organizing to improve their wages had also been members of suffrage organizations and other women's groups.

WORLD WAR I: A LESSON TO REMEMBER

Public sentiments about women's role in society have always been influenced by changing economic realities, and attitudes toward women during and after World War I were no exception. Women workers were seen as productive, cheap, and disposable.

Until the mass recruitment for war production began, women remained largely confined to the familiar female ghettos. However, by 1917 women were being actively recruited into almost every trade, where they performed admirably in spite of much shortened training periods.

Despite the domestic hardship imposed on working families by the War, industrialists and business owners were reaping huge profits at the expense of their new workforce. “They are killing us off as fast as they are killing the men in the trenches”, a deputation of women munitions workers told *The Toronto Daily Star* in 1917.

Yet almost as soon as peace was declared, men returned home and women were driven out of the workforce. Powerful social forces marshaled resources to re-assert the ideology that women's true work lay in the tending of home and hearth. Women who wanted to remain in their jobs faced enormous commercial, government and workplace pressure to quit.

Nevertheless, the impact of women in the labour force provided the leverage needed to secure women's right to vote in federal elections.

Between 1916 and 1919, seven of 10 provinces extended suffrage to women and in 1920 the federal *Dominion Elections Act* was finally proclaimed. Yet it was only a partial victory. Aboriginal and Inuit women and men were excluded, as were any groups barred from provincial voters' lists including Asians, “Hindus” and Québécois women.

Excerpts from *The Toronto Daily Star*, July 27, 1917, p. 11

Woman War Workers “Fired” Refused to Work 14 Hours

“They are killing us off as fast as they are killing the men in the trenches”, declared the spokeswoman of a deputation of women munitions workers who came into The Star Office yesterday morning. “We are working six days a week from seven till seven and on Sundays from seven till four, and now they want us to work fourteen hours a day by coming back three nights a week to work two extra hours. We just have half an hour for lunch and half an hour for supper.”

Skin off Hands

“Look at our hands” cried one black-eyed maiden, thrusting out hands blackened with oil and machinery and from which the skin had peeled in big patches. They were all saturated with oil, and told of removing oil-soaked garments at night to replace them in the morning because they had no time for laundry work.

“One of the girls was too sick to come with us”, they said. “She has been working five nights of night work and is just dying on her feet. The oil has got into her system.”

One Dropped Dead

“There was one of us dropped dead on the street car the other day”, said one of the deputation.

“Though they put it down to heart trouble. And I know another who was so tired and dizzy that when she was going home from work she fell off the car and died later. And another the same way that walked right in front of a car and was so badly hurt that she is disfigured for life. I tell you we can’t stand it.”

The Toronto Daily Star, July 27, 1917. Reprinted in: *Women at Work: Ontario, 1850 – 1930*.

“Women during the Great War,” chapter by Ceta Ramkhalawansingh.

To Women Workers –

Are You Working For Love Or For Money?

Are you holding a job you do not need?

Perhaps you have a husband well able to support you and a comfortable home?

You took a job during the war to help meet the shortage of labour.

You have “made good” and you want to go on working. But the war is over and conditions have changed.

There is no longer a shortage of labour. On the contrary Ontario is faced by a serious situation due to the number of men unemployed.

This number is being increased daily by returning soldiers.

They must have work. The pains and dangers they have endured in our defence give them the right to expect it.

Do you feel justified in holding a job which could be filled by a man who has not only himself to support, but a wife and family as well?

Think it over.

Department of Labour, Ontario government archives. Reprinted in: *Women at Work: Ontario, 1850 – 1930*. “Women during the Great War,” chapter by Ceta Ramkhalawansingh.

1920 1930

NEW WORKPLACES, OLD IDEAS



Alex Flores

Mi derecho al voto
(My right to vote)

36" x 36"

Acrylic on canvas

1920s

Women and the Right to Vote

This piece reflects different scenarios in which women were expressing and demanding the right to work and the right to vote. The piece shows different colours with all kinds of different women's signs.

When I think of this painting I smile, because I can express a little part of women's history in a very magical way, which in turn allows me to create even more deeply, visual inventions of this decade.

I want this painting to show women's past vision—when they were fighting for the right to vote; and women's present vision—as we are still fighting for the right to live with dignity all over the world. I hope my painting speaks out through the images it presents.

The different shapes and structures may seem surrealist; this is an aspect of my technique that I love. I like people to think about what they see and in this piece, reflecting on women in the 1920s, I hope that people will see something from the past and something for the future.

Alex Flores

NEW WORKPLACES, OLD IDEAS

Despite the fact that the legal barriers to women's participation in the political structures of Canadian government were crumbling, there were still significant obstacles.

THE "PERSONS" CASE

The first woman judge appointed in 1916 faced an almost immediate challenge to her authority. Citing an 1876 English court ruling that stated: "Women are persons in matters of pains and penalties, but are not persons in matters of rights and privileges," the lawyer argued that no decision coming from her court may bind anyone: "Since the office of the magistrate is a privilege, the current magistrate [a woman] sits illegally".

When this matter was taken to the Supreme Court of Canada in 1928, it agreed that women were not "persons" and women could therefore not be senators. Unwilling to let it go, women successfully appealed to the Judicial Committee of England's Privy Council. In its 1929 ruling the Committee stated that the exclusion of women from public office was "a relic of days more barbarous than ours".

POVERTY IN THE FACE OF PROSPERITY

The 1920s were years of commercial boom in central Canada. The stock market soared, the banking industry expanded, and even the size of government grew as it made use of the new income tax dollars that had been imposed during the First World War.

Despite the setback in the aftermath of the War

years, the new economy expanded women's employment opportunities. The retail sector was a growing industry that recruited and attracted primarily young women who were prepared to work long and arduous hours, at the female (cut) rate of pay. Poverty and misery were anticipated—it was not that employers were unaware; they planned for it:

A certain amount of welfare work is carried on in a few of the larger stores . . . In one instance, such a welfare worker has a special fund in reserve. If a girl looks as if she needed attention, the welfare workers send for the girl to come to her office and studies the case. Frequently the welfare worker comes to the conclusion that better nourishment is required. If this is so, she makes the girl a special allowance for a few weeks to provide a warm dinner in the middle of the days.

—1916 Commission on Unemployment in Ontario

OFFICE WORK: THE NEW PINK COLLAR GHETTO

By 1921 a huge occupational shift had taken place for women. For the first time, more women were in the new category of "Office and Clerical Work", as opposed to "Domestic Service". In Canada, there were 79,000 female clerical workers in what was once a male-dominated occupation.

Employers made use of these workers, but organized new systems to pay less and relegate women to the most menial of clerical jobs. Typing pools were created. Faster work paces were demanded. Productivity was maximized. Strained

necks, hands, and backs became commonplace.

Women were also shunted to the lowest ranks of the civil service. Job openings were classified by sex, with women's employment pegged at much lower rates. Married women were prohibited from holding permanent posts in the civil service. Even so, women did excel—for a while—and many more would have but for deliberate and calculated efforts to bar their way. The “Third Division” in which only routine work was done, was created specifically to block female workers from any hope of a career path. There was no way up—only out, and back to the home, in keeping with the still dominant attitude toward women.

And so, the 15 percent of women in all job categories who were in the paid labour force in 1921, found themselves in the grip of a common work reality.

NURSING: “YOU CAN'T EAT DEDICATION”

In many ways, the story of our sisters who worked as nurses most starkly demonstrates the extreme hardship faced by the still minority of women working outside the home. In addition to teaching, nursing was the other category of work listed as a “profession” available to women.

The history of Ontario hospitals is littered with the shattered lives of nurses. The prevailing wisdom of 1916 that no woman ought to practice nursing longer than twelve years as the risk of great injury to her health. Exposure to tuberculosis and other contagious diseases, long hours of gruelling physical work, living conditions in dormitories that were often squalid, freezing cold and rat infested, made early nursing similar to sweatshops.

By 1914, 96 hospitals had been built in Ontario,

but employment opportunities did not increase correspondingly. Decades before, hospital boards had devised the perfect staffing plan: pay nothing. It was accomplished under the guise of “education.” Scores of hospital training schools were opened whose purpose it was to ensure an ongoing supply of cheap labour—nursing students—for two- and three-years at a stretch. As a result, hospitals had relatively few paid positions available, forcing nurses to rely on hiring pools that were run by private agencies.

As in the situation for teachers, poverty always loomed:

Several of the registries said they did not know how nurses were managing last winter, and spoke of suffering. In two instances, the woman in charge of the registry—in both cases a private registry—said that she was helping a few of the nurses herself.

—1916 Commission on Unemployment in Ontario

In 1925, a report by Edith Johns, a black nurse, detailed horrendous working conditions and multiple levels of racism and exploitation. Her seminal report, *The Status of Black Women in Nursing*, highlighted the long hours, low pay for nurses, and the fact that nursing students were given little formal instruction, but were instead hired out to care for private patients with fees being paid to the hospital. The report emphasized that: “...racial conflict bear[s] heavily on the Negro nurse throughout her training and afterwards...”

The Johns report was followed in 1929 by the Weir Survey on *Nursing Education in Canada*. Echoing many of the themes of the Johns Report, the Weir report recommended that an approved training school should be considered primarily as an educational institution rather than as an economic asset to the hospital. In the report, leading doctors characterized the present standards for student nurses as nothing short of “criminal”.

Canada's 1,000 public health nurses were also faced with low pay, long days and rigours associated with working in isolation and travelling over long distances. But, free of the oppressive hospital environment, they developed an independent spirit. Today, women can point to the 1929 Weir Survey naming public health nurses as the “least agreeable” in the profession and recognize with admiration that the women who took on this work were pioneers who also challenged the ideology of a “woman's place”.

By the end of this decade, the first headway had been made in improving workplace health and safety and pay rates; in shortening the length of the work day; and in moving nursing education out of the hospitals and into the universities.

1930-1940

DETERMINATION IN DESPERATE TIMES

Kathy Kennedy

Turlotage

36" x 36" x 36"

Found radio, audio recording



1930s

Turlotage

An antique radio from 1931 has been refurbished to play three short documentary pieces, each about an outstanding Québec woman of the 1930s. A turn of the dial allows the listener to change from one documentary piece to another so that “all channels” represent the heroines of Québec society from that era.

Madame Thérèse Casgrain helped attain women’s suffrage in Québec in 1941. She hosted *Femina*, a radio show on Radio Canada specifically for women. To tell this story, I used clips from the CBC archives as well as an interview with Mme. Casgrain herself.

Léa Roback was a union organizer in the 1930s and played an important part in the Garment Workers’ strike that had a critical impact on Quebec’s working class history. The Léa Roback centre is now an important Québec resource for addressing issues of social inequality.

Mary Boduc was a Québécoise who became a major recording artist and rose to iconic status through her witty songs that told stories of everyday life. The verb “turloter” refers to an Acadian style of mouth music La Bolduc (as she is now called) broke into during her songs. No matter how hard times were, her advice was to “keep singing”.

Kathy Kennedy

DETERMINATION IN DESPERATE TIMES

The Great Depression, triggered by the New York stock market crash of 1929, produced enormous social and economic upheavals. On top of this crisis, there were also crippling ideologies and powerful forces that further constrained women.

The overtly discriminatory practices of business, industrial, and government employers created a world that defined women as disposable, worth only one-third to one-half of men's wages. Women's work was limited by regimentation and oppressive supervision; there was no upward mobility, jobs were temporary, and working conditions were life-threatening.

The devastation and poverty caused by the Great Depression drove even more women to seek work outside the home to help make ends meet. By 1931, nearly a quarter of a million women were working in Ontario—a 30 percent increase over the preceding decade. At the same time, the percentage of married women in the workforce doubled to four percent. One of the ways women found to avoid public censure was to use their maiden names to secure and keep jobs.

The grinding exploitation of working women and open hostility to married women in the work force, combined with a multitude of legal, political, professional and educational barriers, and no access to birth control made the world harsher and often more hopeless for women. And if this were true for women in general, it was especially so for racialized and ethnic women.

TORONTO DRESSMAKERS' STRIKE, 1931

The garment industry was a pioneer in new and inventive ways to exploit its primarily female and ethnic workforce.

Homework, piecework, and temporary jobs were standard practices. Employers created a reserve labour pool to keep wages down and undermine security; women were worked long hours during peak seasons and laid off at other times.

Factory owners often avoided paying the \$10 per week stipulated by the *Minimum Wage Act* by labeling the work as part-time. Often, girls were forced to accept work that was 30 to 50 percent less than the minimum wage.

When Toronto dressmakers resisted these terrible conditions and took strike action in 1931, the employer resorted to violence. Women strikers were arrested, jailed, and assaulted. The employer even hired a private detective agency (run by an ex-police officer who had been forced to resign) to harass women picketers.

This highly-publicized strike lasted more than two months. Although it did not achieve its short-term goals, this strike brought together women from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds in a collective struggle, forging new attitudes among women and workers.

THE WOMEN OF EMPIRE COTTON MILLS, 1936

With a union, when we return to work, there will be no need to bring kegs of wine, cakes and chicken for the bosses. You won't have to be good looking to get a break.

—Mary Jary, Striker

Discounted Labour: Women Workers in Canada 1870–1939, by Ruth Frager and Carmela Patrias

Working conditions at Empire Cotton were so dangerous and the pay so impossibly low at this Welland, Ontario plant that workers felt more like cattle than human beings. Even Ontario's labour minister denounced the company for its “shameful underpayment and exploitation of workers”. In 1936, more than 800 workers—over half of whom were women—launched a month-long strike.

The strike had a radicalizing effect. The very women workers who had grown up in and been disciplined by the dominant attitudes and expectations of “womanhood” were picketing round the clock, accosting mill supervisors to prevent them from loading textiles onto the trucks, and confronting police who, in turn, attacked them with batons.

In 1937, five thousand striking dressmakers braved sub-zero weather on picket lines in Montreal to demand a 44-hour workweek, wage increases, and union recognition. This strike established Local 262, the largest Canadian Local of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union.

With each strike and job action, won or lost, women were challenging the kind of oppressive views expressed in 1889 at Canada's *Royal Commission on the Relations of Labour and Capital*:

Females and children may be counted upon to work for small wages, to submit to petty exasperating exactions and to work uncomplainingly for long hours.

1940-1950

TAKING ON THE FACTORIES



Cindy Mochizuki

Carry, Lift and Heave

25 ½" x 19"

Ink, watercolour on paper

1940s

Carry, Lift and Heave

During 1940-41 Japanese Canadian women were working in canneries, berry farms and as seamstresses. In World War II, thousands of Japanese Canadians on the west coast were removed from their homes by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and sent to internment camps in the interior. They were released from the camps in 1946 and were uprooted from the west coast with a “choice” to move either east of the Rocky Mountains or to Japan.

This drawing reflects the absence of Japanese Canadian women during the 1940s. By 1942, due to the labour shortage, single women and married women were recruited to take on the jobs that had been left by men going to war. The burden of history is conveyed in the gestures that are expressed by the women in this drawing who are carrying, lifting, and heaving. Seeping through these women are the ghosts of Japanese Canadian women who whimsically evoke a sense of memory and loss.

Cindy Mochizuki

TAKING ON THE FACTORIES

World War II intensified racism, anti-immigrant sentiment and chauvinism in Canada, and laid the foundation for severe restrictions on civil liberties, culminating with the 1942-47 internment of Japanese Canadians. This hostile atmosphere worsened the already harsh working conditions for racial and ethnic minorities, most particularly for Aboriginal people, Asians, Blacks, Jews, and persons from India.

Segregated schools for blacks were still in existence and “gentlemen’s agreements” barred racialized minorities from many workplaces.

Although Ontario’s 1944 *Racial Discrimination Act* stated that racial and religious discrimination would not be tolerated, interned Japanese Canadians were ordered deported in 1945 under the federal *War Measures Act*. The deportation order was not overturned until 1947 and those interned were not permitted to return to their former communities until 1949—but by then their property had been auctioned off. The federal *Exclusion Act* that prevented Chinese and East Asians from voting wasn’t repealed until 1947.

WOMEN AND THE WORKFORCE

By the outbreak of World War II in 1939, working class families in Canada were still reeling from the Great Depression. Yet almost overnight, thousands of Canadian companies profitably retooled for arms and munitions production. The war solidified the fortunes of already wealthy families and moguls, and created the new millionaires of the next decade.

The John Inglis munitions factory was a case in point. Closed during the Depression of the 1930s, it was re-opened by an entrepreneur and retooled to make Bren machine guns used by the Allies. The severe labour shortage combined with mass production techniques and cheap female labour made the hiring of women particularly attractive. The John Inglis munitions factory led the way in the hiring of women workers. Other factories followed suit and during the War years, women’s participation in the paid labour force nearly doubled from 638,000 in 1939 to 1,077,000 in 1944.

This decade also opened up new opportunities for black women. The Ford plant in Windsor, for example, hired its first full-time employees of African descent. Black women began to work alongside white women in munitions plants across the country.

WORLD WAR II AND CHILD CARE

At this time of labour shortages, an obvious barrier to women’s ability to undertake factory work—where women often worked for weeks at a time without a day off—was the absence of child care.

In 1942, the first wartime day nurseries opened in Ontario and Québec as part of a federal-provincial agreement to support women at work.

The nurseries were much more than a place to park children; they were exciting, stimulating centres of learning, with beautiful playgrounds and first-rate programs designed to ensure that children thrived. A new field of early childhood education

Challenging Long Days and Low Pay

In 1946 the Service Employees International Union represented maids and orderlies at the Toronto General Hospital where conditions provided for a 12-hour day with a half day off per week. Wages ranged from \$55 per month for single women (\$65 if married). SEIU bargained the Toronto General Hospital contract which reduced the work week to 48 hours, provided a full day off and increased wages by \$10 per month. These victories paved the way for women at other hospitals to win improvements in their working conditions.

emerged advancing theories of child development that were put into daily practice in the nurseries.

When the government withdrew funding at the end of WWII, Ontario women were furious and reacted forcefully. Mothers' marches, demonstrations, neighborhood organizing, and province-wide protests placed unrelenting pressure on the government. As a result, in March 1946, Ontario became the first province to fund regulated child care. It was a major victory.

EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK

The mass influx of women into the industrial workforce at a time of extensive organizing drives forced unions to address women's demands. Women workers began re-shape the labour movement, emerging as organizers and leaders, taking positions on bargaining and other committees and campaigning for equal pay.

As one woman union organizer at Inglis recalled: "The issue with the women was they did get considerably less at an hourly rate than the men, but they had a production quota system. Now undoubtedly some of the men had this too. But I recall particularly this: as soon as the women's group would reach their quota of production, then the quota would be raised. That was one of the major grievances amongst the women. That made it easier to organize them." In 1943, Inglis workers—the majority of whom were women—unionized with the United Steelworkers of America as their selected bargaining agent.

But winning equal pay was still an uphill battle.

Women members of the United Auto Workers at De Havilland, Massey-Harris and Metallic Roofing all won the right to equal pay in the early 1940s. In

1942, the auto workers in St. Catharines reported that several wage increases were won when an entire line of women walked out of the plant over a wage bonus dispute, and then threatened to do it again. Workers at the new all-female Border City Industries in Windsor conducted the "first sit down strike of their sex" that forced the company to retreat.

But there were defeats as well. In Windsor, a 1942 wildcat strike of 13,500 Ford workers demanding equal pay for 37 women failed to win, although it did get widespread media attention and helped galvanize public opinion in support of the issue.

In 1946, the Ontario Teachers' Federation, the umbrella body for the various teachers' federations, adopted an equal pay resolution. Equal Pay for Equal Work became not just a key demand of women in the 1940s—it became a rallying cry for the major union drives that were underway.

As a result, during the first half of the 1940s, many thousands of unionized women did win their demand to receive pay equal to their male counterparts. These victories improved the statistical earnings of women so that by the end of World War II, women were earning an average of 59.7 percent of men's pay—up three percent from the pre-war average of 56.3 percent. By 1951, the Ontario government would pass the *Fair Remuneration for Female Employees' Act*, which took the first steps in legislating equal pay.

During this decade, women's participation in the workforce reached a high of 33.5 percent in 1944 and then began to fall. Not until 1967 would this peak be reached again.

Eaton's Organizing Drive

Between 1948 and 1952, the United Steelworkers launched a drive to unionize the female workforce of Eaton's department store in Toronto. The drive was led by key women organizers. One of the organizers recalled:

"Some of the places we visited were appalling, they were so poverty stricken. The poorer people were, the more they were afraid, even outside working hours, when we suggested that they join the union. I have crawled into cellars and climbed up to single rooms in attics. They were the people who were the most reluctant . . . they had so little and they didn't want to lose what they had."

Although the campaign was ultimately unsuccessful in winning a union, the employer was forced to spend millions to increase women's salaries and offer them a pension—all this just to stop women from unionizing.

1950-1960

THE ERA OF CONFORMITY AND BACKLASH



Tania Willard

Be a good girl

24" x 30"

Woodcut relief print

1950s

Be a Good Girl

In the 1950s, Indian Residential Schools trained young Native women to become “good working class wives” and workers. Until 1952, the Indian Residential School System had a half-day labour program; it was abolished because of concerns that students were not receiving an education, but were working to meet the financial needs of the school. In an effort to mold Native children into productive members of white, capitalist society (their “salvation”) Residential Schools admonished Native children for speaking their own languages or engaging in their own cultural practices. The last Residential School closed in 1996.

Residential Schools were part of a dark history of racism and genocide in Canada and the negative effects are still felt today.

This sort of gendered work training was not reserved only for the assimilation of Natives. Training schools like the Ontario Training School for Girls were set up to receive young women “in trouble”, those with “loose morals” or other traits that did not fit the mold of a 1950s woman. These schools were filled with girls from poor and working class families as well as Native girls. This piece is about conflicts, spiritual paradoxes, societal expectations and pressures on young women in the 1950s.

Tania Willard

THE ERA OF CONFORMITY AND BACKLASH

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people.

—1948 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights

During World War II, the rallying cry for “human rights” simultaneously called nations to prosecute war and to end it. The 1948 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights codified a new era of “international humanism”; however, a profound disconnection existed between the fundamental ideas it expressed and its application to Aboriginal peoples and racialized communities in Canada. In the 1950s, the century-long genocide of First Nations communities was still in progress and was marked by residential schools, forced relocations, and the destruction of the lives, cultures, and communities of Aboriginal peoples.

Canada’s *Indian Act* perpetuated a twisted combination of racism and sexism. Although women were given the right to vote in band elections, they would lose their status if they married “non-Indians”. In this new era of so-called human rights, the government did not relax its chokehold on First Nations communities and in many cases, it hardened its position.

In 1955, for example, the federal government wondered whether there could be special provisions made to give Indian status to the “illegitimate male child but not the female child of an Indian man and white woman”.

The racism and discrimination that blocked Aboriginal and racialized people from employment opportunities also required monumental efforts from their organizations in pursuit of equality.

In the 1950s for example, the Canadian Negro Women’s Association raised funds to provide scholarships for young black students who showed promise and organized numerous efforts to advance equality, including Black History Month. In 1979, their efforts, along with other organizations, were officially recognized when the City of Toronto officially proclaimed February as Black History Month. In 1995, the House of Commons followed suit.

“NORMALIZING” THE NATION

In the aftermath of World War II, and despite the attention to human rights, women were once again pressured to “normalize” the nation. The stifling domestic climate with its attendant rules, mores and expectations, meant, of course, that women were to strive to be the “queens” of their tiny, perfect worlds.

Women were also called upon to buy, buy, buy.

In fact, the entire post-war economy was invested in the mass marketing of “the perfect woman” with her nuclear family, suburban house, cars, gadgets, and everything else it took to feel like “a real woman”.

Growing workforce productivity during the 1950s reinforced the new consumerism. For women who bucked the odds and remained in the labour force, there were not only technological innovations underway, but also an intensification of labour. So while total manufacturing output increased 48 percent, employment increased by only 11 percent.

Manufacturers and business owners, who in the last decade could use patriotism to leverage super-human efforts from workers, were reluctant to let go of the profits that the heavier workloads represented. Many conflicts in the workplace developed when employers tried to hide cuts to wages and increased workloads by using technological change as a cover. In 1956, for example, 50 women at Firestone Rubber in Hamilton called a work stoppage to protest wage cuts of \$3 to \$4 a day.

HELL, NO – WE WON'T GO!

Many women resisted the attempts to separate them from work. They either needed to work, or wanted to. In fact, married women were breaking free from decades of prohibitions to establish a permanent place in the workforce. In 1941, less than 5 percent worked outside the home, but by 1951, that figure reached 15 percent.

However, it was still legal to discriminate against married women. Most school boards, for example,

had policies forcing women teachers to resign when they married. In 1954, the Ontario Teachers' Federation passed a resolution stating that marriage should not be grounds for the termination of women teachers. It also called for maternity leave.

Won or lost, the strikes, job actions, and demands for equal pay of the previous decade forced the Ontario government to demonstrate a commitment to eradicating discriminatory female wage rates and hiring practices.

The 1951 *Female Employees Fair Remuneration Act* is often referred to as the first equal pay legislation. The Act required that work be identical before a comparison could be affected.

Throughout the 1950s, delegates to numerous Ontario Provincial Federation of Labor (the forerunner of the Ontario Federation of Labour) conventions pointed to serious flaws and a lack of enforcement that compromised the stated intent of the Act.

The *Fair Employment Practices Act* of 1951 was used as a model for future human rights codes. It targeted discrimination in hiring practices as well as in the workplace by establishing fines and a complaint procedure. But it did not apply to domestics employed in private homes. Many of today's bitter realities and constraints for domestic workers are a product of this serious and purposeful omission.

For example, black Caribbean domestic workers were extremely vulnerable to the whims of employers. Restrictive immigration conditions prevented women from leaving their employers. If

they did, they were to be returned to the Caribbean at the expense of the source nation and the entire program could be cancelled. For many of these workers, unregulated hours, isolation, sexual assault and other exploitative behaviours were common experiences. From 1955 to 1961, domestics comprised 44 percent of the 4,219 independent Caribbean immigrants.

The stifling decade of the 1950s—with its laws, regulations and practices that limited women in every sphere, made them subservient to and dependent on men, and compromised their health and human potential—would soon produce a backlash.

The revolution that was coming would materially change the lives of millions of women, their children and grand-children, and the social fabric of Canada.

From the Proceedings of the Eighth Annual Convention of the Ontario Provincial Federation of Labor:

Chartered by The Trades and Labor Congress of Canada

Held in the City of Windsor, Ontario

January 15th, 16th, 17th, 1954

Resolution No. 18 – By Hotel and Club Employees’ Union, Local 299

Toronto, Ontario—Whereas some employers are taking advantage of the present low *Minimum Wage Act* of Ontario.

Therefore be it resolved that the Ontario Provincial Federation of Labor, in Convention assembled in the City of Windsor, Ontario, to seek legislation for a minimum wage of thirty dollars (\$30.00) per week for female employees in the Province of Ontario. (Carried)

Resolution No. 48 – By Shunia Lodge, No. 347, B.R.C.A.

Port Arthur, Ontario—Whereas women are now working in practically every class of occupation as that of men including both mechanical and office work, and

Whereas many of the women are just as skilled and proficient as their contemporary male expert in all classes of work with productions results equal to that of the men, and

Whereas many employers take advantage of the *Female Minimum Wage Act* to reduce their overhead expense of production for their own greedy purpose with no reduction of the price of the commodity to the public;

Therefore be it resolved that this convention of the Ontario Provincial Federation of Labor demand that the Provincial Government enact laws that the male and female employees be paid equal pay for equal work.

Chairman McQuade: Resolution No. 48. Mr. Chairman, your Committee wishes to point out to the sponsors of this resolution and to the delegates present, that as a result of continuing pressure from this and other organizations we were successful in obtaining the legislation sought by this resolution in 1951. The Act is presently in existence.

Bearing that in mind we, therefore, as a Committee, recommend that the resolve of the resolution be amended to read:

“That the Provincial Government enforce the laws, that male and female employees be paid equal pay.”

With that amendment, Mr. Chairman, your Committee recommends concurrence in Resolution No. 48 as amended.

ENOUGH! THE RISE OF THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT



Shelley Niro

Happy Cherry Picker

36 1/2" x 48 1/2"

Acrylic on canvas

1960s

Happy Cherry Picker

In the 1960s most Native American women made their wages at minimum paying jobs, working as seasonal fruit pickers or as domestics. My mother worked at any job she could find.

The painting is called *Happy Cherry Picker* because anything that could be used for the benefit of the family was easily and readily accepted. Every summer women waited in anticipation for the harvest to begin and for the hope of surviving the winter. Surviving the winter was the crucial motivation for accepting such work, since picking offered some security—if only temporarily.

In the same decade as the “Man on the Moon”, “The Pill” and second wave “Feminism”, Native people were still being subjected to the paternalistic dictates of the government, while exploring and asserting our own definitions and our own ability to govern ourselves. As we identify who we are and where we are going, we are caring for our own well-being and being true to our own identity.

Shelley Niro

ENOUGH!

THE RISE OF THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT

The Women's Liberation Movement flourished in the 1960s and was part of a global wave of radicalization. Massive protests against the U.S. war in Vietnam, the rise of the Black Power, Lesbian and Gay Rights and Indian Rights movements were powerful forces that represented a rejection of the ideas and values that had created misery for millions of people around the world.

Medicare became a reality with the 1966 *Medical Care Act*—establishing Canada's universal public health care system. Progressive forces had defeated the fierce and well-funded opposition from the Canadian Medical Association, big pharmaceutical companies and the insurance industry.

The Women's Liberation Movement rocked every corner of Canadian society and, in doing so, fundamentally altered the prospects for future generations. The anger and frustration of being held down and held back for so many decades fuelled mass organizing and protests on university campuses, in workplaces, and on the streets. No institution was spared women's demands for equality.

Between 1965 and 1975, the number of employed women in Canada increased by 79 percent. The number of women union members increased by 144 percent, spurred by the unionization of public sector workers, so many of whom were women.

Both inside and outside the workplace, women challenged fundamental economic relationships and power structures. Abortion and contraception services, health centres, rape crisis services,

shelters for abused women, midwifery, and other desperately-needed services were established and provided by the collective efforts of women's groups. Ending sexism and eliminating women's sexual exploitation were central to the redefinition of "a woman's place".

At the same time, childcare activists pushed the demand for universal childcare to the top of the public agenda. In 1966, as a partial response to this pressure, the newly-created Canada Assistance Plan introduced child care fee subsidies for low-income, Ontario families.

In 1969, Parliament passed amendments to Section 251 of the *Criminal Code*, decriminalizing contraception and allowing some abortions, but only under extremely restricted conditions. Women still did not have the right to control their own bodies.

WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE

Militancy from public sector workers forced governments and employers to recognize and bargain with the newly-created unions, whose memberships were dominated by women. For example, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (formed in 1963) actively organized in municipal, health and education sectors. By 1975, it would become the largest single union in Canada representing the largest number of women.

In 1961, nearly one in three workers were women and almost a third of all adult women were

In 1901, 95 percent of women in the paid labour force were located in the five major occupational groups and by 1961 that percentage had decreased slightly to 85 percent.

in the paid labour force. From 1966 to 1976, the number of unionized women increased by an astonishing 160 percent. By contrast, over the same period, the number of unionized men increased by only 40 percent.

The Public Service Alliance of Canada became the fourth largest union in the country within a mere 12 months of its founding in 1966.

In Ontario workplaces, demands for equal pay resulted in some improvements, but not enough. Unionization was the most effective element in the battle to close the wage gap, but the decades of business and government effort to ensure that women remained a cheap labour source meant that progress was slow. Employers, wedded to the status quo, ratcheted up their resistance.

In 1965, for example, women health care workers (members of the Service Employees International Union) at the Trenton Memorial Hospital braved weeks of strike action in the dead of winter to press their demands. The Ontario government responded with legislation—the *Hospital Labour Disputes Arbitration Act*—that took away the right to strike from all healthcare workers. To this day, arbitrators have the power to impose contracts if the union and management cannot voluntarily agree.

Despite these kinds of action by governments and employers, women and their unions still made crucial gains.

In 1965, nurses marched on Queen's Park, marking an escalation in the fight to unionize, and in 1969, registered nurses went on strike in Hamilton. Their efforts for recognition, and better wages and working conditions would result in the founding of the Ontario Nurses' Association in 1973 when more than 100 nurses' unions with separate collective agreements came together under one banner.

In the mid-1960s, a wave of wildcat strikes were underway, one of which created the Canadian Union of Postal Workers. In negotiations with the Post Office Department, the union won reclassifications—and corresponding wage increases—for 60 percent of part-time workers, many of whom were women.

In 1968, Equal Pay for Equal Work legislation was transferred from the Ontario Human Rights Commission to the *Ontario Employment Standards Act*, with its stronger enforcement mechanisms.

The surge of women into unions also produced demands for promotions

on the same basis as men, paid maternity leave, the elimination of sexual harassment, and improved job security.

Although the proportion of women in the organized labour movement increased from 17 percent to 27 percent between 1966 and 1976, women still faced challenges inside their unions. Women had to challenge long-standing structures and organizational cultures that held them back. Resolutions and debates on conditions affecting women at work, home and in society became top agenda items at union conventions.

Even today, there still exists a prejudice against women working. Strangely enough this prejudice does not extend to occupations which are badly paid and where men do not want to work. These are nursing, waiting on tables in restaurants, clerical work and primary school teaching.

—From the OFL submission to the *Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada*
February 1968

By 1968, a *Royal Commission on the Status of Women* was underway. Many of its 167 recommendations called for profound structural changes that were holding women back from equal status in society. But its release in 1970 also told us what we already knew: that action—not more research and evaluation—was required immediately. Defiance, mass mobilizing and collective action had produced significant change and were our best routes to securing the gains already made—and achieving new ones.

1970-1980

WOMEN AND UNION POWER



Natalie Wood

GNP - Gross Nanny Product

30" x 40"

Deconstructed canvas

1970s

GNP (Gross Nanny Product)

I am exploring the experiences of Caribbean Live-in Nannies / Foreign Domestic Workers who came to Ontario / Canada in the 1970s under the *Temporary Employment Authorization Program*, which became policy in 1967.

There were many abuses under this policy—economic (underpaid and not paid for overtime), physical (expected to do housework and cleaning / cooking) and sexual exploitation. The *Temporary Employment Authorization Program* did not allow these workers to apply for landed immigrant status (unlike the former domestic worker law) and excluded them from the protection of labour laws so they had very little recourse or leverage with those exploiting them. There was even a Conservative minister in the Ontario government—Larry Grossman—whose abuse of his nanny made it into the papers in 1979. Many domestic worker organizations such as Intercede were formed at this time and they took on the fight for these women. Their organizing resulted in changes to the federal policy that culminated in the *Foreign Domestic Movement Program* in 1981. The Foreign Domestic Workers won a victory where it was acknowledged that if they were “good enough to work then they were good enough to stay”.

Natalie Wood

WOMEN AND UNION POWER

On May 11, 1970 for the first time in history, the Parliament of Canada was forced to adjourn its business. Thirty women had chained themselves to the parliamentary gallery in the House of Commons demanding abortion rights. The more than 500 women outside refused to disperse, and instead dug in for two days of demonstrations.

This was Canada's first national feminist event.

Dr. Henry Morgentaler had launched an open defiance of the *Criminal Code* by performing abortions in his medical practice in Québec.

The Abortion Caravan, with its demand for repeal of Section 251 of Canada's *Criminal Code*, which barred women from control of their own bodies, had travelled 3,000 miles from Vancouver, gathering women as it moved through hundreds of towns and cities.

One year later, on August 1, 1971 the first Toronto Gay and Lesbian Pride event took place at Hanlon's Point, drawing 300 people. Since then, this event has grown to become one of North America's largest demonstrations celebrating diverse sexual and gender identities, with more than one million people participating each year.

And in 1978, Toronto's first International Women's Day kicked off with a 2000-strong women's march and seven key demands, one of the central being an end to the deportation of Jamaican mothers.

Another revolution was also in the works. Maternity leave was becoming an important focus of unions and women's organizations.

MATERNITY LEAVE: SUCCESS WAS JUST AROUND THE CORNER

Ontario's teachers had been actively campaigning for maternity leave for decades. Even as early as its 1954 convention, the Ontario Teachers' Federation passed a resolution calling for maternity leaves. Unwilling to rely on governments, the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario began a campaign to negotiate this crucial right into their collective agreements. And, in the early 1970s, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation successfully fought a Toronto Board of Education policy that required pregnant women (married or single) to resign.

In 1970, the report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women noted that women rarely received wages for all or even part of their maternity absence, and even when they did, leave with full pay ranged only from one to six weeks.

In their unions, at conventions and meetings of the newly-created National Action Committee on the Status of Women, the right to maternity leave was becoming a focus for public education campaigns, rallies, and organizing.

In 1977, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers included paid maternity leave as one of its bargaining demands. By 1979, public sector workers in Québec had won the right to fully-paid maternity leave as a victory in their province-wide Common Front Strike. Despite this fact, it took a hard-fought 42-day strike by CUPW, to become the first pan-Canadian union to finally win the breakthrough. In

so doing, it established a legal precedent for other unions to obtain maternity leave. One of the most fundamental rights for women, men and children had been won—but not without a struggle.

WOMEN AND THEIR UNIONS FIGHT FOR RECOGNITION AND BETTER PAY

The years of struggle by garment and service workers, office workers, civil servants, teachers, nurses and other women made women's place in the world of work permanent. Yet the wage gap between men and women persisted. In 1971, the average annual earnings of women working full-time represented only 59.7 percent of those of men.

In 1973, 100 individual bargaining units with over 10,000 members met in October to found the Ontario Nurses' Association. The ONA would go on to fight for pay equity, maternity leave, measurably increased wages and other important gains to improve the socio-economic welfare and working conditions for its members.

The same year, over 100,000 teachers staged a province-wide walkout to demand the right to free collective bargaining after the government threatened to impose compulsory arbitration. Three years later, over one million workers walked off the job in a Canadian Labour Congress Day of Protest against federal wage and price control legislation that especially hurt public sector workers, and especially already low-paid workers in schools, hospitals and municipal governments.

Taking their lead from the federal government's wage control legislation, Ontario colleges were

refusing to bargain any increase in support staffs' wages. By 1978, clerical workers and other members of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union were fed up and began to prepare for a strike. In mid-January, 1979, college support staff walked off the job in an incredible 13-day province-wide strike that not only won immediate improvements in management's contract offer but also visibly demonstrated how important the right to strike was to women's demands for higher wages.

In 1974, sisters in the garment industry were standing firm against both the Manufacturers' Association in Montreal and the Men's Clothing Manufacturers' Association of Toronto. In 1974, the Canadian Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America took a series of strike actions in the men's and boys' clothing industries. In the end, the workers won wage increases of 85 cents an hour over two years, a fourth week of paid vacation, a pension raise, bereavement pay and other benefits.

In 1976, two critical organizations were formed: Women Working with Immigrant Women (WWIW) and Organized Working Women (OWW).

The Labour Committee of WWIW pushed for changes to policies and legislation in support of immigrant women in the labour force and workers in general. It also joined with the Ontario Federation of Labour on the crucial Affirmative Action Campaign. This work began the process of removing barriers to equality, overcoming past and present discrimination, and improving the economic status of racialized women. WWIW would eventually become the key organizer for International Women's Day marches in Toronto.

The OWW consisted of women in unions who worked together to ensure that women's issues were front and centre at bargaining tables, conventions and in other arenas where important changes were being discussed. Naturally, the issue of unequal and low pay for women became a top priority.

FACING DOWN RACISM, SEXISM AND 500 ONTARIO PROVINCIAL POLICE

The 1978 strike at Fleck Manufacturing illustrated just how high the stakes were for business and government in ensuring female wage rates remained as low as possible.

As it did in 1890, the economic system depended on the terrible exploitation of women, especially racialized women: the lower the wages, the bigger the profits. For the Ontario government and the factory owner, the possibility of union representation was a threat to be reckoned with at all costs.

They worked together to viciously oppose one of the most significant strikes of the decade. On the one side, 120 mostly immigrant women determined to win union security with the United Auto Workers (now Canadian Auto Workers) and the higher wages that would come with it; on the other, 500 Ontario Provincial Police constables stationed in and around the industrial park where the plant was located.

The combined and vested interests of the provincial government and the well-to-do business owner against the workers was the focus of national headlines and became a pivotal event in working women's struggle.

The policing costs at Fleck were higher than for any other event in Ontario history, totaling approximately \$2 million, or \$16,000 per striker. This fight would not be over until six months later. Despite the police harassment, arrests, beatings and intimidation, the Fleck strikers achieved their goals ... and more.

STRIKING TANDY: THE RADIO SHACK STRIKE

The magnificent Radio Shack strike of 1979 involved a battle between women warehouse workers at the Radio Shack plant in Barrie, Ontario, and the huge Texas-based Tandy Corporation, a producer of consumer electronics. At the time no Tandy location in the world was unionized, and the company was not prepared to give workers a first contract and guarantee union security. The United Steelworkers sought to organize the women at Tandy despite threats by the company that it would pull out of the city if the employees voted for the union. The women pushed back and won their first union contract in 1980.

The many unbending and courageous actions of women like those at Fleck, Radio Shack, and workers at Artistic Woodwork and many others, forced Ontario's Conservative government to give way and legislate union security as a part of the *Ontario Labour Relations Act*.

The blossoming economic strength of women and unions would bear fruit at the start of the next decade.

The Origins of International Women's Day

Women's Day was first recognized internationally in 1910 at the Second International Conference of Socialist Women, attended by women from 17 different countries. The date of March 8 was not officially designated until 1913 as a commemoration of a crucial strike by women textile workers in New York that took place in the 1880s. In the decades since, International Women's Day has been celebrated and marked in countries all over the globe. In North America, International Women's Day demonstrations and rallies gained prominence during the 1960s with the rise of the Women's Liberation Movement. In 1977 the United Nations finally proclaimed International Women's Day.

1980-1990

STRIKES, FIGHTS AND SOCIAL GAINS



Shelly Bahl

A Day in the Life

10" x 15" x 4 prints

Digital print series (1/6)

1980s

South Asian Immigrants in Canada

I have been researching the history of South Asian immigrants in Canada, who have joined the labour force at airports over the past twenty years. This diasporic community of airport workers is primarily composed of working class immigrants from the Punjab regions of India and Pakistan. I am interested in exploring their stories and have created a new photographic series that examines the lives of working women within this community. I am also addressing the class tensions that divide the newer working class immigrants from the earlier arrival of professional South Asians.

I am interested in the symbolism of the airport as a place of metamorphosis. My narrative is a surreal and poetic exploration of the desire for personal transformation, contrasted with the reality and hardships of the new immigrant experience. This project will hopefully bring attention to the workings of the airport microcosm, and the many invisible people within this world who keep things moving.

I have created a series of four photographs set in an airport restroom and lounge, with a group of South Asian women (a businesswoman, cleaner, security officer, flight attendant, and a holiday traveller with a baby).

Shelly Bahl

STRIKES, FIGHTS AND SOCIAL GAINS

It is not that individuals in the designated groups are inherently unable to achieve equality on their own, it is that the obstacles in their way are so formidable and self-perpetuating that they cannot be overcome without intervention. It is both intolerable and insensitive if we simply wait and hope that the barriers will disappear with time. Equality in employment will not happen unless we make it happen.

—Rosalie Abella,

Royal Commission on Equality in Employment, 1984

The 1980s marked a period of increased recognition of women's inequality and major victories.

In 1979, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF), the Ontario Division of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), and the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) had included sexual orientation in their anti-discrimination policies. At the time, only Québec had codified the prohibition of discrimination based on sexual orientation (1977). By 1980, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) had become the first pan-Canadian trade union to include sexual orientation in their definition of discrimination.

In 1982, Canada's new *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* outlawed discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age

or mental or physical disability. [Although the Charter did not explicitly list sexual orientation, successful Charter challenges ensured that, by 1995, the Supreme Court had ruled that "sexual orientation" should be "read into" Section 15 of the Charter.]

In the early 1980s, the Ontario Coalition for Better Day Care developed a blueprint for a universally accessible, publicly funded, not-for-profit day care system that was taken up with renewed energy by unions and women's organizations.

The Congress of Black Women was founded in 1980 reflecting recognition of the multiple layers of discrimination faced by women who were also of colour. By sponsoring educational, social, cultural and health related initiatives to meet the needs and concerns of black women and their families, the Congress has grown. There are now chapters in dozens of towns and cities across Canada.

By 1983, the Ontario Coalition of Visible Minority Women was founded to support visible minority women in their struggle against racism and to lobby for proper recognition of foreign credentials, improved maternity leave, and workplace language training.

The Ontario Coalition of Black Trade Unionists was founded in 1986. By working together, black union members drew public attention to racism in the workplace and implemented pro-active strategies to improve the wages, working conditions

and promotional opportunities of black workers. In the late 1980s, the women's committee of the Coalition launched an education project to address the specific issues affecting women of colour within the labour movement, equipping them with the necessary skills to take on leadership roles within their organizations.

In 1987, the Supreme Court ruling in the Bonnie Robichaud case, backed by the Public Service Alliance of Canada, definitively established women's legal right to workplaces free from sexual harassment and placed the onus on employers to provide a healthy work environment.

And in 1988, the Supreme Court of Canada struck down Canada's abortion law as unconstitutional, declaring that it infringed upon a woman's right to "life, liberty, and security of the person". Trade unions had been absolutely central to the success of the Pro-Choice movement. The strong resolutions passed at OFL, and other union conventions, and the mass participation of trade unionists in defence of free-standing abortion clinics resulted in one of the most important victories in women's history—the right to control our own bodies. Today, there is no law in Canada that criminalizes abortion, although ongoing cuts continue to threaten access to all aspects of women's reproductive health care.

FACING THE NEW ECONOMIC REALITIES

Canada was hit hard by the recession of the early 1980s: interest rates skyrocketed, inflation soared, unemployment grew and massive job losses in the manufacturing sector spelled new hardship

for working families. Despite legislated anti-discrimination victories, federal and provincial governments began in earnest to implement conservative social and fiscal policies, modeled after those of U.S. President Ronald Reagan and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

Every effort was made to curb the strength of working people by cutting social programs, restricting collective bargaining, and sowing divisions among working people. Women and immigrants were last hired and first fired, while racism, anti-immigrant rhetoric, anti-Québec bigotry and homophobic attacks on lesbians and gay men formed an ugly backdrop to the 1980s. In an event that came to symbolize the ongoing violence against women, on December 6, 1989, 14 women engineering students at Montreal's École Polytechnique were gunned down. As he was shooting, the gunman shouted: "I hate feminists."

The Ontario *Crown Employees Collective Bargaining Act* of 1972 and the federal *Public Sector Compensation Restraint Act* of 1982 were wage control and anti-strike laws directed at over one million public sector workers in Canada and Ontario who were mostly women. Such legislation had a chilling effect on women's wages. It removed the right to negotiate for pay equity, paid maternity leave, protection from sexual harassment, day care allowances, and protection from the effects of technological changes. Women's unequal place in the workforce was fast-frozen and their ability to fight back was criminalized.

Nevertheless, in 1982, when Ontario's Conservative government imposed wage control

legislation and outlawed strikes by public employees, the Service Employees International Union launched an Ontario Supreme Court challenge to the legislation and won in 1983. Although the government appealed the ruling, the Ontario Court of Appeal sided with SEIU. This crucial victory helped to ensure that unions maintained the right to organize, to bargain, to strike and to have access to the arbitration process.

Later in the decade, headway was also made in pension plan negotiations. SEIU won a union-administered, multi-employer pension plan for nursing home workers. Until then, these women workers lacked any employer contribution toward retirement. Today, that same pension fund has over half a billion dollars in assets and covers thousands of women in nursing and retirement homes.

Further victories were to follow, as SEIU, CUPE, ONA and OPSEU implemented a coordinated bargaining strategy to implement hospital pension plans. As a result of this crucial move, the unions won the legal battle to establish joint-trusteeship, and ensure that the employer paid their fair share of pension contributions—in good times and in bad times.

By 1986, the unionization of women was increasing at six times the rate of the unionization of men and more than a third of union members (36 percent) were women. Unionization raised women's wages, gave them more social power and elevated a variety of demands for equity-seeking groups—but never without a fight.

From Ontario Legislative Assembly Hansard:

Thursday, October 25, 1984

Affirmative Action

Ms. Bryden: Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister responsible for Women's Issues. Is he aware that, this morning, representatives of the Ontario Federation of Labour came back to Queen's Park to tell a press conference there had been absolutely no response, written or verbal, from the government to the brief on affirmative action submitted six months ago by the OFL and a large coalition of women, teachers and community groups?

In the light of the government's commitment in the throne speech last March to push municipalities, school boards and crown agencies to set up affirmative action programs, how can the minister justify a total allocation of the ridiculous sum of \$260,000 for all public sector affirmative action programs? That amount was referred to by the president of the OFL, Cliff Pilkey, in his remarks at today's press conference. He said this figure was confirmed by the chief statistician for the women's directorate, Mr. Lou Masurier.

Is the minister aware Mr. Pilkey pointed out that this sum, divided among 838 municipalities, 186 school boards and 229 hospitals, works out to only \$207 each, or roughly 85 cents a worker?

Mr. Speaker: Question, please.

Ms. Bryden: Does the minister think an effective program of affirmative action can be set up with this kind of money?

WOMEN FLEX THEIR MUSCLES

Since 1965, Ontario hospital workers had been forbidden to strike. By 1974, when the official poverty line for a family of four was \$6,400 a year, the average woman hospital worker was paid \$5,200; many received as little as \$3,800. In 1981, members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, in 65 hospitals and 19 cities in Ontario, went on an illegal strike—in direct defiance of the legislation.

In 1986, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation won a collective agreement with the Frontenac School Board that provided the first Maternity Leave top-up plan. Under the new plan, women were entitled, not only to the Unemployment Insurance benefit, but up to 60 percent of the teacher's wages for the 17 weeks of maternity leave.

The many strikes in the 1970s and 1980s, in which women—particularly immigrant women and women of colour—were prominent, achieved gains and important firsts not only for themselves but for the overall labour movement. Many of these strikes featured massive police presence, violence and other forms of intimidation.

PURETEX STRIKE: "WE'RE LIKE IN PRISON THERE."

The 220 immigrant women members of the Canadian Textile and Chemical Union squared off against their employer in 1978. They wanted pay increases of 40 cents an hour, sick pay and a drug plan; but before all else, they wanted the surveillance cameras that were pointed at the women's washroom and the production floor to be removed. Although

the security cameras were intended to intimidate women workers, their installation had just the opposite effect: the women brought the company to a standstill and eventually won important gains.

Not only did they receive pay increases of 65 cents per hour over two years, they succeeded in having the hated spy cameras removed from the production floor and women's washroom. This was a precedent-setting victory, later used successfully by postal workers to fight a similar battle.

SOUTH ASIAN WORKERS FACE DOWN RACISM AT SUPERPLASTICS

The South Asian women and men strikers of Superplastics held out for more than ten months, facing down an employer who had set up a two-tier approach in the workplace: one for white workers, and the other for South Asian workers, complete with differential wages and worse shifts. The workers, who daily experienced racial slurs and a workplace poisoned with vinyl chloride fumes, won a collective agreement and fundamental changes for those who came after them. The 1985 Superplastics strike prompted First Contract legislation, another important first for Ontario's labour movement.

MCGREGOR HOSIERY

Portuguese and Chinese women workers took on McGregor Hosiery for increased wages (theirs were below the poverty line) and better working conditions in 1986. Despite the language barriers between these immigrant women, their solidarity and decisive action resulted in renewed public

pressure for legislation prohibiting the use of strikebreakers.

PIZZA CRUST

When, in 1982, 23 Punjabi night-shift workers at Pizza Crust were cut out of the 30 cent per hour increase that had been promised by management, the workers refused to let it go. Management's response was to turn all the lights off and lock them out in the rain. Although they lost their unionizing drive by ONE vote, their actions and attendant publicity helped to make the issues of racism and sexism part of a public dialogue.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AND EQUAL PAY: WOMEN START TO WIN

The women in this province have been trying to inform the Minister of Labour, the Cabinet, and, in fact, all the members of the legislature that the principle of equal pay for work of equal value is seen as an integral part of the fight for equality in employment. These measures must include legislated affirmative action, skills-training programs, adequate day care and other support services if women are to move up the economic ladder and into non-traditional jobs. Without equal pay for work of equal value, women will not move out of the job ghettos which they occupy today.

—Ontario Nurses' Association Presentation on Bill 141: An Act to Amend the *Employment Standards Act*, 1984

In 1982, women's wages were just under 60 percent of men's. Yet that same year, the Ontario

Labour Minister outraged working women when he declared that he opposed introducing legislation for Equal Pay because it would place "too heavy a burden on businesses and lead to bankruptcies". As re-affirmed by the Royal Commission on Equality in Employment in 1984, concrete affirmative action and employment equity strategies were essential to break through decades of discrimination and force open the doors to the thousands of jobs and workplaces that were still considered "off limits" for women.

Accusing the government of giving employers "a skirt to hide behind" when they allow unjustified sex-based pay discrimination to continue, the Ontario Nurses' Association, on behalf of its 97.8 percent female membership, organized lobbies and actions to press for equal pay for work of equal value and for pay equity.

In the early 1980s, almost 500 federal government librarians won equalization adjustments ranging from \$500 to \$2,500 annually, plus back pay, as a result of an equal pay for work of equal value complaint lodged by the Public Service Alliance of Canada.

Between 1980 and 1985, though the majority of elementary teachers were women, men continued to be promoted to principal and vice-principal positions in disproportionate numbers. The Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario succeeded in getting the government to institute voluntary school board affirmative action plans for women teachers and to institute a fairer system for admission to the required principals' training course. Later, school boards would be

legally required to have affirmative action plans.

In the industrial sector, the fight for affirmative action was taking place on a number of fronts. Intensive efforts were focused on getting women hired into the higher paid all-male domains at workplaces such as Stelco and Inco or the trades. These were non-traditional jobs. In a ten-year period, 10,000 women had applied to Stelco but none had been hired. The “Women Back Into Stelco” affirmative action campaign waged by the United Steelworkers won a ten percent hiring quota that resulted in the employment of more than 200 women.

In the retail food sector, until the late 1980s, there were virtually no women meat cutters, department managers or assistant department managers in supermarkets. These were the higher paying jobs. The United Food and Commercial Workers demanded training for women workers on an equal basis with men. Many women were told that they had to pass additional tests, requirements that were never imposed on men. After sustained struggle, women began to enter these occupations.

In April 1988, more than 20,000 teachers and 4,000 allies from the Ontario Public Service Employees Union rallied in Hamilton against proposed government cuts to pensions. Copps Coliseum reached capacity at 19,000 with an overflow outside crowd of 6,000. Together, they marched to the then-governing Liberal Party convention. It was one of the biggest demonstrations in Hamilton’s history and was a key event that catapulted the issue of elderly women’s poverty and entitlement into the public discourse.

Unable to ignore women’s ongoing demands for equity, by 1988, the Ontario government implemented the *Pay Equity Act*. While the Ontario government wanted to limit the scope of the act, extensive and united organizing under the umbrella of the Equal Pay Coalition—comprised of women in both the public and private sectors, as well as organized and unorganized women—forced the Ontario government to extend the law to include more women than any other provincial law in Canada.

Clearly, despite a decade of high inflation, high interest rates and high unemployment, major gains were made by women, their unions and women’s organizations.

1000 2000

FOR BREAD AND ROSES, FOR JOBS AND JUSTICE

Slogan of the 1996 Women's March against Poverty



Julie Faubert

Dirty Windows

9" x 36" x 3 prints

Photography

1990s

Dirty Windows

I live in a neighbourhood which is home to both seamstresses working in the remnants of Montreal's textile industry and a community of artists who now occupy the empty factories left behind.

From them to me, from an endless repetition of gestures to a lonely esthetic act: the same walls, the same streets, the same geographical experience. Each of us, in our own parallel worlds, performs repetitive actions that have taken on a new meaning through the last century. The meaning of the gesture has shifted, creating and maintaining distinct visions of these parallel worlds.

I am profoundly moved by this immeasurable distance, it has set my head in a spin. I can only keep on staring. Looking through this unbearable distance as if my gaze could make it disappear.

7:00 am. From the 12th floor, I look through the window. Montreal lies in front of my eyes. Closer, the wind skims the surface of forgotten puddles on top of the building I am staring at. Closer again, the same three women facing their sewing machine. I can't take my eyes off them.

5:00 pm. Them, again. Always, them. Always the same position. The neon lights have just been lit.

Julie Faubert

FOR BREAD AND ROSES, FOR JOBS AND JUSTICE

Slogan of the 1996 Women's March Against Poverty

In 1996, women's caravans left the east and west coasts headed towards Ottawa. The caravans, part of a National Action Committee on the Status of Women and the Canadian Labour Congress joint mobilization, were part of an event involving approximately 50,000 women who arrived in the nation's capital on June 15th for the largest women's demonstration in Canadian history, the Women's March Against Poverty.

Between 1994 and 2004, Canada's economy grew by a phenomenal 62 percent; in just one decade workers were producing nearly \$480 billion more a year in market value! Wealth was everywhere, but it was not being accumulated in the pockets of women. Instead, the phenomenon of globalization had produced stagnant or diminishing wages, part-time work and more low-waged jobs.

An enormous social and economic change had taken place with the increase in the rates of mothers of young children who were in the labour force. In 1990, 54 percent of mothers with children under the age of three were in paid employment. By 2003, the share would rise to almost two-thirds, or 63 percent.

Unions were moving forward in organizing women workers. For example, in the early 1990s, the Service Employees International Union negotiated the first province-wide agreement for Red Cross home care workers, where previously such workers had low wages and no benefits.

A huge productivity surge in the 1990s that peaked in 2000, pushed Canada into fourth place

among the nine OECD countries. Workers, and especially those at the bottom, were driven harder and faster to deliver record profits.

Women, such as cashiers, secretaries, and clerks were (and still are) relegated to highly repetitive work ghettos that require fine manual dexterity of the hands, fingers, wrists and upper limbs. It was estimated that cashiers, for example, were handling more than 6,000 pounds of groceries in an eight-hour shift. As a result, repetitive strain injuries and musculoskeletal disorders grew.

The United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) secured a concrete and urgently-needed victory at Loblaw's and Supercentre stores when it won check stand redesign. Over time, and as the new design was phased in, the accident rate for cashiers fell from the second highest to the second lowest.

Despite all the data, many stores failed to build on the success of the check stand redesign. In an inconceivable disregard for women's injury rates, employers are resisting changes that would allow cashiers to alternate between positions of standing and propped seating. As we go to press, the Ontario Ministry of Labour is supporting new ergonomic guidelines and a health and safety "toolbox". The Ontario Federation of Labour, the UFCW, and other unions are working to ensure these generic guidelines become sector specific. Such a victory will dramatically improve the health and safety of workers in these and other kinds of occupations.

UFCW has also been fighting to improve wages,

benefits and working conditions for part-time workers more than 70 percent of whom are women. Beginning in the late 1980s and continuing through the 1990s UFCW fought for and won benefits for part-time workers. Initially the benefits covered only those who worked a certain minimum number of hours in a year and then the benefits were extended for dependents of single mothers. Today, virtually every UFCW retail collective agreement provides health and dental benefits for part-time workers, and the vast majority of them even have access to pension plans.

Beyond the workplace, women and families needed universally accessible, publicly funded, not-for-profit child care and strong social and public programs and services. But just the opposite was taking place. Between 1993-94 and 2000-01, federal program spending fell from 16 percent of the economy to pre-World War II levels of 11 percent.

The neo-liberal policies that characterized the 1990s meant that governments and employers were deeply resistant to ideas of real equality. Moreover, as recession threatened Canada's economy, these same forces conspired to ensure that women and working families, not corporations, paid the price.

DETERMINED EFFORTS TO PROTECT GAINS AND ACHIEVE BREAKTHROUGHS

In 1991, the federal Conservative government of Brian Mulroney imposed wage controls on government workers and threatened them with mass layoffs. The government had been systematically ignoring pay equity legislation for more than 15 years and was operating the largest female job ghetto in Canada.

The Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC), representing more than 150,000, largely female workers, responded with the biggest national strike ever conducted by a single union in Canada, ending only when the Mulroney government implemented back-to-work legislation.

It would take another eight years of fighting, but in 1999, PSAC achieved an historic victory winning approximately \$3.5 billion in retroactive pay equity adjustments and interest for over 200,000 then-current and former federal government employees.

Despite the climate of neo-liberalism, the 1990s were a time when union campaigns for pay equity and pensions were starting to bear fruit.

In Ontario, another victory was achieved in 1995, when a pay equity settlement was finally reached with the York Region school board. This was the

last board to settle with the elementary teachers' unions. Across the province, the settlements resulted in \$43 million for women elementary teachers, and also significantly improved the pension benefits that these teachers would eventually receive.

As if a century of discrimination against married female teachers and pregnant teachers were not enough, in the 1990s some school boards were still engaging in discriminatory practices. In 1996, the Essex Country Board refused to allow teachers to use accumulated sick leave for post-birth leave. The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation victory at Ontario Divisional Court forced that board to comply with the *Human Rights Code*.

In 1998, the United Steelworkers organized its largest local in Ontario which today has over 5,600 members working at the University of Toronto, Victoria University and the University of St. Michael's College. Approximately 70 percent of the members are women. Major improvements in wages, working conditions and pensions have been won. Today, these USW women have placed a major pay equity/job evaluation campaign at the top of the agenda to achieve wage equality for women.

Throughout the 1990s, unions like the Public Service Alliance of Canada, the Canadian Union of Public Employees and others were successful in re-defining spouse to include same-sex relationships. CUPE's 1992 pension plan change providing same-sex partners with the same benefits as opposite-sex spouses, was initially rejected by Revenue Canada, but later upheld by the Ontario Court of Appeal. Its unanimous ruling in favour of CUPE forced the federal government to change dozens of statutes to include same-sex partners.

In June 1996, the federal government amended

the Canadian *Human Rights Act* to include sexual orientation as prohibited grounds for discrimination. That same month, uniting under the slogan “We are Everyone’s Family”, the Toronto Pride Day March drew over three-quarters of a million people. The Grand Marshals of the march were four lesbian couples who had just won the right to adopt their partner’s children. Part of the celebrations included Toronto’s first-ever Dyke March with more than 5,000 women taking part.

The 1984 Report of the *Royal Commission on Equality in Employment*, calling for action to remove the discriminatory barriers against women, members of visible minorities, Aboriginal peoples and persons with disabilities, triggered the formation of the Alliance for Employment Equity in 1987.

The Alliance was comprised of organizations such as the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, Coalition of Visible Minority Women, Congress of Black Women, Urban Alliance on Race Relations, Cross-Cultural Communication Centre, Disabled People for Employment Equity, Native Women’s Centre, Ontario Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, Ontario Black Coalition for Employment Equity, and others.

This Ontario-wide coalition was determined to win mandatory legislation. It staged protests, conferences, Queen’s Park rallies and other actions. On one International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in the late 1980s, the Alliance interrupted a Secretary of State breakfast and continued its significant pressure well into the 1990s for crucial structural changes.

In 1991, Black and Philippino nurses challenged the virulent racism, discrimination and reprisals

by their employer, Northwestern General Hospital. Some nurses were fired; others became targets for daily reprisals and humiliations. The hard-fought battles of these racialized nurses not only in their workplace, but also with the Ontario Human Rights Commission, produced an important legacy for all racialized nurses and workers. The Ontario Human Rights Commission was finally forced to address what was Canada’s first systemic case on the grounds of race.

In 1992, important wage improvements were secured by the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) that helped establish the Homeworkers’ Association (now the Homeworkers’ Network). The Association advocates for garment workers who work as individual “sub-contractors” out of their homes, and helps gain minimum wage improvements under the *Employment Standards Act* in Ontario. Homeworkers now receive 110 percent of the set minimum wage.

Racialized and Aboriginal workers were not only winning breakthroughs in the public arena, but within their unions as well. The late 1980s and 1990s, saw the beginning of anti-racist initiatives within unions, locals and labour centrals.

ONTARIO’S MIKE HARRIS AND THE TORY WAR ON WOMEN

From the moment Ontario’s most despised Premier took power, an overt war was launched on women’s deepest aspirations and decades-long struggle for equality.

Described as “being in love with guns”, Premier Mike Harris and the Progressive Conservatives were also in love with confrontation and created a Canadian tragedy when they unleashed the Ontario Provincial Police in the Ipperwash land claims dispute. Their deliberate actions resulted in the killing of Stoney Point Ojibway band member Dudley George. This internationally publicized event kicked off, and characterized, the Mike Harris years in Ontario.

With an unparalleled contempt not seen since 1889, when *The Royal Commission on the Relations of Labour and Capital* heard from greed-driven industrialists and employers, the Harris Tories began to take apart every piece of legislation, every social program and service, and every gain women had struggled for. The newly elected Conservative government repealed proxy pay

equity and it took a charter challenge by the Service Employees International Union to have it reinstated in 1997.

Teachers were cast as “the enemy”, nurses were compared to obsolete hula hoops, pregnant mothers on welfare were cut off from nutrition benefits of less than \$30 per month and insulted as “beer-guzzling, n’er-do-wells”, public sector employees were characterized as lazy and superfluous, and public policy was shaped to drive women out of the workforce, and back into their homes.

The public sector, composed mainly of women, was being gutted. The huge attack on length of hospital stay created a mass burden on home care workers and on women at home to replace the missing hospital services. Welfare benefits were slashed by nearly 22 percent creating a wave of unprecedented homelessness, and welfare recipients were forced to offer up their unpaid labour in exchange for their meager monthly welfare allowance. Letters to the editor were filled with accounts of deaths and lost human potential of those who could not access health, housing, and other services.

Women, working people and unemployed people across the province, dug in. They fought every cut and every attempt to take away hard-won gains.

Within the first year of taking office, Mike Harris announced that 13,000 “non-essential” public sector workers would be eliminated—a majority of whom were women. Harris was preparing the groundwork for full-scale privatization and sending a message to corporate investors that his Ontario was “open for business”. To accomplish this though, he would have to break the unions.

The Ontario Public Service Employees Union, Harris thought, would be the thin edge of his vicious wedge.

But OPSEU rose to the challenge, launching a province-wide strike in February 1996. During the course of this strike, OPSEU members battled OPP riot police, challenged a daily barrage of Tory lies and—most importantly—held their lines.

Between 1995 and 1998, the Ontario Federation of Labour launched its Days of Action—city-wide general strikes that shut down 11 cities. Together, these general strikes involved millions of employed and unemployed workers. In Toronto, a quarter of a million people marched against Mike Harris as the culmination of the previous day’s general strike that turned Toronto into a ghost town.

In 1997, all five teachers’ unions, including the Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation, the Ontario English Catholic Teachers’ Association, the Ontario Teachers’ Federation, the Federation of Women Teachers’ Associations of Ontario, and the Ontario Professional School Teachers’ Federation, walked off the job for two weeks in an inspirational fight-back to rescue quality, public education. Parent groups decorated cities and towns in green ribbons to demonstrate their support. Shortly thereafter, in 1998, women and men teachers joined forces to found the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario.

Leaner and meaner ... power ... bullying ... confrontation and contempt ... were the words of the Mike Harris decade. When, finally, the Tories were defeated in 2003, there was a renewed sense of hope for women’s equality and for health care, for education, and for vital public services and programs.

THE BATTLE OF SEATTLE

In November 1999, tens of thousands of people, including women, indigenous peoples, trade unionists and youth from all over North America and beyond, marched in Seattle to the doors of the World Trade Organization with a message: ¡Ya basta!—Enough! Enough of trade practices that impoverish women and children and those in the developing world. Enough of social policies that favour corporations over people. Enough of the corporate practices that destroy the environment. The WTO meeting was shut down and, in the process, a new, re-galvanized movement swept the globe setting the stage for the next millennium.

Epilogue

Solidarity, Sisterhood . . . and Finishing What We Began

Calling for an end to violence against women at work and at home, and an end to poverty for all equity-seeking groups, job progression and promotion, and quality universal child care, women's and trade union organizations mobilized for the year 2000 World March of Women. The event culminated with a massive rally on Parliament Hill and sent a strong message that women across Canada—in solidarity with women around the world—were demanding change.

The new era of global solidarity had emerged. The many union women's committees that had emerged over the previous two decades kicked into high gear—mobilizing, organizing, and marching. Global solidarity was concrete. For example, the women's committees of the United Steelworkers established partnerships with women in Mexico and South Africa through the Steelworkers Humanity Fund. A key focus for these ongoing campaigns is the fight against HIV/AIDS.

As we prepare this booklet for International Women's Day 2007 Ontario women are marching to win a crucial demand for a \$10 minimum wage. Women make up the angry majority of the more than 1.2 million workers in Ontario that are paid less than \$10 an hour.

For hotel workers for example, many of whom

are women and newcomers, the UNITE HERE campaign to transform backbreaking, low-wage jobs into decent occupations is being forged not only in Ontario, but across North America.

More than one hundred years after women's struggle for economic security and independence began, female wage rates are still—almost unbelievably—much lower than men's and we continue to be segregated into many of the same job ghettos that existed at the beginning of the century that keep us locked into the lower rates.

How can this be?

Women's equality struggles have produced nothing less than a social revolution, but economic progress has been thwarted by federal and provincial governments who, in good times or bad, have always told women to wait.

No. We cannot, and will not, wait one minute longer.

That was certainly the view of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario who in 2006, conducted work-to-rule job actions across the province that delivered important financial increases, including significant gains to pregnancy and parental leaves.

The Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Canadian Union of Public Employees

(CUPE), Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU), Ontario Nurses' Association (ONA), and the United Steelworkers (USW) also refused to wait. Instead they squared off against the province's refusal to eradicate sex discrimination against women workers in public sector female-dominated workplaces. The Harris government had repealed proxy pay equity and would not flow the necessary funding. The five unions were intractable, and won an important victory in 2003 when the province was forced to pay out \$414 million to 100,000 women in female-dominated workplaces.

In 2005, the federal government and Canada Post's prolonged and insulting attack on women workers was forced to an end by the Public Service Alliance of Canada with a Human Rights Tribunal pay equity award of no less than \$150 million in adjustments and interest.

Last year, working women celebrated with 5,000 current and former Bell Canada telephone operators, members of the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union who achieved a pay equity settlement worth \$104 million and a maximum of additional pensionable earnings of \$13,530.

Over half the income of senior women in Canada comes from government transfer payments, making CUPE's and SEIU's success in establishing a national Multi-Sector Pension Plan for members who would otherwise not be entitled to a pension plan a vital contribution to the economic security of elderly women.

Women workers recognize the improvements that union membership brings. The strong

campaign waged by Grand & Toy, Canada's largest commercial supplier of office products, to keep the union out did not stop the mostly women workers from signing on with the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers. Their demands for job security and a voice in the workplace reflect the desires of all working women for overdue improvements.

Nowhere is this more true than for the predominantly women workers employed by grocery giant Loblaw Cos. Ltd. and represented by the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW). In 2005, for the first time in retail history, four major UFCW Locals in Ontario united their combined 30,000 person membership to face a common employer. Loblaw Cos. set out to wrest concessions from workers at Loblaws, Zehrs, Fortino's, and Real Canadian Superstores. Instead, the workers voted, by an overwhelming 95 percent, to strike. It took 18 gruelling months of negotiations, but UFCW's united membership and 70-member bargaining team staved off concessions and won ground-breaking contract improvements that benefited women workers, especially in the area of scheduling rights and flexibility. The historic agreement achieved in October 2006, also won crucial health and safety improvements—including a commitment to review check stand design issues with the union.

Although there has been a dramatic increase in the share of women who are now unionized (approximately 32 percent of female employees belong to a union) almost 70 percent are on their own in the workplace. The long history of

provincial and federal government's opposition to equality places them in harm's way as they fight many important social and economic battles.

The important role played by trade unions in the struggle for equality cannot be understated and the history of the past 100 years is a testament to this. Through the decades, women, whether they worked in the private, public or industrial sectors, have fought to win common demands: pay equity, safer working conditions, maternity leave, abortion rights, child care and an end to discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation, to name only a few.

THE PUBLIC IS PERSONAL

For women, nothing is more up close and personal than the strong social programs upon which they rely to shift some of their unequal burden and to enable them to participate in paid work, training programs, and higher education. But the federal and Ontario governments are weakening, not strengthening these.

In Ontario, the defeat of the Mike Harris Conservatives raised expectations for a new era. And while open hostility and contempt are no longer part of the daily menu at Queen's Park, the McGuinty Liberals have kept intact many of the worst of the Harris policies. For example, the wretched 21.6 percent cut to social assistance first implemented by Mike Harris has never been restored.

The stark reality of poverty in Ontario was recognized in October 2006 when the Elementary

Teachers' Federation of Ontario, the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation in conjunction with Campaign Against Child Poverty sponsored a full page ad in the *Toronto Star* noting that: "Poverty takes one in six kids out of the picture".

In health care, cheaper wage rates still exist for many workers in the long-term care and home care sectors. In his response at the Ontario Nurses' Association biennial meeting, Health Minister George Smitherman indicated the government was ready to discuss the long-standing problem of the wage gap that exists for nurses working in different sectors.

But the McGuinty government's restructuring of Ontario's health system has many implications. The Local Health Integration Networks, for example, with their many anticipated cuts will hit women hardest as workers in the public sector, care-givers at home, and people who depend on access to comprehensive health care.

The Ontario Nurses' Association's high profile media and organizing campaign "Still Not Enough Nurses" has certainly educated and influenced the public, but nurses in Ontario are awaiting the fulfillment of the Liberal promise to hire 8,000 new full-time professionals. The Ontario Federation of Labour's publication "Understaffed and Under Pressure" eloquently describes the crisis in staffing levels in all health sectors.

The optimism generated, first in 2003 when Ontario became the first province to give legal recognition to same-sex marriage, and then in 2005

when the federal government followed suit, has sobered with the election of Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper. Although his motion to re-open the same-sex marriage issue was defeated, his party has made clear its opposition to full rights for lesbians, gays and transgendered people.

And in one of the biggest assaults on women's equality, Harper is trying to put the boots to 60 years of struggle for universally accessible, quality, non-profit, regulated child care. His pitiful allocation of less than \$1,200 per year for each child under six displays a deep ignorance of how far women are prepared to go to win equality.

Equally appalling, the Harper government has removed the word "equality" from the mandate of the Status of Women department, and slashed funding for women's organizations, programs and services while spending billions of dollars on war and other military adventures abroad.

In February 2003, the largest internationally coordinated demonstration for peace and justice took place on every continent in the world, involving tens of millions of people. As ever, women were at the heart of these mobilizations calling for an end to war, and for social and economic justice.

Our answer to the Harper government's comprehensive attempts to destroy women's equality at home while extending violence and militarism abroad, and to the McGuinnty government's gutting of social services and its refusal to establish a \$10 minimum wage is quite simply, "No."

This International Women's Day marks a revitalization and, indeed, a new provincial, national and global women's movement. In Canada

and around the world, inside unions and out, at universities and in workplaces, at home and in public gatherings, women and their organizations are recommitting to win the final, necessary victories in their century-long struggle for social and economic equality.

Women Make History

A Century of Women and Work is not meant to be a complete history of women's long struggle for equality. We encourage others to use what we have presented as a starting point and to add to it. Share it with other women in your union, women's organization, community group, labour council or federation. The space below is for you.

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About the Artists

Shelly Bahl is a visual and media artist based in Toronto and New York City. Her interdisciplinary work in drawing, painting, sculpture/installation, photography and video has appeared in a number of solo and group exhibitions in North America and internationally over the past 12 years. Currently, she is also a Lecturer in the Visual and Performing Arts Program at the University of Toronto at Scarborough. Her artwork can be viewed at www.shelybahl.com.

Contact: www.shellybahl.com

Marlene Creates lives in Portugal Cove, Newfoundland. Since the 1970s she has participated in over 250 exhibitions, both nationally and internationally. She has also been the curator of several exhibitions, worked in artist-run centres, and taught visual arts at the University of Ottawa, Algonquin College, and the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. Her work is in numerous public collections, including the National Gallery of Canada and the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography.

Contact: www.marlenecreates.ca

Julie Faubert lives and works in Montreal. Her mixed-media installation practice explores ephemeral relationships surrounding the body, its relation to space and the unavoidable translation between thought and word. She has been creating installations in collaboration with both cloistered nuns (Le Tour, 2006) and seamstresses working in Montreal's textile industry (The Hive-Dress, 2003). She studied at the University of Québec in Montréal (UQÀM) graduating with a Master's Degree in visual and media arts in 2005.

Contact: chatnoir@sympatico.ca or 514.272.2251

Margarita Alex Flores is a Latin American eco-feminist, social justice activist, and independent visual artist and film-maker, born in Mexico. She graduated as a teacher in 1988 and moved to Toronto, in 2001. In 2003 she created the Gatuna Film & Video Collective, a collective of Hispanics who produce films on social and cultural issues. She is the Artistic Director of the Gatuna Film & Video Collective. Alex's paintings have appeared in Toronto galleries and on various magazine covers.

Contact: www.alexarte.com or 416.902.0325

Kathy Kennedy is a sound artist working with various technologies and the voice. She has also worked extensively in the digital domain and in community art with feminist practice, as well as in music of many styles. Kennedy offers such professional services as: Soundtracks/scores for radio, film, TV and dance; Installations, radio documentaries; Live performance; Choral direction and composition, vocal arrangement; and workshops and private lessons in voice. For an overview of her work, visit: <http://www.cbc.ca/outfront/listen/2002/apr1702.html>.

Contact: kathykennedy@sympatico.ca or 514.232.5967

Cindy Mochizuki is a visual artist working in drawing, installation, video, performance and web works. Her body of work examines the imagined spaces between memory and history. She has directed two animations at the National Film Board in Montreal and also has collaborated on numerous projects with artists from various disciplines. She holds a Master's of Fine Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies from Simon Fraser University's School for Contemporary Arts and currently resides in Vancouver, B.C.

Contact: cindy.mochizuki@gmail.com

Shelley Niro is a member of the Six Nations Reserve, Mohawk, Turtle Clan. She studied at the Ontario College of Art and received a Master's of Fine Arts from the University of Western Ontario. Her work involves painting, photography, filmmaking and beadwork. Recent exhibitions include a group show at the Cambridge Library and Art Gallery titled "G7 Revisited", re-examining works of the Group of Seven. In April 2007, "Almost Fallen" will be on display at Oboro, Montreal.

Contact: shelleyniro@rogers.com

Karen Tam holds a Master's of Fine Arts from the Chicago School of the Art Institute and a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Concordia University, QC. She has exhibited and held residencies in Canada, United Kingdom, Ireland, and United States. Tam has received grants and awards from the Canada Council for the Arts, Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec, Fonds pour la Formation de Chercheurs et l'Aide à la Recherche. Tam received the Joseph S. Stauffer Prize.

Contact: info@karentam.ca or www.karentam.ca

Tania Willard, Secwepemc Nation, is an artist and designer in Vancouver. Her work has been shown locally, nationally and internationally at galleries, community venues and events. She works with story and voice; through her art and design she hopes to communicate the stories and voices we don't hear, the voices that are missing and erased from our histories and realities.

Contact: taniawillard@shaw.ca

Natalie Wood is a multimedia artist, curator and arts educator. Her artwork cohabits both art and historical research, exploring issues related to identity, marginalization, resistance and representation. She is an Advisory Member of the New Africa Consultation Committee at the Royal Ontario Museum—a committee entrusted with directing the creation and development of the Galleries of Africa. A recent web-based art project called Kinlinks was launched at Images Festival 2005 and is hosted on the Vtape website: <http://vtapedigital.org/kinlinks>.

Contact: wood_natalie@hotmail.com



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