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## CLOSING THE WAGE GAP: WOMEN WORK FOR PAY EQUITY

"Equal pay for comparable work!" This challenge by women workers was echoed in public hearings January 28-30 in San Francisco. Sponsored by the California Commission on the Status of Women, the Department of Industrial Relations, and the Department of Fair Employment and Housing, these hearings were another step toward legislation and regulations sought by women's unions and organizations to combat pay inequity.

The demand by women for pay equity has arisen from the limitations of "equal pay for equal work," the sex discrimination doctrine of the 1963 Equal Pay Act. Women are segregated in occupational ghettos, such as clerical, hospital, library and domestic work. Jobs in these ghettos pay lower wages than other jobs filled by men with similar education, skills, and job experience. So women are calling for equal pay for work of comparable value, even if the jobs are quite different in nature, to raise wage rates in female-dominated occupations. This is the demand for pay equity, or equal pay for comparable worth.

Evidence of job segregation is overwhelming. Across the country, women make up 45% of the labor force, but are 95% or more of secretaries, household workers, dressmakers, and sewing machine operators. In San Francisco a 1978 study of 20,000 city workers--almost half women--found dramatic sex segregation. Men worked in 88% of over 1,000 job classifications, while women were crowded into only 31%. The survey, by local members of the Women Library Workers, found an overall 74% higher average salary in jobs filled predominantly by men compared to those filled by women. Even in comparisons of workers with equal education and experience in their occupations, it turned out that male clerk typists were 64% ahead of female clerk typists.

### Legal and Legislative Battles

The struggle for pay equity is being fought on several fronts. Working women's organizations are backing lawsuits by unions and workers to extend the coverage of Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. One case to be decided this Spring by the U.S. Supreme Court claims discrimination because female jail matrons are paid less than male jail guards. In another case which may go to the Supreme Court, the International Union of Electrical Workers successfully used Westinghouse records, showing lower pay for equally-rated women's jobs, to win their case at the circuit court level.

Government agencies such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) are supporting efforts by unions and women's organizations to push changes in company policies. This process includes threats of lawsuits and use of Executive Order 11246 forbidding discrimination by federal contractors. The EEOC has commissioned a study by the National Academy of Sciences on the feasibility of unbiased job evaluations systems, to be published soon. Pending state legislation co-sponsored by the California State Employees Association and others (AB 129) would require the State Personnel Board to consider comparable worth when deciding salaries for female-dominated jobs.

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### Unions Organize, Bargain for Pay Equity

Comparable worth appeals are part of new union organizing drives and are used increasingly in collective bargaining. In addition to endorsements of the pay equity struggle from individuals, unions and the AFL-CIO, many locals have brought up comparable worth payment in negotiations. Clericals in the California state college system won an additional 2-1/2% wage hike when Local 909 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) demonstrated their past victimization by discriminatory pay standards. AFSCME Local 101 is currently bargaining for extension of a comparable worth system of compensation now used for city employees in San Jose, following a two-year study funded by the city. In 1977, the Communications Workers of America used results from its Job Analysis Committee to win compression of over 300 clerical job titles to seven. The United Electrical Workers recently won special wage increases and upgrading for women workers' classifications in local settlements.

An especially promising organizing drive began at Stanford University when over half of 2,000 clericals petitioned to join the Office Staff Organizing Committee (OSOC). The impetus for this drive was the realization in 1979 by members of one small women's group that their three year wage increase had been 5.3%, while technicians received 21% and the largely male labor pool--requiring just a driver's license for employment--received 19%. This drive by women clericals is now in representation hearings before the NLRB.

The Stanford clericals are working with United Stanford Employees, Local 715 of the Service Employees International Union, which is composed mostly of male technical, maintenance and service workers. "It is extremely important to explain to other union members who are male that this issue will not take anything away from them," commented Joyce Tipp-Coats, chairperson of OSOC. She is very hopeful about the union drive, noting that sudden across-the-board wage increases to clericals of 10% in 1980, and 12% promised for 1981, have only fueled the women's efforts to unionize.

### Issues for the Future

Pay equity raises some special problems for unions. Foremost is the need to keep men and women workers united and fighting for a bigger pie to divide. Asking higher-paid male workers to take lower wage increases so women can "catch up" simply plays into the employers' hands and risks splitting union forces at the bargaining table. It also forces workers to pay now for management's history of pay discrimination.

Pay equity can also be a complicated issue, requiring careful use of job evaluation systems to determine "unbiased" wage differentials with point-factor measurements. Organizers must work to explain these systems so all workers remain actively involved in the struggle.

While measuring the worth of jobs can demonstrate past pay discrimination, it can also be used by management to weaken the union's side in bargaining. If detailed job evaluations are accepted as the rule for wage setting, this may lead toward more use of time and motion and "productivity" data, and toward less reliance on the kind of bargaining patterns that originate where labor is strong (and mostly male), and then spread with a blanket effect to other units (mostly female). Many unionists therefore advocate using comparable worth as only one tool in the broader

struggle for higher wages for women workers. Ultimately, any measurement system is only as strong as the movement to implement its findings. And the power of unionization is apparent in today's pattern of 20 to 46% higher wages for unionized compared to non-unionized women workers.

Some women agree with anti-pay equity business groups on one apparent contradiction: while pay equity would be a victory, it would leave women largely in their traditional occupations. Working women's organizations insist that women must continue to gain access to more "non-traditional" jobs. But the problem of lower pay for jobs that are traditionally women's must also be addressed. This is the goal of the comparable worth struggle.

- Deborah Armida

#### RESOURCES

In addition to the many union pamphlets, position papers, and continuing newspaper coverage of pay equity, here are some outstanding general resources:

Comparable Worth Project, 488 41st St., #5, Oakland, CA 94609, 415/658-1808. Newsletter published beginning January 1981. --\$16 institutions, \$8 regular, \$4 low income, per year.

Manual on Pay Equity, published by the Committee on Pay Equity Conference on Alternative State and Local Policies, 2000 Florida Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20009. -- \$9.95 + .75 postage by mail; 25% on ten or more copies.

Bargaining for Equality, by Women's Labor Project, National Lawyers Guild, PO Box 6250, San Francisco, CA 94101. -- \$4.50 + .50 or \$1.50 postage (book rate or first class); 40% discount on ten or more copies. Covers collective bargaining over issues affecting women including pay equity.

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