

ONTARIO COUNCIL SPEAKER SERIES

January 21, 2017

Closing the Gender Wage Gap

Speaker: Jan Borowy, Equal Pay Coalition and Doris Mae Oulton, Past President, CFUW for Linda Davis, Ontario Government's Gender Wage Gap Strategy Steering Committee

Closing the Gender Wage Gap (GWG) was selected as the theme to kick start our journey of learning and advocacy for 2017. The gap remains high, at approximately 30 %. Equal Pay Day this year is April 19, symbolizing how far into the year women must work to earn what men earned last year. What drives this gap? What can be done?

Setting the Stage

This write-up will only include highlights selected to inform and guide our work. Our speakers offered helpful information and advice. It is recommended that you check the CFUW Ontario Council website to consult the resources provided on this topic, including speaker presentations plus the handout ***Gender Wage Gap in Ontario Background*** that lists the recommendations of both the Gender Wage Gap (GWG) Strategy Steering Committee and the Equal Pay Coalition (EPC). See: <http://www.cfuwontcouncil.ca/Issues/Issues-Gender-Wage-Gap.html> .

Please refer to the end of this summary for selected 'takeaways' provided by two of the speakers, Doris Mae Oulton and Jan Borowy.

Terminology: Linda Davis frames the Gender Wage Gap (GWG) as "a social anomaly that has been allowed to exist and is very rooted in unconscious bias and the normalization of undervaluing women and the work they do". The EPC frames the GWG as a human rights issue. The term we often hear, Affirmative Action, has been replaced by the term Pay Equity. Pay Equity, although related, is not synonymous with Equal Pay. Equal Pay is a term primarily used within organizations or professions referring to equal pay for equal work. Pay Equity is more broadly equal pay for work of equal value, as defined by speaker Jan Borowy, focusing more on the value of work to society. The former is easier to legislate. The latter poses challenges, involving a societal shift in values.

Morning Plenary

The morning plenary was planned to feature two committed and knowledgeable women: Linda Davis, a member of CFUW London, a representative from the Gender Wage Gap (GWG) Strategy Steering Committee and a voice for the Ontario Government's recent commitment to further addressing this issue, and, Jan Borowy, Co-Chair of the Equal Pay Coalition (EPC), an advocacy group with 'on the ground / in the trenches' experiences, able to offer research and critical analysis from a socio legal perspective. Unfortunately Linda was unable to attend but made her presentation available. Doris Mae Oulton, Past President of CFUW National and also a former Assistant Deputy Minister of the Status of Women, Manitoba, stepped in to present Linda Davis' slides and offer knowledgeable insights. She also filled in at the afternoon joint Legislation and Status of Women's Committee meetings.

Doris Mae Oulton: The Ontario GWG Strategy Recommendations Presentation (Linda Davis)

Doris Mae commented on the Equity versus Equality slide, emphasizing that women need an equitable role and this theme runs through the recommendations. The first five recommendations are clustered around family issues required for gender parity, such as child care and parental support. Recommendations 6 - 10 involve change in workplace legislation and policies. Doris Mae flagged that not only external pressure is required for workplace change, but there must be an internal 'engine' to

drive change and a champion from within. Female dominated sectors must be equally valued. There is still an unconscious bias towards women, even among women managers, and women still do not play an equitable role in senior management decision making. She provided the example of women and medicine. Women have reached parity in terms of education but then hit a ceiling. Supports must be extended beyond education. Recommendations 11, 12, 17 - 19 involve the government. Noting number 11, minimum of 30% women on boards, women must have a recent biography to be prepared for the argument of 'can't find qualified women'. When appointed to boards and commissions, women are underrepresented on economic committees. Concerning 17, applying a gender lens, Doris Mae emphasized the importance of staff training on how to apply the tools. The remaining recommendations involve various points where education is essential. She summarized that the GWG Strategy recommendations are an attempt to move in the right direction but must involve partnerships. **To Note:** The GWG Working Group formed to work on the recommendations includes the EPC and the BPW (Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women).

Jan Borowy: Closing the Gender Pay Gap: Fighting for Women's Economic Justice

Jan began her presentation with a history of the EPC, emphasizing its call to action to the government: "Close the Gender Pay Gap by 2025". EPC, formed in 1976, is a coalition of 39 groups which includes CFUW. Please refer to Jan's presentation slides to track historical landmarks of legislative and policy changes, both provincial and national, many influenced by the work of EPC. In Ontario, in 1988 an Act to Implement Pay equity in the Broader Public Sector and in the Private Sector, the **Pay Equity Act**, (PEA) came into force. It introduced a proxy comparative method for classifying jobs. Unfortunately, the Harris Government later repealed the proxy comparative method from the PEA, capped pay equity adjustments and repealed the **Employment Equity Act**.

EPC works provincially, nationally and internationally, but Jan focused on the Ontario strategy, offering critical appraisal and recommendations. See the handout **Gender Wage Gap in Ontario Backgrounder** that lists EPC's twelve steps to closing the gap. What is driving the gap, currently pinned at 30%? Many factors are provided in Jan's slides. The under valuation of gender related jobs is systemic. The erosion of unions leaves fewer women with access to a union, and care obligations continue to create barriers to continued work. Women would have to work 13 years beyond 65 to catch up with men. The situation is even worse for those more vulnerable, such as Indigenous or racialized women. The gap is more intense for women working in the caring professions. Surprisingly, the higher the level of education women attain, the greater the gap! Some detailed economic data were provided, so consult the presentation for more information.

Jan Borowy expressed concern that only five meetings of the GWG Working Group have been scheduled and funded, and the work is limited to the GWG Strategy Steering Committee recommendations. Reviewing the **Pay Equity Act** is a problematic goal. More broadly, employment equity laws, not just the PEA, and policies must be reworked, enforced and expanded. It is important to take into consideration any significant recommendations of the **Changing Workplace Review**, to be released this spring. Another criticism is that the child care recommendation did not flag the low pay of ELCC workers!

To move forward with their goal, the EPC created a Framework for Action. As a part of this, Equal Pay Day was created. It is an opportunity for women and all GWG supporters to mobilize annually.

Afternoon Joint legislation and Status of Women Committee Meetings

In the afternoon, Jan Borowy, EPC, and Doris Mae led a vibrant and fruitful discussion with the combined Legislation and Status of Women committees.

Jan talked about the EPC (www.equalpaycoalition.org) which was originally established and chaired by Mary Cornish, a pioneer of Pay Equity in Canada. She has recently stepped back and Jan is now Co-Chair with Fay Faraday, on faculty at Osgoode Hall Law School, York University. Jan noted the

change in government attention to the GWG issue in the mandate letters Kathleen Wynne sent to her cabinet ministers. Previous to this, there had been no uptake by the Liberal government. The current government should be acknowledged and congratulated on prioritizing this. These letters are a helpful resource.

A few points that were discussed follow. Looking at the 12 EPC recommendations, each call for a broader strategy. Expect the **Changing Workplace Review** to comment on the minimum wage and other key issues that impact the GWG. The marked decline in private sector union participation is a concern. Sectoral bargaining, although complex, would provide more access to unions for women working in the private sector. Issues continue with women returning to work after maternity leave who may find they have been replaced and / or demoted. Currently, the **Employment Standards Act** makes no provision to protect women returning from maternity leave. In general there should be greater enforcement and increased funding to add teeth to the various laws affecting pay equity.

Takeaways: To help us in our Advocacy Work suggestions from our guest speakers

Some Strategies

Closing the GWG is complex. Pick your battles. Facts matter; build credibility. Chose one of the elements of GWG, such as child care, and be on top of the topic. Correspond with your local representative by letter, not e-mail. Of course, a visit is best. When visiting your MP, MPP or councillor, have three items on the agenda: one you can win; one on principle; one you are prepared for a 'no'.

For more complex issues, support a partner, such as the EPC in the case of the GWG.

Minimum Wage "Fairness at Fifteen"

A minimum wage hike is a recommendation of the EPC. You will encounter the argument that an increase to \$15 an hour is detrimental to the economy, in particular small businesses. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/> , is a good source of supportive arguments for an increased minimum wage.

Changing Workplace Review

Flag this as a key document to review. Expected April or May.

Equal Pay Day

On Equal Pay Day, April 19, 2017, raise awareness in your community!

EPC local members visit the Ontario Legislature every Equal Pay Day wearing red and all are welcome to join in on Equal Pay Day 2017! Storm your MPP office with e-mails and phone calls. Highlight the day on your Club website. Plan a local event. Work creatively with a local business or partners to plan an activity.

Keep up-to-date with the work Equal Pay Coalition.

Join the EPC mailing list. It's easy to do from the main page, <http://www.equalpaycoalition.org> .

In closing, a special thank you to our speakers for making their presentations available for all to view.