

# The Politics of Social Justice: Women's Struggle for Equality and One Man's Lament

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Volume 29, numéro 2, spring 2000

URI : [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad29\\_2re04](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad29_2re04)

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## Éditeur(s)

The Department of History at the University of New Brunswick

## ISSN

0044-5851 (imprimé)

1712-7432 (numérique)

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## Citer ce document

Fudge, J. (2000). The Politics of Social Justice:: Women's Struggle for Equality and One Man's Lament. *Acadiensis*, 29(2), 170–187.

## The Politics of Social Justice: Women's Struggle for Equality and One Man's Lament

WOMEN'S STRUGGLE FOR EQUALITY has never been easy nor has it been uncontroversial. More than one hundred years ago, women in Canada formed organizations and joined forces in order to achieve a modicum of social justice for themselves, their families and their communities. While maternal feminists claimed that by virtue of their sex women were a source of rectitude that both distinguished them from men and enabled them to make a unique and important contribution to public life, they also demanded rights equal to those enjoyed by men. The private duties owed by women to their families and the public rights claimed by women to participate in politics and employment have created a dynamic tension through which successive waves of the women's movement have had to navigate. But one enduring feature of feminist politics has been the demand for women's equality. Just as tenacious has been the resistance to this struggle.

Six of the seven books featured in this essay illustrate how women's struggle for equality, the most prominent leitmotif of 20th-century feminism, has changed in meaning, goals and strategies. All but one of them, Irene Howard, *The Struggle for Social Justice in British Columbia: Helena Gutteridge, the Unknown Reformer* (Vancouver, UBC Press, 1992) has an institutional focus. By focusing on the life of one "unknown reformer", a suffragist and trade unionist who emigrated from England to British Columbia in 1911, Howard demonstrates that the early 20th-century women's movement was not exclusively, although it was predominantly, the bailiwick of middle-class women of relative leisure and economic privilege. Gutteridge's life illustrates that it has long been possible, though difficult, for women to advocate feminism and socialism simultaneously. N.E.S. Griffiths, *The Splendid Vision: Centennial History of the National Council of Women of Canada, 1893-1993* (Ottawa, Carleton University Press, 1991) provides a traditional and well-researched institutional history of the umbrella organization that has come to epitomize middle-class and Protestant maternal feminism in Canada. Jill Vickers, Pauline Rankin and Christine Appelle, *Politics As If Women Mattered: A Political Analysis of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1993) offers a detailed political account of the institutionalization of the organization that exemplifies second-wave feminism in Canada and of its wrenching attempt to respond to the claims of women who had previously been marginalized from the women's movement for greater representation. Jeri Dawn Wine and Janice L. Ristock's collection of essays, *Women and Social Change: Feminist Activism in Canada* (Toronto, James Lorimer, 1991) illustrates the broad array of organizations, ranging from NAC, which is the focus of several chapters, to grassroots service agencies for immigrant women and other groups that comprise contemporary feminist activism. Mary Kinnear, *In Subordination: Professional Women, 1870-1970* (Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995) considers the dimensions of professional experience for the first generation of women university teachers, physicians, lawyers, nurses and teachers in Manitoba. Paula Caplan, *Lifting*

Judy Fudge, "The Politics of Social Justice: Women's Struggle for Equality and One Man's Lament", *Acadiensis*, XXIX, 2 (Spring 2000), pp. 170-187.

*a Ton of Feathers: A Woman's Guide to Surviving in the Academic World* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1993) also focuses upon a profession, that of university teaching, but her intention is not so much scholarly as advisory. Her goal is to provide a handbook for women who teach or aspire to teach in universities in order to help them survive in what remains a male-dominated profession and institution. While some of these books by women about women explicitly focus on the meanings of, and strategies for, obtaining equality, women's struggle for equality is the theme that unites them.

The seventh book, Martin Loney, *The Pursuit of Division: Race, Gender and Preferential Hiring in Canada* (Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998) illustrates the flip side of the feminist struggle, that of resistance and denunciation. Loney's focus is on employment equity or preferential hiring policies, what he calls "the politics of grievance", which he identifies as the legacy of the politics of identity and the pursuit of division. His ire is directed at "the feminist movement and more particularly on the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, an organization that owes its existence to sponsorship by the federal government", because "the emergence of grievance politics in Canada has been centrally dependent" upon them (p. xiii). Loney claims that this politics has been able to take over the progressive agenda because of a convergence of interest between radical feminists (p. 289), elite immigrants (p. 172) and "bureaucrats and politicians who represent the existing order" (p. xiii). His primary concern is that specious claims of labour market discrimination against members of visible minorities and women have led to the adoption of preferential hiring policies that, by focusing on group membership as the critical requirement of employment, discriminate against young, white and able-bodied men.

But while his explicit target is NAC, the evil spirits that pervade Loney's account of the Manichean plot to implement the politics of grievance are working women and unskilled immigrants. He claims that "in the last twenty years women have made quite extraordinary gains in the labour market, frequently at the expense of male competitors" (p. xiv). This is contrasted with the "historic decline in Canadian male incomes" which "has been driven by a number of factors, including immigration levels which are now, on a per capita basis, the highest in the world" (p. xiv). Not only are the politics of grievance unjustified, according to Loney, but these policies are also undermining the self-worth of white young males. His solution to this divisive politics is to return to the inclusive politics of the "traditional left" (p. ix); "historically, those who spoke for a politics premised on the demand for greater social equality sought to give voice to the concerns of those who were victims of diminished employment opportunities and falling incomes" (p. xv).

Loney's lament for the deteriorating employment opportunities and conditions for young white men joins with those readily found on the editorial pages of conservative daily newspapers.<sup>1</sup> This lament is, moreover, simply the latest installment in the cycle of complaints that reach their crescendo when the economy and employment

1 Editorial, "Real Men Stay in School", *Globe and Mail*, 4 May 1999, A 16; Mark Mackinnon, "Women Gaining Ground in Workforce", *Globe and Mail*, 19 April 1999, B1, B4; Editorial, "Don't Appeal, Abolish", *National Post*, 1 June 1999, A15.

prospects decline. But what distinguishes Loney's voice amongst the dirge is that his has a progressive timbre. Most purveyors of attacks on policies designed to promote and enhance women's employment, which are typically just a proxy for a direct attack on women's employment itself, embrace a neo-liberal, right-wing ideology.<sup>2</sup> Loney, by contrast, aligns himself with the traditional left, which he claims has historically fought for an inclusive egalitarianism (pp. ix, xv).<sup>3</sup>

While it is true that many of Loney's positions demonstrate a direct inheritance from the traditional left, as exemplified by craft trade unions and their central organizations, it is false to claim that this legacy is one of an unambiguous and principled commitment to an inclusive egalitarian politics that concerned itself with the worst-off in society. In times of economic recession, the "respectable" working class, composed primarily of white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant men, and their leaders, historically have sacrificed the claims to equality made by subordinated groups in favour of their own self-interest.<sup>4</sup> For example, as Irene Howard recounts, Helena Gutteridge's campaign for the extension of the franchise to women in British Columbia met with a profound setback during the First World War, when the British Columbia Federation of Labour, which in 1913 had supported women's right to vote on the grounds that women would support pro-labour legislation, made an abrupt policy about-face and crusaded against the extension of the franchise in a crucial provincial referendum. On 14 April 1916, a *B.C. Federationist* editorial predicted a "war between the sexes over the possession of jobs". According to this representative of the traditional left:

The noisy advocates of "votes for women" may rest assured that their pet hobby will go through with flying colors as soon as the war is ended. Industrially emancipated women must needs be armed with political power in order to withstand such assaults as might be directed against her by those masculine workers who might feel exceedingly sore because of her having invaded those industrial precincts previously held sacred to themselves. The master class will see that she gets the franchise. There is little doubt of that. And with her franchise she will become a bulwark of defence to everything that is conservative in political and industrial life (p. 92).

Assertions of the progressive pedigree of one's position and the venal motives of one's opponents, though rousing to one's partisans, do little to forward political debate or analysis.

Hoisting Loney on his own petard is as easy as shooting fish in a barrel, although

2 Elizabeth Hagen and Jane Jenson, "Paradoxes and Promises: Work and Politics in the Postwar Years", in Jane Jenson, Elizabeth Hagen and Ceallaigh Reddy, eds., *Feminization of the Labor Force* (New York, 1988), p. 6.

3 He acknowledges that the traditional position of the left on the problem of unemployment was to urge restrictions on immigration, but he claims that those who advocate this position today are dismissed as racist (p. 212).

4 Margaret Hobbs, "Rethinking Anti-Feminism in the 1930s: Gender Crisis or Workplace Justice?" *Gender and History*, 5, 1 (1993), pp. 4-15. Kinnear, *Professional Women*, pp. 134-8, recounts how, during the Depression, women teachers' salaries were targeted as excessive. Their association did nothing for them, preferring to emphasize the need of married men for a living wage.

slightly more worthwhile, if only to serve as a caution to publishers to exercise a more scrupulous editorial eye. I have confined my indulgence in this sport to a long footnote.<sup>5</sup> The difficult challenge posed by books such as Loney's, however, is understanding why they resonate in the popular press and opinion polls. Using these seven books, I shall argue that criticism of employment equity policies, although not

5 Loney claims that the purpose of his book "is to expose the fraudulent claims, nepotism, shoddy research and self-serving rhetoric that have propelled the politics of grievance. In order to move forward, it is necessary to unmask this inheritance" (p. xvi). While I would not accuse Loney of fraud, since this accusation requires some evidence of intent to mislead, his discussion of labour market statistics put a particular spin on them. He correctly notes (pp. 11, 187) that the wage gap between men and women declines as their age declines and that the gap is smallest between unmarried men and unmarried women. However, it is also the case that the wage gap between men and women persists even for the youngest workers and even when it is the wages of unmarried men and unmarried women that are being compared. In every age group there is a gap between men's and women's wages, with men earning more, although the gap is smallest for the youngest workers. How data is presented is an important question of emphasis, and differences in emphasis should not inevitably lead, as Loney would have it, to the conclusion that one form of presentation rather than another is meretricious (p. 289).

Other difficulties in Loney's book include the following:

(1) Throughout this book, Loney claims that those who advocate employment equity are guilty of nepotism and/or are self-serving. He points, repeatedly, to the fact that many employment equity proponents, such as Canadian Labour Congress researchers (p. 26) and NAC spokeswomen (p. 19), are employed by organizations that receive tax-funding (pp. 3, 4, 5, 18, 19, 38, 41, 45, 59, 144, 150). He claims that "their critics enjoy no such advantages". This claim is not accurate. As he acknowledges, Loney received a grant from the Donner Canadian Foundation in order to write and publish his book. But what he does not mention is that the Donner Canadian Foundation is a charitable foundation and as such is partially funded by taxpayers through the tax treatment of charitable donations.

(2) Shoddy research is a harsh claim and if a reviewer looks hard enough one is bound to find something to which to affix this label. The most glaring of Loney's unsubstantiated claims is the following (p. 75): "Most Canadian men have mastered at least some minimum level of domestic competence. In contrast, in many South Asian Canadian families roles remain rigidly divided, the domestic competence of men an oxymoron".

(3) Self-serving rhetoric is the worst of Loney's sins. At times he descends to the level of personal invective. For example, when discussing feminists who support employment equity policies he is wont to mention their income and where they reside — "self-styled feminists with six figure incomes, living in exclusive residential areas" (pp. 5, 160, 246, 260) in order to asperse their principles. However, he does not do the same for socialist critics of employment equity policies (p. 88). Moreover, some of his claims are ludicrous: "The past two decades have been dominated by the politics of identity" (p. 327). What about neo-liberalism, globalization, western regionalism and Quebec separatism? Most offensive is Loney's repeated attempt to impugn the ability or legitimacy of Sunnera Thobani's presidency of NAC on the basis of her immigration status (pp. 37-8, 41). He assumes that her status is relevant without explaining why.

(4) Loney begins his book with what appears to be a refreshingly honest acknowledgement of his own personal experience of employment equity policies (he applied for and did not receive an academic appointment in Canada and filed a human rights complaint on the ground that he was denied the position on the basis of his sex and race — he was a white man who was overlooked in favour of equity candidates). However, he seems to have taken the feminist slogan "the personal is the political" too much to heart and allowed grudge to interfere with scholarship. That an author might get carried away is not unanticipated; that is why there are editors. In many instances, Loney's intemperate claims and personal aspersions could easily have been made acceptable within the bounds of scholarly debate by a light editorial hand. The publisher, McGill-Queen's University Press, failed their author in this instance.

for the reasons that Loney develops, should give feminists (and others concerned with social justice) grave cause for concern. This is because they point to problems in a feminist politics that is exclusively focused on equality. Equality's trajectory from separate spheres, through a formal conception, to a substantive understanding, has been a zero-sum gain for many women, not because we have failed fully to implement substantive equality, but because the norm we seek equality with is neither sustainable nor desirable.

Howard's account of Gutteridge's life illustrates not only how experience shapes our social understanding and values, but how human beings have the capacity to transcend their experience. Given her early years living in precarious lodgings in unsanitary conditions in a large unhealthy city (London), it is little wonder that public affordable housing and sanitation were items high on her agenda when she was elected the first woman city councillor in Vancouver in 1937. Her longstanding involvement in unions is also readily comprehensible given her background; she went out to work at 14 and quickly became a skilled cutter, a position close to the top of the hierarchically organized garment trades. This helps to explain why when she arrived in Vancouver in 1911, where she had to make do with work as a journeyman [sic] tailor, she quickly became the vice-president of her local of the Journeymen Tailors' Union of America. Her craft background also assists us in understanding Gutteridge's antipathy to industrial unionism. But what is less readily apparent from her life is why she joined forces with the militant wing of the suffrage movement, the Women's Social and Political Union, that was led by Christabel Pankhurst, in London. Nor is there anything to explain her decision to emigrate to Vancouver at the age of 32, where she joined the Vancouver branches of the British Columbia Political Equality League and Local Council of Women.

Gutteridge brought her working class experience to her suffragist politics, establishing first an Evening Work Committee as an antidote to the de facto exclusion of working women, through the practice of afternoon parlour meetings, from Vancouver's suffragist groups. Later she founded her own group, the B.C. Woman's Suffrage League. She also brought her suffragist politics to her trade union work. When she arrived in Canada, Gutteridge was politically Conservative; however, in quick succession she joined the Socialist Party of Canada, then the Social Democratic Party. She eventually found a home in the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, where she was a prominent member of the provincial party from the mid-1930s until the early 1940s. Howard situates Gutteridge's life within its broader context, nicely blending biography with social history. The chapters on campaigns for women's suffrage and a minimum wage for women and children, as well as that on the early years of the CCF in British Columbia, should be of general interest to historians.

Although Howard clearly admires her subject, she refuses to ignore her shortcomings. One of the strengths of Howard's book is her willingness to address the issue of racism in the suffragist and trade union movements. As Howard recounts, when Gutteridge heard that white women were replacing Chinese labourers in canneries on the Fraser River Delta, in order to verify the information, for she had recently been appointed the women's correspondent to the federal government's *Labour Gazette*, she spent three weeks during the summer working in a fish cannery at Steveston. She discovered that white women were, in fact, being hired in the canneries because their wages were less than those paid to Chinese men and they were

easier to control. At the British Columbia Federation of Labour convention in New Westminster in 1914, she told the assembled delegates what she had learned, concluding that “one of the things that organized labour should do is to see that the standard of pay for the work of white women is more on the level of the white man” (p. 82). She did not, however, suggest that the Chinese men should be paid the same as white men. And as Howard notes, although in none of her reported speeches did Gutteridge resort to the anti-foreigner argument to support the extension of the franchise to women, she did not protest it, nor did she press for the enfranchisement of Asian women (or men). Votes for white women on the same terms as white men was her demand. That position, while it predominated in the suffrage movement, stood in contrast to those of suffragists such as Olive Schreiner, who embraced a position of racial equality (pp. 94-5). Gutteridge, a prominent member of the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council, never publicly challenged the prevailing craft position that “foreigners”, especially those who were not British, did not deserve equal treatment (pp. 112-13).

Howard’s biography of Helena Gutteridge not only illustrates that the class and gender boundaries of suffragist and union organizations were, in fact, permeable, but it also demonstrates the extent to which women who were engaged in full-time employment and politics had to forgo the private life of marriage and family to which men who were active in the public spheres were accustomed. For 11 years, during her unsuccessful late marriage, Gutteridge withdrew from full-time employment (she raised poultry on a farm she bought with her savings) and from politics. Few men at the time were required to make such a sacrifice in order to have a “private” life. Once her marriage dissolved and she returned to political activities, her employment and economic position were exceedingly precarious. In 1945, at the age of 66, Gutteridge had to take a job at Canadian Canneries as her savings were running out and her old age pension would not begin until she was 70. Thus, Gutteridge’s life illustrates another consequence of women’s low wages and intermittent employment histories — poverty in old age.

Access to the professions was also a central demand of first-wave feminists, and Kinnear’s historical examination of women in five professions in Manitoba from 1870 to 1970 illustrates how the presence of professional women both challenged and reinforced the ideology of separate spheres. The introductory chapter provides a good analysis of the nature and function of a profession and clearly demonstrates the important role of the state in Manitoba, and across Canada, in their institutionalization and protection.<sup>6</sup> Kinnear presents a statistical sketch of the position of professional women in relation to the positions of professional men and other women’s occupations, and a brief chronology of pioneering women professionals. Kinnear also introduces several main concepts to explain the enduring discrimination experienced by professional women: the sexual division of labour, the ideology of separate spheres

6 In fact, one theme that emerges in several of the books (Kinnear, Vickers et al., and Wine and Ristock) is the extent to which the various levels of the state in Canada have played an important role in supporting and shaping different institutions and organizations. Loney, along with some feminists, equates state financing with co-optation. See, for example, Roxanne Ng, “Finding Our Voices: Reflection on Immigrant Women’s Organizing”, in Wine and Ristock, *Women and Social Change*, p. 84.

and the gendered model of the professional person. The first refers to occupational divisions in which women are concentrated in certain areas of work and are clustered in the lower levels of pay and responsibility, and the second refers to the cultural reinforcement of the first: “Man’s sphere was the public world of work and government; women’s was the home and family” (p. 15). As Kinnear indicates, the imposition of separate spheres ideology on actual circumstances became blurred in the 20th century, although an enduring notion was that women were economically dependent upon men. The third refers to the common assumption regarding the career ladder of a profession. Professionals were to devote themselves single-mindedly to their patients/clients, and such service would be rewarded by promotion and success, and experience and responsibility would yield career progress and a family wage. According to Kinnear, this model professional was highly gendered, for “only with difficulty, and often not at all, could such ideas be modified to encompass the professional who was a woman. . . . The first claim on [a professional woman] was neither herself or her clients, but her own domestic life” (p. 17). Kinnear also addresses an important methodological issue, the significance and reliability of oral history — a recurring problem for scholars who want to make women’s history visible. But, as she makes clear, “awareness of the difficulties of assessing the witness of women now alive who worked in professions before 1970 should permit us insight into the historian’s sometimes less critical use of more traditional forms of evidence” (p. 24). The value of any evidence, even that of supposedly “hard” data such as statistics, as Loney also points out, depends upon how it is used. But this simple fact does not entail, as he would have us believe, that personal testimony should be dismissed as anecdotal or that a contested statistical conclusion is *per se* meretricious.<sup>7</sup>

The body of Kinnear’s book is divided into five chapters, one for each of the professions. The first three deal successively with the male-dominated professions of university teaching, medicine and law. What distinguished medicine from the other two professions was that it involved a process in which men wrested control over medical care away from women. This is also the only chapter in the book that addresses racial and ethnic exclusions in addition to those pertaining to gender, and then only in the context of discussing the quotas imposed by the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Manitoba. While Jewish doctors and students organized to expose and fight the quotas that discriminated in favour of white, Anglo-Saxon and French men, no criticism of gender bias was ever made publicly, nor did women doctors or students band together to fight discrimination. In fact, the absence of collective organization by women in male-dominated professions is a common theme. These professions contrast markedly with those of nursing and teaching. Nursing was almost

7 Loney makes some very good points about the use of labour market statistics for policy purposes, especially the need to factor in age when attempting to measure discrimination (p. 183). However, he overstates his case, for example, when he states that “the meretricious use of statistics which characterizes preferential hiring debates was evident in the opening discussion of [Caplan’s] text” (p. 289). The use of the term “meretricious” is problematic in this context. According to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 9th Edition, its primary meaning is “showily or falsely attractive” and its second is “of or befitting a prostitute”. Either Loney intends this semantic double entendre, with its connotation of personal slur, or he is sloppy in his choice of words.



exclusively female, and it had difficulty achieving professional status. It was associated, as was teaching primary school, with women's inherent caring qualities. Although obedient subordination to doctors and hospitals was required of nurses, not only did they organize collectively, but they also had strong ties with other groups, especially women's organizations. Like nurses, teachers were members of a profession and, from the mid-1960s, unions. However, teaching was initially a male domain, and men continued to inhabit the upper echelons of the profession, as secondary school teachers and principals. According to Kinnear, "women's absolute majority in numbers, juxtaposed by a virtual absence from positions of authority, displays dramatically how gender was an organizing principle of this profession" (p. 123). Within teaching, the existence of explicit sex-based wages, with lower wages for women than for men until the early 1950s, demonstrates the extent and hold of the male breadwinner ideology. Significantly, single male teachers were not paid less than their married male counterparts, and women with dependents were simply ignored.

In her concluding chapter, Kinnear compares the experience of women in the five professions and examines some common findings: in none of the professions were women in control, not even in those professions in which they dominated numerically; in each there was an assumption that women's primary responsibility was domestic; and equal pay was not an issue except in teaching, where there were explicitly gendered pay scales; however, women were simply not admitted or accepted into higher positions. In addition, prior to the Second World War in all of the professions, marriage was an explicit bar to women's employment, reinforcing the significance of the gendered assumption that women's primary responsibilities were to their families and that this responsibility was incompatible with professional life. After the Second World War, marriage was no longer a bar, but maternity was still a barrier. Despite this, most women continued to regard childcare as a personal responsibility. In fact, only the female-dominated profession of nursing and teaching were organized so that women could balance childcare with paid employment. Kinnear identifies the impetus behind women's greater entry into the male-dominated professions as economic; in the 1960s "'income shortage at the household level and a labour shortage at the production level' gave an economic incentive to more women to defy previous assumptions of dependency and to consider a lifetime career of working for pay as the norm" (p. 167). Yet, as she notes, the structure of professional life still makes it difficult for women to balance the responsibilities of marriage and childcare. Thus, despite the confluence of formal equality and economic necessity, the majority of professional women continue to confront systemic barriers that prevent them from participating in professions on the same basis as men.

Kinnear's book provides insightful analysis of the gendered assumptions of various professions and the perceived and real conflict between the domestic and professional demands on married women and women with children. There is, however, little attention to the relationship between women in the professions and women's organizations, such as the Business and Professional Women's Clubs or the National Council of Women of Canada. Nor does Kinnear define what she means by gender. Moreover, by posing the sexual division of labour as material, and the ideology of separate spheres as cultural, there is little basis for accounting for why it is that the latter endures, especially in light of the profound economic changes that

occurred in the 1960s.

Paula Caplan, *Lifting a Ton of Feathers: A Woman's Guide to Surviving in the Academic World* provides a contemporary look at what continues to be a male-dominated profession, that of university teaching. Like Kinnear she relies on questionnaires and interviews with women in the academy in order to depict the maleness of the university as an institution and university teaching as a profession. She juxtaposes the ideal of merit, with its attractive claim to gender-blindness, with the reality of systemic discrimination, which she substantiates with a variety of statistics and women's accounts of the sexism that they have experienced in universities. What she provides is a woman-centred handbook for surviving university teaching and graduate school, since her concern is that women, on account of their social training, are more likely to blame themselves for their lack of success rather than to identify and confront the systemic barriers they face.

Caplan's discussion of the myths about the academy is entertaining, but her discussion of the myths about women and women in the academy is less so, likely because exposés of those myths have been around for a long time. Her advice, concerning both general principles and specific circumstances, is useful for anyone, woman and man, teacher and student, in the university. Her emphasis on the need to develop relationships in the university is especially resonant in light of Kinnear's finding that few women university teachers in Manitoba made links with one another and that this contributed to their sense of isolation. The final chapter, which provides a number of "check-lists for women positive institutions", especially those relating to recruitment and hiring and tenure and promotion, usefully could be followed by any university that was seeking to improve the quality of its decisions and simultaneously avoid lawsuits (two activities that do not necessarily go hand in hand). In fact, if one were to reduce Caplan's advice to one general precept it would be "avoid basing decisions on direction, as that is where discrimination creeps in, and be explicit about what is required, so as to avoid misunderstandings". There is nothing particularly ominous, or feminist, about this advice.

I would, however, have liked to have seen more discussion of women-only universities in comparison with male-dominated ones in order to begin to determine how much of what is ugly and stupid about university practices and protocols is due to sexism, and how much to hierarchy and competition. I suspect that most new teachers experience the cognitive dissonance that women experience on account of the emphasis placed on individualism, competition, hierarchy and seniority. I would not deny that this experience is gendered, but it is likely bad for most women and most men, with the rare exception of those members of either sex who "enjoy" overweening self-confidence and ambition. This failure to attend to the commonalities in men's and women's experiences of the university leads to what I see as a second shortcoming in the book — the need for greater attention to how women's marital and childcare responsibilities undermine their ability to succeed in universities as these institutions are now structured. While Caplan does mention that women's domestic duties get in the way of their university careers, this dimension of women's professional experience needs greater examination. It may help to explain the funnelling phenomenon that occurs as women move up the university hierarchy and the persisting predominance of men in the upper echelons. More emphasis on structures, as a complement to her discussion of attitudes, would have helped to

illuminate the gendered dimensions of universities. It also would have helped to address some of the over-the-top criticisms that Martin Loney levels at her book. It is unlikely, though, that this information would have assuaged him, as he regards women's decisions to sacrifice employment opportunities for family life as purely private choices of no concern to public policy (pp. 289, 308).

The next three books, all of which focus on women's organizations, adopt a women-centred perspective, albeit only the volume by Vickers, Rankin and Appelle explicitly defines the focus this way. N.E.S. Griffiths, *The Splendid Vision: Centennial History of the National Council of Women in Canada, 1893-1993* was commissioned by that organization and makes an important contribution to our understanding of the first wave of the women's movement. Griffiths' account is especially good on the first 50 years of the NCWC. She nicely situates the Council within the broader context of social reform philanthropy and illustrates the essentially conservative stance of the maternal feminism that it espoused. From its conception and during its early years, the NCWC was not a feminist organization in the sense that it was not specifically concerned with women's struggle for equality. Rather, it was part of an international movement of women's councils that grew out of the increasing emphasis on social reform as a response to the problems arising from industrialization and urbanization in the late 19th century. The NCWC was an umbrella organization of women in volunteer organizations, especially those groups that provided for social welfare before the state took over that role. Women's equality in the public sphere was acceptable to the NCWC, and later a goal. It did not, however, challenge the traditional family, although it did support increased rights for women in marriage, custody and divorce. The Council supported the extension of the franchise to women, and after the vote was won, it initiated a federal lobby, but its primary emphasis was not political. Moreover, from the beginning, the relationship between the NCWC and the Canadian state was close; Lady Aberdeen, the Council's first president and the wife of the governor-general, had the clerk of the Privy Council draft the organization's constitution, which emphasized the family, the state and the "Golden Rule" (p. 23). Although neither racially nor religiously exclusive, its founders and future leaders were predominantly Protestant, Anglo women who were closely aligned, as their wives, sisters, daughters and mothers, to men who exercised political and economic power.<sup>8</sup> The NCWC did not see its goal as transforming society, but rather as one of reforming it by making it more humane.

Employment issues required the Council to enter contested terrain. During the Depression, the employment of married women was a controversial question within the NCWC; many local Councils did not support the right of married women to work, although that was the national organization's official stance. As Griffiths notes, after 1940 the NCWC demanded equal status for women in employment and in the 1950s and 1960s the debate shifted from community service to the political needs of women. However, she does not offer any explanation for this shift in orientation or the changed terms of debate, other than claiming that in the 1950s the political and

8 The membership of the local councils, by contrast, was much more diverse; for example, Helena Gutteridge was a member of the Vancouver Local Council of Women in 1911. Overall its members tended to be older women, since younger ones were too busy raising children.

ideological divisions between women became more apparent. She does indicate that there was a correlation between the major demographic shift as increasing numbers of women entered paid employment and the decline in the NCWC's membership. She attributes the latter to the emergence of new feminist organizations such as NAC and the decline in volunteerism, but she provides little basis for understanding why it is that younger and "more radical" groups joined NAC rather than the NCWC or why the older organization did not adapt to meet the needs of the new generation of women.

In her final chapter, Griffiths notes that in 1993 the NCWC, concerned with its loss in membership and declining political importance, undertook a reexamination of its "mission, values and vision" (p. 399). This led to a debate within the Council about whether it should declare itself a feminist organization, which concluded with a rejection of the term. Griffiths characterizes the debate in the following terms:

The idea that the word [feminism] stood for the affirmation of women as normal human beings, as females of a bisexual species, as individuals as necessary and as valuable as the male, with the same social, economic, intellectual and cultural rights, was applauded vigorously by the members when they gathered together at the 1993 annual meeting. However, the contemporary representation by the media of feminism as a set of beliefs incompatible with a view of stable marriages, childcare and homemaking as honourable occupations for women, made many Council members uncomfortable with the use of the term itself (p. 400).<sup>9</sup>

What Griffiths does not explore is the extent to which this vision of the women's role demonstrates the enduring legacy of separate spheres ideology and maternal feminism, which characterizes women as the natural nurturers of society, and the extent to which this emphasis condemns women in today's economy to a double work load.

Unlike Griffiths' study, that by Vickers, Rankin and Appelle, *Politics As If Women Mattered: A Political Analysis of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women* does not provide an institutional history of the organization. It highlights NAC's development as a political institution and also focuses on the norms of feminist political process. The authors are sympathetic to NAC's goal of providing a political voice for women in Canada because they start from the premise that the traditional institutions of liberal politics cannot deal with women's issues because these institutions define women's issues as private matters that are outside of politics. They are sympathetic to NAC's political project, but this does not mean that it is correct to dismiss the book, as Loney does, as a hagiography.<sup>10</sup> The authors are critical of NAC. They make the excellent point that contemporary feminism (that of NAC included) has failed either to develop a conception of democracy that goes beyond

9 In their introduction, Wine and Ristock, p. 3 note that "although most Canadian women espouse agreement with the various aims of the [women's] movement, it is typically with the preface 'I am not a feminist but . . .'"

10 Loney, p. 40, fails to provide for his characterization. This simply amounts to an a priori dismissal rather than an engaged and critical reading.

simple egalitarianism or to grapple with the enduring problem of balancing representation and accessibility (pp. 157, 202). They also provide a detailed discussion of the different political strains of feminism — most commonly identified as liberal, radical and socialist — and argue, convincingly, that NAC has adopted an integrative feminism that demonstrates a continuity with the early manifestations of the women's movements, such as the NCWC, and a uniquely Canadian strain of radical liberalism.

The most controversial claim made in *Politics As If Women Mattered* concerns the need for the institutionalization of the women's movement in general and NAC in particular. Here the authors join issue with other feminists who criticize the process of institutionalization as co-optative. Instead, they argue that women need to develop organizational structures in order to sustain their political projects over time. While the authors are clearly familiar with Wine and Ristock's *Women and Social Change* (Vickers was a contributor and they discuss Lorraine Greave's chapter in detail), they do not discuss Linda Briskin's distinction between "mainstreaming" and "disengagement" as the two distinctive trends within feminism, a distinction that Briskin deploys in order to overcome the limits of the traditional political labels. This manner of characterizing feminist politics would have been a useful addition to the discussion of how the different types of organizations that are members of NAC, especially national groups and unions on the one hand, and grassroots service collectives on the other, impose incommensurable demands on NAC's internal political processes and structures. *Politics As If Women Mattered* also takes issue with critics, such as Loney (in an earlier article) and other feminists, who claim that NAC's close relationship with the federal state has inevitably led to its co-option. Vickers, Rankin and Appelle argue that although state funding may have been an attempt by the federal government to contain women's organizations such as NAC within a limited political agenda, this attempt was not successful. NAC's policy-making evolved from a narrow status-of-women approach, symbolized by the 1970 Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, to a broadly conceived political framework that linked apparently gender-neutral issues such as free trade, federalism and the Constitution to women, and which challenged many of the policies of the federal government. Moreover, the history of NAC after 1988, which is when this study ends, suggests that this broader approach to feminist policy analysis has placed NAC dramatically at odds with the traditional ruling parties in Canadian federal politics, with the result that NAC has become less of an institution and more of a protest movement.<sup>11</sup>

Both *Politics As If Women Mattered* and the essays collected in *Women and Social Change* share a preoccupation with the enduring problem of democratic process and organizational structure for the women's movement in Canada. And although the first book emphasizes the continuities between the different waves of feminism, both show that what was distinctive about the women's movement in Canada during the late

11 See Vickers, Rankin and Appelle's afterword, pp. 293-5, for a brief discussion of NAC's unhappy experience under the Tories. Sylvia Bashevkin claims that after 1988 NAC was less of an interest group and more of a protest movement: *Women on the Defensive: Living Through Conservative Times* (Toronto, 1998), pp. 40, 232.

1980s and early 1990s was its attempt to accommodate the needs and demands of groups, such as immigrants, visible minorities, First Nations peoples, disabled women and lesbians, who had previously been left out of the women's movement.<sup>12</sup> While Loney criticizes this as a divisive form of identity politics, to its credit the women's movement has been prepared to challenge assumptions about appropriate political process, such as majority rule in democratic institutions, that have excluded the interests of minority groups in the past. Those critics who, like Loney, castigate identity politics for their particularistic self-assertion tend to forget that these movements arose in the first place "to protest the disguised particularisms — the masculinism, the white-Anglo ethnocentricism, the heterosexism — lurking behind what parades as universalistic".<sup>13</sup>

These two books share many of the same virtues — both define their terms, engage with contemporary debates within feminist activism and politics, provide clear introductions and adopt a non-aligned or integrative approach to feminism — although they have a different focus. *Women and Social Change* examines a panoply of women's organizations, gives greater weight to women's differences and is explicitly concerned with the relation between theory and practice and the academy and activism; *Politics As If Women Mattered* focuses on one institution and is primarily, though not exclusively, concerned with feminist political norms. They also share some limitations — a focus on women at the expense of gender and an inability to account for the enduring power of the public vs. private distinction. While a women-centred perspective was a necessary corrective to histories and political analyses that simply ignored women by assuming men were the only social actors that mattered, the focus on women as the historical or political subject has tended to reinforce a false dichotomy that either emphasizes women's commonalities or their differences. Instead, if gender is the focus, attention turns to the cultural meanings associated with sexual difference and the ways in which sexual difference forms the basis for social exclusions and inclusions and constitutes inequalities in power, authority, rights and privileges. It also becomes apparent that gender is a social characteristic that is a fundamental element in all social relationships. As Frader and Rose put it: "the historical meanings of gender change as gender is inflected by class, race, ethnicity, culture and sexuality. The term 'gender', therefore, refers to both historically and socially constituted relationships and to a tool of analysis that historians can use to understand how social relationships and cultural categories are constructed".<sup>14</sup>

That the public vs. private distinction has been a central theme within feminism is not surprising given that conventional liberal political institutions and theories were created by men in an era of strict demarcation between men's and women's spheres.

12 Vickers, Rankin and Appelle discuss why NAC was not able to make inroads with the Quebec francophone women's movement and they emphasize NAC's belief in the need for a strong federal government and its centralist tendencies as a primary reason.

13 Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus* (New York, 1997), p. 5.

14 Laura L. Frader and Sonya O. Rose, "Introduction: Gender and the Reconstruction of European Working-Class History", in Laura L. Frader and Sonya O. Rose, eds., *Gender and Class in Modern Europe* (Ithaca, 1996), p. 20. In conceptualizing gender, Frader and Rose acknowledge their debt to Joan Scott's "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis", in her *Gender and the Politics of History*, pp. 28-50.

The history of feminism has, to a great extent, been the struggle of women, first, for rights equal to men to participate in politics and employment and, second, for public recognition for, and value of, their domestic responsibilities. But this distinction, although useful in capturing men's and women's different social positions, tends to reify a specific social division of labour as a matter of either personal choice or natural capacity. Moreover, it tends to lead to a policy impasse, especially regarding the complex issue of social policies for women who are raising young children. As Vickers, Rankin and Appelle recount, the "wages for housework" issue — whether or not the work women performed in the home should receive social support in the form of state benefits — revealed a profound disagreement within NAC concerning how women should live (pp. 255-63). The dominant position in NAC was that women's participation in the paid work force was the key to their liberation and that paying for housework would primarily benefit men. The problem with this position was that it did little to challenge the prevailing notion that unpaid labour in the house was not work and thus had no value. *Politics As If Women Mattered* usefully points out that NAC had difficulty developing policies that bridged the traditional public/private divide and that the organization offered little for the homemaker who was not engaged in waged labour. The book is less helpful in identifying the source of NAC's difficulty.

Here the concept of social reproduction, which is nicely elaborated by Antonella Picchio in *Social Reproduction: The Political Economy of the Labour Market* is extremely useful. In her critique of the neo-classical view of the labour market as governed by the laws of supply and demand, Picchio emphasizes that labour is a commodity that is unlike other commodities; it is not produced exclusively for sale in the market and it has the power to act collectively and to resist the terms of its sale. Social reproduction, or the supply of the labouring population, is not merely an appendage to the labour market, but a complex range of a variety of processes — from biological procreation to media consumption, from education and training to clothing and caring — that take place in variety of institutions, including the household, community and the state. Instead of seeing what occurs in the household exclusively as consumption, Picchio argues that it is more accurate to regard it as the production of one of the key commodities in the capitalist accumulation process, the commodity of labour power. According to her, unpaid domestic labour is central to the capitalist accumulation process:

Housework is the production of labour as a commodity, while waged work is the exchange of labour. To be exchanged, labour must be produced; and to be used in the production of other commodities, labour must be produced and exchanged. This is not a question merely of time sequences, but one of functional relationships between processes. While wages are a cost of production, housework as unpaid labour is a deduction from its costs (the subsistence of the houseworker), but the relationship is such as to guarantee a high surplus. This is not directly obvious because labour is not sold by capitalists: the surplus is realized by capitalists not in selling labour but in buying it.<sup>15</sup>

15 Antonella Picchio, *Social Reproduction: The Political Economy of the Labour Market* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 196-7.

Thus, there is an incentive under capitalism to maintain a sexual division of labour in which a great deal of the work of social reproduction, especially the highly intensive labour of caring for young children, is performed on an unpaid basis by women in their homes on the ground that it is natural for them to do so.

The concepts of gender and social reproduction can be used to illustrate two problems that mar, and ultimately undermine, Loney's criticisms of employment equity policies. Before doing this, however, I want to make it clear that I am not persuaded that employment equity policies are either effective or appropriate.<sup>16</sup> In fact, I agree with some of the criticisms that Loney mentions, but fails to develop, of employment equity: that they do little for First Nations peoples and seriously disabled people (p. 6); that there is no principled reason why young, able-bodied white men should pay for the advantages that their forefathers reaped from discrimination (p. 9); that it is a low-cost, mostly symbolic, policy for the state to address inequality (pp. 160, 167); and that the American experience with affirmative action indicates that it has not been very effective for the worst-off groups (p. 167). I have three additional criticisms of employment equity policies. The first is pragmatic: I do not see how they can achieve much success during a period in which the overall conditions of the labour market are deteriorating.<sup>17</sup> The second is political: in a time of deteriorating labour market conditions for everyone, employment equity policies are likely to fuel a backlash against women and other target groups, such as members of visible minorities.<sup>18</sup> The third is principled and has two prongs. It is occupational hierarchies per se, the unequal distribution of work-related wages, benefits, conditions and prestige, that I find offensive, not simply their unequal distribution on the basis of gender and race. Similarly, it is the male norm of employment and its failure to accommodate social reproduction as a socially valuable aspect of human labour, rather than women's unequal access to it, that is the crux of the problem of gendered labour market segmentation. The strength of employment equity policies is that they directly confront racially- and gender-based occupational segregation, something that I, too, believe should be ended. I would like to go farther and see the introduction of policies that are designed both to flatten the pyramidal shape of the labour market, in which the few enjoy good jobs at the top while the overwhelming majority enjoy bad ones at the bottom, and to accommodate women's and men's needs and desires to engage in productive labour that is valuable in terms other than those of the capitalist accumulation process.

16 I define these as policies that measure the success of techniques to dismantle systemic barriers to employment in terms of whether or not the place of employment reflects the percentage of persons of employable age who are members of specific target groups in the labour force. Contrary to Loney's claim (p. 263) that I was an active participant in the employment equity policy debates in Ontario, I was not. Although I was a co-chair of NAC's Employment and Economy Committee during this period (1991-93), I never took a public stand on employment equity policies, nor did I represent NAC in any public discussion of these policies. This is because I had (and continue to have) grave doubts about the value of employment equity policies.

17 For this argument see Judy Fudge, "Fragmentation and Feminization: The Challenge of Equity for Labour Relations Policy", in Janine Brodie, ed., *Women and Canadian Public Policy* (Toronto, 1996), p. 57.

18 See Judy Fudge, "Rungs on the Labour Law Hierarchy: Using Gender to Challenge Hierarchy", *Saskatchewan Law Review*, 60, 2 (1996), pp. 237-63.



That said, I now want to turn to the two major flaws that I believe undermine much of Loney's analysis of employment equity policies. The first is his focus on sex and gender as biological categories, as opposed to gender as the cultural significance attributed to sexual differences within specific social relations. The second is his reliance on a neo-classical conception of the labour market. One of Loney's bugbears is the "meretricious" use of statistics regarding labour market discrimination by supporters of employment equity policies. He is correct to point out that income differentials between unmarried women and unmarried men are much smaller than those between married women and married men. He claims that "examination of labour market data indicates that marital status, not gender, is the most important predictor of earning disparities" (p. 187). But this is a patent non sequitur because, clearly, the gender/sex of the person who is married determines whether they have a high or a low income. In general, married men earn more than unmarried men and unmarried women, and a lot more than married women. Marital status and *gender* are highly correlated to income.

Elsewhere, Loney claims that "marital status and the divisions of responsibilities within the family, not labour market discrimination" drive the differences between men and women's wages (p. 11). He also claims that "many of the supposed disadvantages faced by women in the labour market stem not from discrimination in employment but from childcare responsibilities" and he asserts that "the suggestion that society owes some duty to women to equalize their earnings, to compensate for the outcomes of decisions taken by individuals and families about the prioritization of labour market versus domestic activities, appears to rest on assumptions that find no wider application" (p. 166). These assertions embody several controversial assumptions that Loney neither identifies nor defends. The first is his neo-classical vision of the labour market in which the question of the supply of labour power, or the labouring population, is simply taken as a given, rather than understood as a social process that is subject to many forms of regulation. The supply of labour is a process of social reproduction involving the family and the state, and women's labour is central to it. It is a fallacy of neo-classical economists to abstract the labour market from the processes of social reproduction that supply labour. Jamie Peck makes the same point: "Extra market processes, such as the division of domestic labour or the structure of educational systems, both structure *and are structured by* the wage-labour sphere. Recognition of this relationship implies the abandonment of neo-classical formulations in which the market is abstracted from its social context".<sup>19</sup> Immigration, one of Loney's other bugbears, is another aspect of social reproduction, which in Canada has always been extremely important.

The second questionable assumption upon which Loney's claim rests is that women choose to sacrifice employment goals in order to fulfill their domestic responsibilities (pp. 27-8, 166). According to him, since this is a matter of individual or private choice, there is no justification for state policies to compensate women for the consequences of their choices, unless the state were equally as willing to help women who chose to stay at home and raise their children. But this is a rather robust

19 Jamie Peck, *Workplace: The Social Regulation of Labour Markets* (New York, 1996), p. 39, references omitted.

idea of choice with which Loney saddles women, one that he does not impose on young, white men, for example. He notes that women now predominate among those entering universities and colleges and instead of simply accepting that young white men are making what in economic terms are bad choices, Loney claims that in today's climate, in which emphasis is placed on the advantages flowing "from white skin colour and male gender", not surprisingly "many interpret failure in personal terms and respond by withdrawing from the competition" (pp. xv-xvi). That women may make choices in light of a sexual division of labour that shapes the family and employment is also likely the case. Individual choice is always mediated by social structure, and one enduring feature of social structure has been that women have been assigned primary responsibility for social reproduction. The division of labour, whether within the household or in employment, is highly gendered; over time, institutions and social processes have tended to reify sexual difference as one of the primary bases for distributing benefits and burdens, rights and responsibilities. To believe otherwise would be to assume that biology is destiny, a position that Loney rejects when he is criticizing employment equity policies (p. 42).

The final, and damning from a progressive point of view, criticism of Loney's neo-classical conception of the labour market is that he places the primary responsibility for the deteriorating conditions of employment for young white men on other members of the working class, women and immigrants. While he identifies a range of supply and demand factors for the increasingly precarious labour market, including women's employment, high immigration levels, global restructuring, new technologies and mounting public sector debt, it is the supply factors with which he is most preoccupied (pp. 19, 26). According to Loney, it is the entry of growing numbers of women into the labour market and increased immigration that have increased competition and lowered terms and conditions of employment (pp. 14, 47-8, 85, 212). While the "traditional" left has long accepted the inevitability of the trade-off between the size of the working population and their standard of living, some "progressive" labour market theorists, like Marx, have argued that this was a Malthusian perversion of classical political economy, the political effect of which was to displace social conflict from the profit wage relation to an internal struggle within the working class.<sup>20</sup>

One of the reasons that equality, especially economic equality, is such an important indicator of the justness of a society is that it is intimately related with people's life chances and their freedom. Generally, the more income a person enjoys, the longer they live. But, as Loney points out (p. 28), despite men in general having more income than women, they do not live as long as women do. This inequality is important. Equality is a crucial political norm, but it is not the only important social value. Having women work more hours in more physically dangerous jobs will make them more equal with men, but it is difficult to see how this would be a move towards greater social justice. Women's struggles for equality with men have been an important social struggle. However, I agree with Loney that "those who have a vision of social justice that amounts to more than a reordering of group representation must articulate a new politics of inclusion" (p. xvi). The problem is that he simply rehashes

20 Picchio, *Social Reproduction*, pp. 30-56.

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a tired old one — that of the male breadwinner — and ignores the transformation of gender relations in recent years. Taking gender and social reproduction seriously would be a step towards a new inclusive politics of social justice.

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