

## Equalizing base rates



In many provinces, pay equity legislation has helped to address the problem of employers paying less for the jobs women do than for the jobs men do. But lower pay for women workers takes many forms, and these can persist even with pay equity legislation. This is partly because women and men still tend to be employed in different job classifications. For example, women are more likely to be employed as clerical workers, and men as labourers.

Employers pay lower base rates for the jobs women do than for those that men do. The base rate is the wage for the lowest entry level job class. The base rate for clerical workers (Clerk I, for example) is often lower than for labourers.

Equalizing base rates means raising wages so that the base rate for women's jobs is equal to the base rate for men's jobs covered by the collective agreement.

## The B.C. struggle

In the early 1980s, CUPE municipal and school board locals in British Columbia had some success in raising women's wages by negotiating equal base rates, as well as by eliminating increment steps.

At its 1979 convention, CUPE B.C. passed a resolution calling for the equalization of the base rates between inside and outside workers as a major bargaining priority. The resolution was supported by women and men, clerical and manual workers.

Every bargaining proposal package presented to employers in B.C.'s Lower Mainland prominently featured two demands:

- That clerical workers be paid the same starting rate as a beginning outside labourer.
- That clerical workers not be required to "prove their dedication to an employer" by enduring years of discriminatory increment steps before achieving full pay for their work.

CUPE sisters and brothers picketed up to 15 weeks to support these demands. Our members did not achieve everything they wanted in this first effort, but the gains were significant.

## Minimum entry level rates

Another way to tackle the problem of entry level female job classes being paid less than men's is to negotiate a minimum entry level rate by bringing all classifications with low wage rates up to one selected rate. Using this approach eliminates the wage basement usually occupied mainly by women. It establishes a CUPE "minimum wage" with that employer.

## Negotiating parity



Despite years of efforts to raise women's wages, most of CUPE's lowest paid workers are women. Recently, a number of CUPE locals have had great success boosting women's wages by negotiating parity with another group of workers. Negotiating parity means bringing women's wages up to the higher rate of pay for a comparable group of workers.

There are many examples within CUPE showing how this can be done, and several are included here. Two of the most common methods are through:

- Provincial bargaining, where negotiating wage parity provincially has brought large wage increases for groups of mainly women workers.
- Negotiating parity locally by making comparisons between one establishment and another. Negotiating parity in cases of mergers and amalgamations falls within this category.

## Provincial comparisons

At the provincial bargaining level, CUPE's successes have tended to involve making wage comparisons between similar workers, often within a particular sector.

### Health care sector

The broader health care sector is one sector where we have successfully negotiated parity for different groups. Through provincial bargaining, the wages for long-term health care workers have been brought up to par with those of hospital workers in a number of provinces.

In the last round of provincial hospital bargaining in Manitoba, CUPE negotiated an agreement to eventually bring parity to all hospital workers in the province. The first priority is to achieve parity in wages for all hospital workers in urban centres. The next is to bring the wages in rural locations up to the rates paid in urban centres.

### Social services

In Spring 2000, community social services workers in British Columbia also benefited from a bargaining strategy to achieve parity. CUPE, our B.C. Health Services Division – the Hospital Employees' Union (HEU), the Health Sciences Association (HSA) and the British Columbia Government Employees Union (BCGEU) joined forces to demand parity for lower-paid community

social services workers (mainly women) with other community health workers. We were successful in bargaining wage and benefit parity for thousands of social services workers employed by community agencies throughout the province.

## Parity through mergers and amalgamations

When faced with having to merge collective agreements and wage schedules because of mergers and amalgamations, CUPE's goal is to negotiate the highest wage rate for comparable jobs, often in contrast to the employer's goal to negotiate the lowest rate.

This is an example of negotiating parity locally, since we argue for the lower paid comparable workers to be brought up to the highest rates in similar job classes. This method also benefits women since, as noted before, they are concentrated in lower paying jobs.

Some CUPE locals have negotiated this type of parity through "job matching", showing that two different jobs with similar core duties are essentially the same and should be paid the same, even if they have different job titles and different rates of pay.

## Comparisons with male job classes of another employer

Some CUPE members, such as child care workers, have jobs in agencies where there are no male job classes to compare with. Often, these workers are among the lowest paid, earning little more than poverty wages even though they are performing valuable human service jobs.

Over the past decade, pay equity legislation has been the most common method for recognizing that different jobs held by women and men should be paid the same. Legislation often relies on demonstrating that different jobs are of equal

value based on comparable skill, effort, responsibility and working conditions.

But where women workers are not covered by pay equity legislation, it is also possible to bargain increases based on making the same argument for parity. It goes like this:

- Women should be paid the same as men in a dissimilar job, regardless of whether they work for the same employer. The argument is that women's work is just as valuable, and in some cases more so, than men's. For example, wages of child care workers are usually far below those paid to zookeepers. Yet a strong case can be made in bargaining that a worker providing early childhood care and education to children should make as much, or more, than someone caring for animals.

This type of argument can be very powerful in addressing basic notions of wage equity and fairness through collective bargaining.

## Parity wages and benefits for part-time and casual workers

Almost four of every five part-time workers are women. This makes raising the wages and benefits of part-time workers another important way to make gains for working women. First, we need to ensure that part-time and casual workers with our employers are organized and represented by CUPE. Through collective bargaining, our goal should be to bring the part-time and casual workers' wage rates up to the full-time rates. We should also seek to negotiate full benefit coverage for part-timers, or a percentage payment in lieu of benefits where it's not possible to extend benefits to part-time and casual workers.

Seniority rules can be extremely important for part-time and casual workers as a fair way to ensure they have access to more paid hours of work or to bid on full-time jobs, as well as for

protection against arbitrary layoff during downsizing.

### Pensions important

Pension coverage for all women workers, especially part-timers who are often excluded from pension plans, is extremely important to provide a decent income to women workers in their retirement. Check to ensure that your pension plan eligibility rules don't have the effect of excluding women because of the types of jobs they are in (part-time, part-year, etc.). And check that they don't have a different pension contribution and benefit structure (depending on age and sex) that disadvantages women workers. Also, try to ensure that parents (often women) who take time out of the workforce to care for children are not penalized in the pension plan for these gaps in service.

Finally, we should push employers to create more full-time jobs. A large and growing number of women workers hold down multiple jobs to make up a full-time income. Through bargaining, we can force employers to convert casual and part-time jobs into full-time positions.



## Paid parental leaves of absence

Because women bear children and often tend to be primarily responsible for their care, negotiating paid parental leave is important to ensure women don't lose income when off work for family-related reasons. Forms of paid parental leave include:

- Paid maternity leave
- Paid adoption leave
- Paid extended parental leave
- Paid leave for family responsibilities

The longest absence from work and interruption in pay occurs around childbirth and adoption. Therefore, negotiating paid maternity/adoption leave to ensure full pay and benefits for the required time is an important way to prevent a big loss of income. One way to do this is to negotiate a top-up of unemployment insurance benefits through a SUB Plan (supplementary unemployment benefits plan). But the union can and has bargained for longer periods of paid leave beyond what is available under unemployment insurance. Negotiating benefit coverage for extended parental leaves of absence is also important.

Because women still tend to be the main caregivers in the family, it's also important to negotiate paid time off work for family responsibilities. For example, this might take the form of 10 paid days off a year to look after sick children and care for ill parents or close relations.

## Direct grants



In some cases, it's hard to make headway in raising low paid women's wages at the bargaining table when a public sector employer can't come up with the money. For example, many CUPE employers rely almost exclusively on funding from government. This is the case for many social services that depend on municipal and/or provincial funding.

In these cases, it's important to develop an effective strategy to pressure government to come up with the cash. CUPE has had some success with this approach. One example is the Direct Operating Grant (D.O.G.). The Ontario government was pushed to provide more funding to public child care centres to subsidize the cost

of raising child care worker wages out of the income basement. In this case, we learned the importance of folding a direct operating grant into the base wages to prevent the grant from being easily withdrawn. Child care workers in British Columbia, Quebec and most recently, Manitoba, have also benefited from direct grants provided by provincial ministries to boost wages.

## Public Works!



Our struggles to stop privatization and contracting out of services are also important to prevent a decline in women's wages.

One of the main ways contractors make money when they take over services is to lower labour costs by cutting hours of work, increasing the proportion of part-time positions and/or by directly lowering the wage rate.

Stopping privatization is an important way to preserve higher wages for women workers. And if services do get contracted out, we need to make sure we organize those workers and negotiate to keep their wages at the same level they were before.

CUPE Research March 2000

Mobilizing CUPE women by putting in place local union women's committees is a way for us to work to raise our wages, gain workplace equality and promote union activism. It's a way to strengthen the connection of CUPE women to the union—and that means building a stronger CUPE to fight for all our members' rights.

## Why do we need active women's committees?

They're a good way for the women in your local to identify the unique problems of women workers, carve out some space to share their experiences, support each other in their activism, and plan for mobilizing on equality issues and other union priorities. Women's committees are not only helpful when women are in the minority in their locals; they're also extremely useful in majority or all-female locals.

## Don't women's committees just isolate women?

On the contrary. Women's committees are a way to encourage women to take an active role in the union. Women have often been prevented from doing this because of the way unions are structured and because of the demands that union activism imposes on them on top of their work and family responsibilities.

Providing a vehicle for women to organize among themselves helps the entire union. Union women have worked with supportive members and leaders to push many issues forward that once weren't considered conventional workplace concerns. Issues such as child care, pay equity, employment equity, harassment and maternity and parental leave. Gains made in these areas have benefited men as well as women.



## Isn't a committee a lot of work?

Don't let the word "committee" scare you! Your committee can be formally structured (written into the local's bylaws and duly elected), or it can start out as an informal grouping – whatever works best in your particular situation. It doesn't have to be a lot of work, or a lot of meetings. There are ways to spread the work around, keep things manageable, and even have fun!

## Will a women's committee cost the local money?

It won't cost your local more than any other committee, and the costs of not having one are far greater. The union loses potential new activists, and an opportunity to increase union solidarity and make workplace gains for everyone.

## Women's committees help CUPE women and the union

They provide a way for CUPE women to:

- Build women's power and make sure CUPE women's voices are heard in our locals and at the bargaining table.
- Work with each other in ways that are inclusive and sharing.
- Develop stronger ties to each other.
- Learn about the union and union activism in a comfortable environment.
- Raise awareness and build support for the fight for equality.
- Find ways to integrate women's issues into the local's daily priorities and bargaining agenda.
- Develop women leaders and activists to work with our brothers and support the union in all its struggles.

- Talk one-on-one to the women in your local, or survey them. What are the issues that concern them? How do they feel about their work? Their wages? Do they have trouble making ends meet? Do they want to get to know the other women in their local better and work with them to improve their wages and their rights?
- Be inclusive and representative of the diversity in your local. Reach out to Aboriginal women, women of colour, women with disabilities, lesbians, and older and younger women. Find out what's important to them. How does inequality affect them differently from other women in the local?
- Don't forget to also include women who work different shifts or do different jobs from the majority of the women in your local.
- Don't write women off who seem hesitant or opposed to what you're doing. It might take a little longer to bring them along, but it's worth the effort. Listen to them. Find out why they're hesitant and see if you can deal with their concerns. For example, a woman might initially say she's not interested. But after some probing, you might discover that child care is the main obstacle to her involvement. Talk to reluctant women about the importance of having a way to bring women activists along so that the whole union can be stronger, and so that you can build support for women's issues in the local.
- Try to recruit your CUPE sisters to come to an initial, informal gathering of women in the local. Send out an invitation. It doesn't matter if the turnout is small – it's a start. Make it part social (so that women can build relationships) and part "business" (to discuss what kind of women's committee will work best in your local). Be organized about what you would like

to accomplish during the more formal part of the gathering:

- Draw up a short list of topics you want to cover.
- Find someone to take on the responsibility of guiding the discussion and keeping it on track. Someone else should record all decisions.
- Decide on a time frame for the business part of the meeting – perhaps one hour – and stick to it.
- Make sure there's a clear end to the business part of the meeting, so that those who have to leave early will know that other decisions won't be made in their absence.
- If you decide you want a formal, permanent women's committee so that it is integrated into the local's structure:
  - Write up a motion to take to a membership meeting so that the committee gets written into the local's by-laws.
  - Make sure you organize support for the motion ahead of time.
  - Develop terms of reference. What will the committee's mandate be? Its size? Frequency of meetings? Budget?

## Making it work

- Focus on the issues that are important to the women in your local. Develop a plan of action with realistic goals. That might mean having just one goal for the time being – and that's fine.

- Find ways for the committee to accommodate the reality of women's lives as workers, family and community members, and union activists. Meetings aren't the only way for women to participate. Ask your sisters on the committee to help organize an event, work on a newsletter or leaflet, or on part of a project that interests them.
- When you need to hold meetings, hold them at convenient times and in convenient locations. If meetings are after work, make them children-friendly, and order pizza. If your committee has a budget, offer to pay child care expenses so that attending a meeting doesn't mean an extra expense.
- If the women on your committee use the Internet, consider holding "virtual" meetings. Email provides an easy way to discuss issues without having to arrange to meet face-to-face every time. It is also a good way to circulate and work on documents together (for example, drafts of letters).
- If your committee is brand new and inexperienced, consider "buddying up" with an existing women's committee from another local for support and advice. (Contact your provincial CUPE women's committee for the names of the local union women's committees in your province.)
- Find ways to build knowledge and leadership skills. Invite guest speakers, show videos, or set up mini-educational on equality issues, and skills such as effective speaking and bargaining. Encourage members of your committee to attend CUPE educational and women's conferences.
- Spread the knowledge, work and power around so that more women are involved, and one or two people don't get burned out. Shared power gives your committee a stronger base and develops skills.
- Contact your national women's committee representative and your division's women's committee. Let them know about your committee, and ask them to keep you informed about the work their committees are doing. This is especially

important and helpful if your women's committee is new.

- CUPE's Equality Branch has resources (publications and flyers) on equality issues. For more information, contact your regional equality branch representative (if your region has one), your servicing representative, or the Equality Branch at national office (613-237-1590, or [cupe.ca](http://cupe.ca)).
- **Don't isolate yourselves in the local!** Campaign to elect women on other local union committees. Work with other committees in your local to promote equality issues and to fight for other priorities identified by the union. Make regular reports to membership and executive committee meetings.
- Reach out to women's committees in other CUPE locals and unions, and women's groups in your community.

## The committee and the local union executive



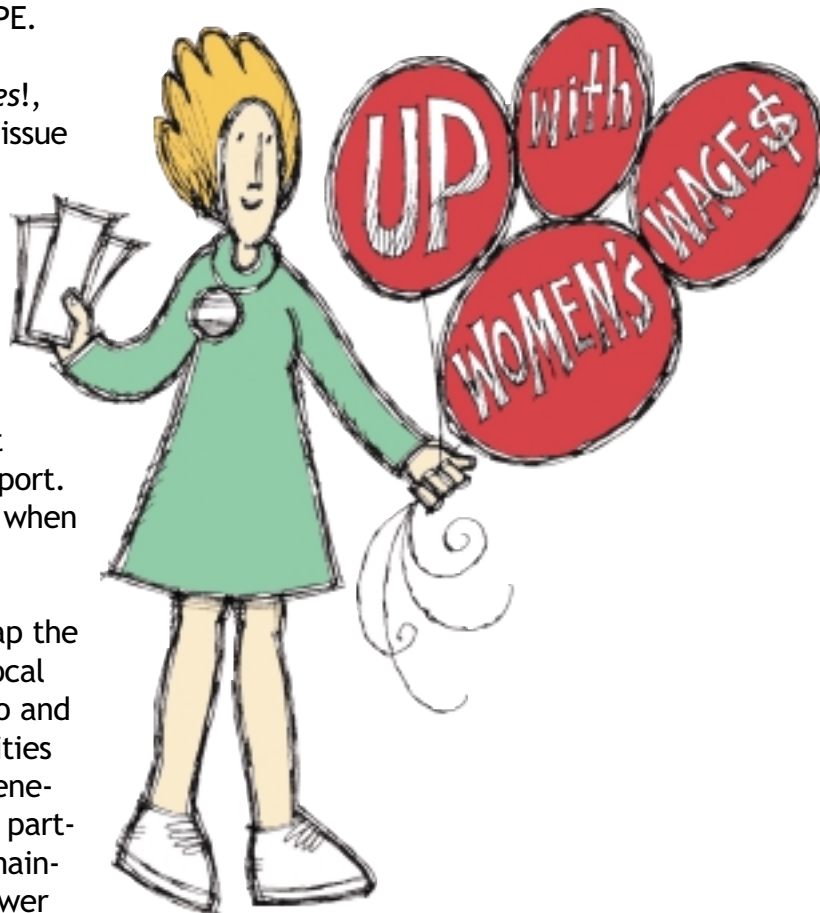
- Try to build support on the local union executive for your committee. No matter how the executive members feel about what your committee is doing, make sure to keep the lines of communication open. Inform them about your activities to avoid unnecessary conflict, prevent isolation and promote trust.
- Seek out allies on the executive. Look for someone who knows the ropes and might be willing to give your committee a hand, especially when problems occur.
- If your local has women on its executive, make sure that they are plugged into the women's committee. They are an important link and can speak in favour of your committee's requests and recommendations at executive meetings.



# A local campaign on women's wages

Raising women's wages is a priority for CUPE. That's why the union has embarked on the national campaign, *Up with Women's Wages!*, and is encouraging local unions to put this issue on their bargaining agenda.

A local union campaign to raise women's wages can be spearheaded by the local union executive, the bargaining committee, or the women's committee. Regardless of who takes the lead, the women's committee will play an important role in ensuring the campaign receives support. Here are some steps and ideas to consider when planning a campaign on women's wages:



- Review the collective agreement and map the workforce (the jobs women do in your local and their pay, as well as the jobs men do and their pay). Identify any economic disparities between men and women in wages or benefits, such as pensions. Be sure to look at part-time and temporary workers. Are they mainly women? Do they get lower pay and fewer benefits? (For more information, see the tools on *Bargaining strategies* in this kit.)
- Look at employer practices around promotions, and who gets picked for skills upgrading.
- Using some of the information from your research, do an informal or formal survey of the members to see how they feel about women's wages as a priority issue and why. The results of the survey will help you develop a plan that starts from the members' reality.
- Based on the information you've gathered, develop a plan of action to get women's wages on the bargaining agenda as a priority. Your plan should have clear short- and long-term goals, timelines, allocated responsibilities, and a method for evaluation and follow up. Don't be too rigid about the elements in your plan. If something's not working, be prepared to make changes.

- Start with ways to raise awareness of the issue and build support for it in the local:
  - Seek out and develop allies, especially sympathetic union men and members from other equity seeking groups within the union, and other union women's committees and women's groups in your community.
  - Raise the issue at local union meetings.
  - Develop a catchy slogan for the campaign and use it on posters, leaflets, buttons, t-shirts.
  - Write articles about the issue in your local union or women's committee newsletter.
  - Invite a speaker – perhaps an activist from another CUPE local or union that has made pay equity an issue – to come to one of your women's committee meetings and address women's wages.
  - Use women's wages as a way to mobilize the women in your local around special days like International Women's Day (March 8).
- Develop ways to make your point about women's wages and to put pressure on the employer. For example:
  - Consider holding a day when all the members wear their campaign button to work in support of the campaign.
  - Use the no-discrimination clause in your collective agreement as the basis for a group grievance on gender discrimination in wages, and publicize the grievance within the local.
- Join forces with other CUPE women who work in your sector or whose source of funding is the same to push for increased funding to raise wages.
- Work to elect women on the local's bargaining committee and other union offices, so that they can help to get women's wages on the bargaining agenda.
- Be prepared with arguments to help others understand why raising women's wages is an issue that everyone should take on:
  - Lower paid workers and classifications act as a downward drag on everybody's wages. They provide the employer with arguments for keeping overall wage rates low.
  - The employer creates divisions among workers through different pay scales and job classifications and these divisions weaken us at the bargaining table. More equal rates of pay help increase our solidarity and our ability to make gains for everyone.
  - By raising women's wages, the local benefits through increased dues and gaining women who are active in the union.
  - Raising women's wages means increasing the wages of spouses, partners, mothers and grown daughters, which in turn raises family incomes.
  - Taking on women's wages benefits the union because women members see their union as active on their issues and relevant to their lives. They are more apt to become activists and support the union in other struggles.



*Barbara Ames, CUPE 38, is the Alberta representative on the CUPE National Women's Committee. She sits on a number of other women's committees, including the Calgary*

*District Labour Council women's committee, which she describes below. The committee deals with all kinds of issues, from poverty to racism.*

"We don't have real structured move-a-motion, pass-a-motion meetings. We meet here, or we meet in a restaurant.

"Our meetings are simple. This is what we need to do, this is who we need to lobby, so-and-so: 'write the letter.' We're very informal without being hung up on political structure. If you miss a meeting, people tell you they miss you.

"I guess it's a reflection of who the women are that are on the committee. Some have quite a bit of experience but we also have women with hardly any experience. We're not intimidating because we don't have that structure... it's an easy way for women to come into the meeting and feel comfortable. It works because we're sharing the successes.



"From my perspective, our responsibility as leaders and people who have been around awhile is mentorship. It's vital to the labour movement. I see men grooming men but I don't see women grooming other women."

*H el ene Simard is a member of the CUPE Qu ebec women's committee and the chair of CUPE 2929's women's committee. The women's committee in CUPE Qu ebec is very active, and provides support to local union women's committees through education on equality issues, skills building and regular communications. Here is an example of how that support made a real difference to the lives of the women in H el ene Simard's local.*

"The women's committee in Qu ebec has done a lot of training on affirmative action and I took part in that training. I didn't realize at the time that it would pay off in a concrete way for our local.

"Our employer, the Soci et  immobili re du Qu ebec, was going to lay off some of our clerical workers, who were all women. At the same time, The Soci et  had vacancies for trained electricians and was looking to fill these positions from outside.

Ren  Mathieu

"Of course, we wanted to stop these layoffs. I thought about what the union could do, and suggested our local propose that the employer apply for government funding to train the clerical women as electricians. The employer agreed to do this. And now, 5 women are working at the Société as trained electricians. They're not out of a job. They have a much higher classification than before: they went from a classification of 7 to 17. And they got a big wage increase, too – \$155 a week more!

"Our CUPE Québec women's committee puts a tremendous amount of effort into helping to develop and support local union women's committees. Taking the course on affirmative action and knowing that an effort was being made in Québec to put women into non-traditional jobs was what did it. The light went on, and this is the happy result."



*Shellie Bird is the education officer for CUPE 2204, which represents child care workers in Ottawa. After the last CUPE women's conference in Ottawa, the local "became fired up" and decided to start a women's committee. The committee is working on the two main issues of the World March of Women 2000: poverty and violence.*

"In the short term, we're looking at what we could do in our local to get a better understanding of poverty among women. Our longer-term goal is to work on setting up some sort of support system within the local around issues of violence.

"The first thing we're doing is an evening with Joan Grant Cummings (National Action Committee on the Status of Women Chair). We're encouraging the public to come. We're reaching out. We're even inviting the local women's groups to come in and plan together.

“Hopefully we’re going to get 250 women out to this meeting. We’re going to set the room up into postal codes – women will sit in their postal code. Once everybody’s settled and sitting down, we’ll say, ‘Look around, these women live in your community. If you need a ride home, you know who’s going in your direction.’ It’s a practical example of solidarity, how we can support each other. That’s what we’re after – practical ways to change people’s lives without theoretical big ideas.”



*Louise Hutchinson is co-chair of the CUPE National Women’s Committee and its representative from the Hospital Employees’ Union, CUPE’s B.C. Health Services Division. This is an abridged excerpt from her report about the HEU’s women’s committee to the national committee.*

“We have an extensive action plan prepared for the March 2000, 6-month period. A banner is being designed with the word “women” in many languages. We will have 20 banners and the committee members will take banners throughout the province to gatherings of our union sisters who will write/draw/sketch their own demands for the international march against poverty and violence against women.

“We will be having a special day of training on public speaking as well as tips for handling those tough questions. Committee members will be making presentations on the March in gatherings around the province and so we want to be prepared in every regard.

“We are planning a special event to be held at our provincial division convention. Our idea is to have a women’s Decade Achievement Award and present our banners from the different regions/cities/towns to the convention while honouring the achievements of the women who went before us.”



*Anne Holland is a member of CUPE 4150 in Bridgewater, Nova Scotia, and a member of the CUPE National Women’s Committee.*

*As the chair of CUPE Nova Scotia’s equal opportunity committee, she is involved in efforts to make equality issues a priority and to encourage the formation of local union women’s committees in the province.*

“Earlier this year, the provincial equal opportunity committee and the human rights committee co-sponsored a workshop on harassment in the workplace as part of CUPE Nova Scotia’s Education Conference. We got very good feedback on the workshop, which dealt with harassment in all its

forms — ways to prevent it, recognize it and fight it. And many locals that were not able to attend requested that it be put on again, so we will be doing that. I feel that our committee can play a useful role in providing this kind of education and raising awareness about equality issues.

“The committee is also involved in putting forward a number of resolutions to the division convention around some of the World March of Women 2000 issues — poverty, child care and violence against women.

“One of the things we will be focusing on now is to encourage CUPE women from Nova Scotia to start local union women’s committees, because this is very important in order to move our issues forward in the workplace. Our provincial committee can be an important source of information and support to local committees.”

Unionization helps women get fair treatment in the workplace. A strong unionized sector can be effective in the fight to keep services public, make employment more secure, help workers balance work and family life, and improve wages. These issues are important to women, and they are part of CUPE's bargaining priorities.

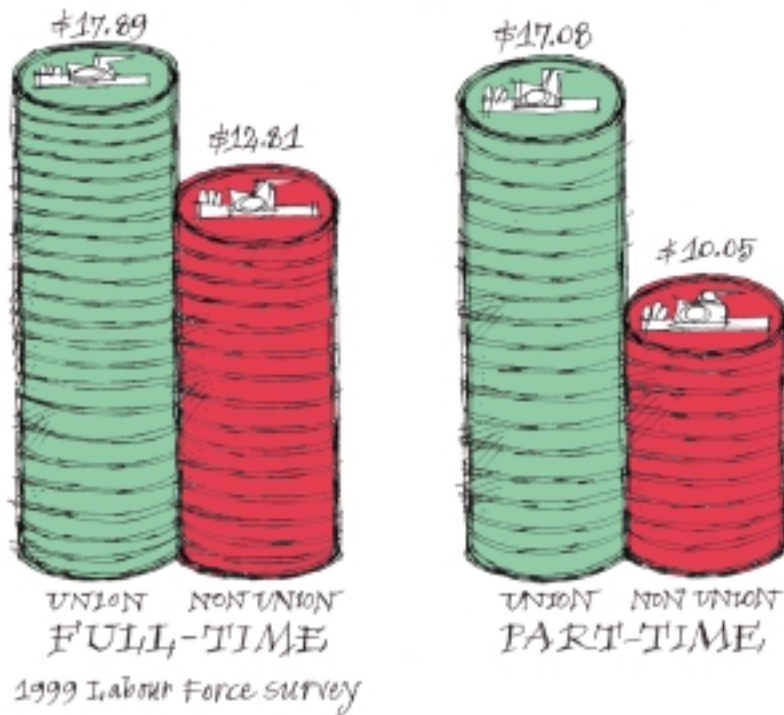
For example:

- The ability to balance work and family life is the most important aspect women are looking for in a job, according to a recent Vector public opinion poll. Today, 35% of employees covered by collective agreements have provisions for flex-time, up 17% from 1985 to 1998. More than 24% have paid leave for illness in the family, and 53% have unpaid leave for personal reasons.
- The poll shows that the next priority for women workers is job security. The most recent data from the Statistics Canada Survey on Labour and Income Dynamics shows that just 7% of jobs covered by a collective agreement ended in involuntary separation, compared to 19% of non-union jobs. Turnover is much lower in the unionized sector because of better working conditions and provisions for job security.

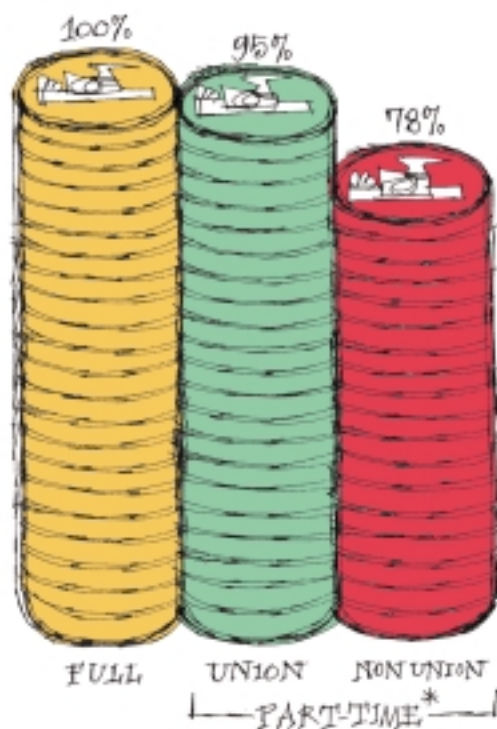
## Unionization raises women's wages

- According to 1999 Statistics Canada information, the hourly wage rate for full-time unionized women is \$17.89 per hour; for non-unionized women it's \$12.82 per hour.
- Unionization helps close the wage gap for women. The 1999 Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey showed that **hourly rates** for unionized women were 90% of the hourly rates of unionized men. In the non-unionized sector, women's hourly wages were only 77% of men's wages.
- The gap is larger when comparing **annual** wages between women and men, and this is because women workers tend to have fewer hours than men. But even this more substantial gap is smaller for unionized women workers than it is for their non-unionized counterparts.
- Part-time workers are treated more fairly in unionized workplaces, and most part-timers are women. Unionized women part-timers earn 95% of the hourly wages of unionized women full-timers. In non-unionized workplaces, they only earn 78% of full-time women's hourly wages.

Women's hourly wages (all industries)



Part-time wages as a % of full-time

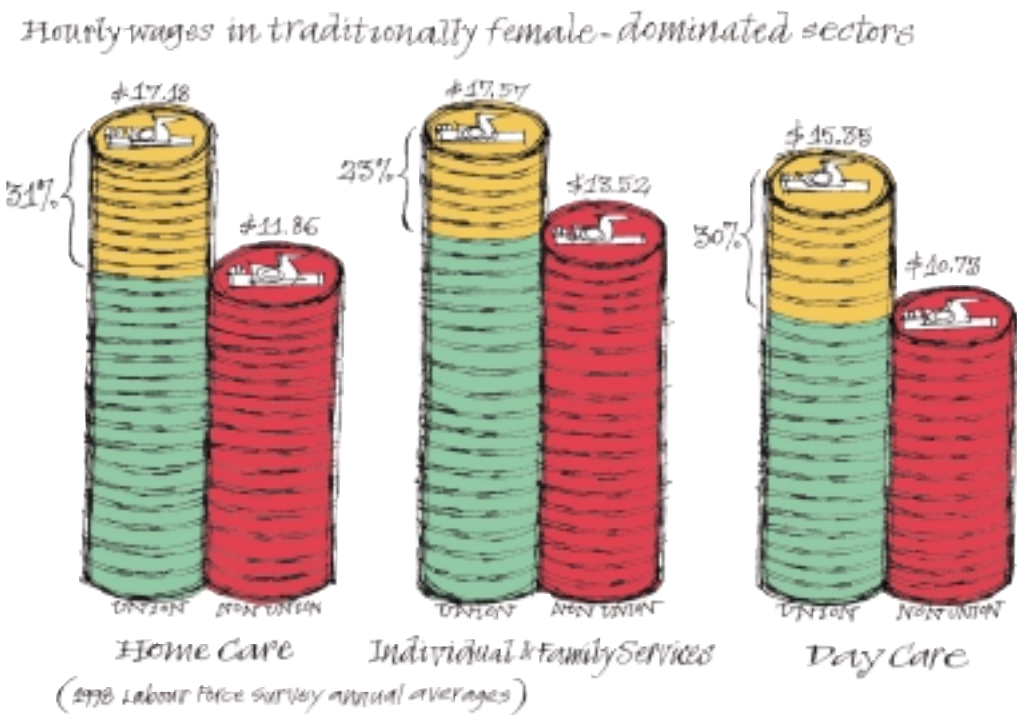


Women's wages as a % of men's (full-time and part-time)





- Women employed in traditionally female-dominated sectors are working in the poorest paid sectors. Unionization is of great benefit to these workers. A 1998 special statistical run done by CUPE using Statistics Canada Labour Force Information showed that wages in traditionally female-dominated sectors were significantly higher in unionized workplaces than in non-unionized workplaces.



## Benefits make a difference

- 79% of unionized women have a pension plan – only 31% of non-unionized women are covered.
- 78% of unionized women have extended medical coverage – only 40% of non-unionized women are covered.
- 72% of unionized women have a dental plan – only 38% of non-unionized women are covered.<sup>1</sup>

## Unions give women power

Unions make workplaces more democratic. Collective agreements take away arbitrary powers of the employer. Unions empower workers, giving them bargaining clout, and ways of resolving differences with the employer through union representation and access to the grievance process.

Women are more interested in joining unions than other workers. A recent Vector poll shows that working women between the ages of 18-34 are 30% more likely to favour a union than the total of non-unionized workers.



## Look for new CUPE members

The first place to look for potential new members is the scope clause in your collective agreement. It tells you who is and who isn't covered by the collective agreement in your workplace. For example, a number of collective agreements still don't include part-time workers and casual workers – workers who are mainly women. It's important to organize these workers to protect them from exploitation and make sure they don't become a source of cheap labour for the employer.



## Follow the work

There may also be workers on your work site or workers providing services who aren't employees of your employer. This could be because the work has been contracted out or because the work has never been in your bargaining unit. We need to keep unionization high in our sector and follow our work even if it gets privatized. Otherwise, we risk losing unionized jobs to the lowest, non-union bidder. Unionization for women in the private sector is very low – only 14% in 1999, compared to 76% in the public sector.

There may also be opportunities to organize workers in your workplace who aren't employees of your employer. For example, some school, college and university-based child care centres are run by not-for-profit boards of directors and remain non-unionized.



## Map your sector

Sometimes it helps to map your sector to identify who is doing the work and who is unionized in your community. CUPE members can be helpful in identifying new projects for organizing by identifying the providers of services in the community. For example, child care activists can identify unorganized child care centres in their communities as potential organizing targets.



## Organizing for strength

Organizing more women workers helps everyone in the union. Organizing new union members strengthens the position of all workers to get a better deal. It builds solidarity so that our labour has to be bought at a fair price. Organizing in our sectors ensures we maintain our bargaining power and confront our employers with one strong and united front. It helps protect our sectors – and that protects all of our members.

<sup>1</sup> CLC Research Paper #11, Unions Collective Bargaining and Labour Market Outcomes for Canadian Working Women.