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“Lord give us men”: Women and Social Work in English Canada, 1918 to 1953

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Article abstract

Depuis la dernière décennie, les travailleurs sociaux du Canada sont aux prises avec un embarrassant paradoxe: bien que les femmes aient été les pionnières dans la profession et qu'elles représentent près de soixante pour cent des effectifs dans le domaine, les hommes y occupent les meilleurs postes, tant dans l'enseignement que dans l'administration, et, à travail égal, ils commandent de meilleurs salaires. Des études récentes effectuées dans plusieurs provinces canadiennes en témoignent éloquemment et il en est de même, d'ailleurs, aux Etats-Unis. Ainsi, et curieuse- ment, il appert donc qu'en dépit du fait que les membres de cette profession s'enorgueillissent d'avoir été à l'avant-garde de nombreuses transformations sociales, le sexisme qui sévit dans la répartition du travail au sein de la profession ne fait que refléter les inégalités qui existent toujours dans notre société.

L'auteur s'interroge ici sur les origines de ces inégalités, sur les raisons qui ont empêché les femmes de s'emparer des postes les plus rémunérateurs, sur la perception qu'avaient ces femmes du rôle de la femme dans la société et, enfin, sur l'incidence que ces deux dernières questions ont pu exercer l'une sur l'autre. A travers l'étude des événements qui ont marqué la profession dans les décennies vingt à quarante, il constate que non seulement les hommes ont dominé dans la profession mais que, bien souvent, ces hommes qui étaient beaucoup mieux rémunérés que les femmes qu'ils dirigeaient étaient à la fois plus jeunes et moins bien formés qu'elles. A cet égard, le travail social ressemblait fort aux autres professions féminines à l'époque à cette différence près, toutefois, que les travailleuses sociales protestaient en somme contre une image de la femme qu'elles avaient, d'une certaine façon, contribué à maintenir et qu'elles s'opposaient à une domination masculine qu'elles avaient elles-mêmes encouragée à une certaine époque, préoccupées qu'elles étaient alors de rehausser l'image de la profession aux yeux de la société.

"Lord give us men": Women and Social Work in English Canada, 1918 to 1953*

JAMES STRUTHERS

Over the past decade, Canadian social workers have been confronted with an embarrassing paradox. Although women pioneered the profession's development in this country, as elsewhere, and today comprise almost 60 per cent of those working in the field, men disproportionately occupy its key teaching and administrative positions and earn substantially higher salaries for similar work. As a recent study of seventeen hundred social service positions in the Atlantic region pointed out, two-thirds of those earning less than $15,000 per year in social work were women; an almost identical proportion of those earning more than this figure were men. In the two highest income quintiles in social work (over $20,000 per year), men outnumbered women by a proportion of more than three to one. When education, experience and type of work are held constant, men still earned higher salaries in 91 per cent of all job categories it was possible to compare. Nor is this sexual disparity confined to the Atlantic region. Similar studies of men and women in social work in Ontario specifically, Canada generally, and the United States conducted during the 1970s reveal an identical pattern.[1] Although the profession has prided itself, historically, on its role as a vehicle for social change, the sexual division of labour within social work mirrors rather than challenges the job ghettoization and power and income disparities which surround women's work in the larger society.

This paper examines the historical origins of sexual inequality within Canadian social work. Why, in the crucial years between 1918 and the early 1950s, when social work first evolved as a paid career, did women, although numerically dominant within the profession, fail to capture its key administrative positions? How did women in the profession view the place of women within Canadian society as a whole? Finally, to what extent are these two questions related? In other words, to what extent was women's role within social work constrained by their view of women outside of it?

In 1947, Charlotte Whitton, six years into retirement from her pioneering career as head of the Canadian Welfare Council between 1920 and 1941, set out to expose the issue of sexual discrimination in Canada in an article for *Macleans* magazine entitled

* I would like to thank Art Kilgour for his help in researching this paper and Veronica Strong-Boag for her comments on an earlier draft.

1. Joan E. Cummings, "Sexism in Social Work: The Experience of Atlantic Social Work Women", *Atlantis,* VI (Spring 1981), pp. 64-5; Michael Landauer, *Social Work in Ontario: A Study for the Committee on the Healing Arts* (Toronto, 1970), pp. 62-3; James Gripton, "Sexism in Social Work: Male Takeover of a Female Profession", *The Social Worker,* XXI (June 1974), p. 80; James Grimm and Robert Stern, "Sex Roles and Internal Labor Market Structures: the 'Female' Semi-Professions", *Social Problems,* XXI (June 1974), pp. 701-2.

"The Exploited Sex". After systematically documenting gross salary and administrative inequalities for women in nursing and teaching, Whitton turned her wrath to social work, the other key female-dominated helping profession to which, up to that point, she had devoted the bulk of her working life. Social work, Whitton claimed, although one of the newest professions, was perhaps the "most . . . discriminatory" of them all:

> In the early twenties and on into the thirties, as it struggled along, it was overwhelmingly a woman's field, still is largely so, but the boys have discovered it now, especially its enlarging administrative and executive opportunities, and they have come, some transferring from Arts or theology courses, more from other occupations, especially the "good mixers" and "good contact men". The few real male topnotchers in the profession will volunteer chivalrously and truthfully, that there are ten excellent, competent women to every one qualified male worker in the field. . . . But . . . notorious preferment to executive posts is going weekly to young, inexperienced men . . . over experienced competent women. Some of the older and mature male executives have fought valiantly for the advancement of women with whom they have worked, but with little success, and all across Canada, and particularly in government service, men with little or immature training or experience in the field are being put into major welfare posts.[2]

Whitton's revelations, although perhaps startling to the general public, were no surprise to the hundreds of unmarried career women like herself who had dedicated their lives to developing social work as a professional occupation in Canada in the years following World War I. Complaints about abysmally low pay for women and preferential treatment for males, although by no means frequent, existed as an undercurrent of anger and frustration throughout the profession's formative years in the 1920s. Because social workers did not "strike for shorter hours and higher salaries for themselves," Kate MacPherson, a Toronto caseworker for the Neighborhood Workers Association pointed out in a 1920 article, the "business world hears and knows comparatively little about them." As a result, the "stigma of overwork and underpay" was "especially odious" in the profession. Church deaconesses, she argued, were sacrificing the "flower of their youth . . . [for] . . . $15 monthly with board and room provided". A trained, experienced, caseworker was "offered $60 a month for a position which would claim her whole time for seven days a week". To MacPherson, the lesson was obvious. "The time is ripe," she concluded, "for dispossessing our minds of the old pharisaical, hypocritical notion that such work should be undertaken for the love of it, and not for the remuneration, that a pittance just sufficient to keep soul and body together, to be received with humble gratitude, is the correct financial treatment of those engaged in it."[3]

Nine years later, although salaries for trained caseworkers had improved somewhat, women's relative position in the profession had not. "Equal pay for equal work," a special Ottawa conference on social work pointed out in 1929, "is a principle which is recognized but not practiced." According to conference delegates,

2. Public Archives of Canada (hereafter PAC), Charlotte Whitton Papers, MG 30 E256, vol. 88, copy of "But He's a Man", 1947, later retitled "The Exploited Sex".
3. Kate McPherson, "Service at Sacrifice", *Social Welfare* (June 1920).

the reason was that "often the same salary which will attract superior women will interest only mediocre men."[4]

Mediocrity did not stop men's rise to the key administrative positions within the profession, however. Even the "most cursory survey of the field of social work," Lyra Taylor, a district secretary of Montreal's Family Welfare Association pointed out in 1930, revealed that "the really trained and experienced women workers greatly outnumber the men." Despite this fact, Taylor argued that there was a "strong prejudice against allowing women to occupy the highest executive positions in the family social work field . . . . [M]any women in family case-work . . . who are adequately equipped, well-trained, and sufficiently experienced, work under the direction of men executives whose experience equipment hardly makes up for their obvious lacks in education . . . vocation, and personality." It was a situation which called for "much forbearance on the part of the family case-worker," Taylor concluded. "She must, day by day, work to improve the casework standards of her organization and be content to see the man executive get all the credit, and, in addition, to see him draw a salary two or three times as large as her own."[5]

As these articles reveal, women in Canadian social work were aware of and angry about their low salaries and unequal authority compared to men, long before Whitton's revelations of the 1940s, let alone the more recent upsurge of concern in the 1970s. What is less clear is why a pattern of male dominance emerged so early within the profession when women constituted over two-thirds of all social welfare workers in Canada before 1941 and over 84 per cent of the professionally trained membership.[6]

Two of the most important sources of low pay for women social workers were external to the profession itself. Excluded in large part from the male-dominated fields of business, government, and the liberal professions, a new generation of college-educated, middle class women, after the turn of the century, provided a large pool of available labour for emerging fields such as nursing, teaching, and library and social work. In the years following World War I, moreover, the supply problem was complicated by the death of so many Canadian men in that conflict. Countless of her colleagues, Charlotte Whitton pointed out in 1937, "who in the normal life of their generation would have been the heads of families and occupied in their home life"

4. "Reports of Committees on Findings of the Special Conference on Social Work Held in Ottawa, 25-26 June 1929", *Social Welfare* (October 1929).
5. Lyra Taylor, "Essentials in the Equipment of a Family Case-Worker", *Social Welfare* (December 1930). For similar complaints about salary discrimination against women in the profession see University of Calgary Library, Canadian Association of Social Workers Records, vol. 18, file 18.25, Minutes of the Toronto Branch, 21 January 1931, which noted a "wide divergence . . . between the salary standards of men and women executives in social work". The problem, according to one woman case-worker at the meeting, was the prevalence of too many "sheltered women" on family agency governing boards who did "not know the needs of nor recognize the claims of decent salary requirements".
6. "The Employment of Social Workers in Canada", *The Social Worker*, XXI (July-August 1953).

instead found themselves forced to "live their lives on a permanent basis of self-support . . . because . . . the husbands with whom they would have built homes were many years dead on the . . . fields of battle."[7] The availability of this pool of low cost labour was undoubtedly one incentive for governments and private charities to expand low-paying employment in the social sector in the years before World War II. As the 1929 Ottawa conference on social work observed, low salaries in the field could still, after all, attract "superior women".

Additionally, although trained women caseworkers were in short supply throughout the entire interwar era, governments and charitable organizations were by no means easily convinced that the more costly skills they had to offer were either desirable or necessary. In this sense, women in social work faced even a greater disadvantage than their counterparts in nursing and teaching, where skills were older, more easily identifiable, and practiced on a far wider scale.[8] As a result, by far the greatest amount of energy expended by women in social work to expand their own status and income between the wars took the form of attempting to demonstrate to skeptical male authorities that the profession did, in fact, possess a body of recognizable, scientific skills that took years of education, training, and experience to acquire. Lyra Taylor accurately pinpointed this problem in 1930:

> We still have with us the occasional board member who feels that a family case-worker need not be highly educated and specially trained for the job. He thinks there is nothing the family case-worker does which could not be equally well done, say, by one of his smartest stenographers. We still also have with us, in the ranks of the professional social workers themselves, the man who, in his inmost heart (though he is fast becoming afraid to voice the opinion) really thinks that the job of the family case-worker could best of all be done by some nice, sensible, motherly woman. Such a man views only with apprehension the fast-growing number of trained, intelligent, highly-equipped women who are definitely choosing social work as a profession, and who feel that no sacrifice which they make in order to add to their professional equipment is too great for the demands that their work makes.[9]

Throughout most of the 1920s and 30s, professional mobility for these women that Taylor described primarily took the form of displacing, not men, but rather other unpaid, volunteer married women working in the nation's private charities and welfare institutions. It was to this end that Charlotte Whitton, from her position as executive secretary of the Canadian Council on Child and Family Welfare, dedicated with such zeal her famous social surveys of the 1920s and 30s. By ruthlessly exposing and holding up to ridicule the "amateurish" and "overly sentimental" activities of a previous generation of unpaid women volunteers, Whitton and her colleagues were

7. On the restricted access of women to the liberal professions see Veronica Strong-Boag, "Canada's Women Doctors: Feminism Constrained", in Linda Kealey, ed., *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s* (Toronto, 1979), p. 110; Charlotte Whitton, "In Home and Office, In Factory and Shop", *Child and Family Welfare*, XIII (November 1937).
8. Ronald Walton, *Women in Social Work* (London, 1975), p. 14.
9. Taylor, "Essentials in the Equipment of a Family Case-Worker".

able to justify the creation of paid casework positions for a newly emerging cadre of professional women social workers, in many cases hand-picked by Whitton herself.[10]

Apart from these external problems of supply and skill recognition, women's advancement in social work was also handicapped by what Dr. Helen Reid, director of the federal government's Division of Child Welfare, referred to as a "tremendous turnover" of "constantly disappearing staff".[11] Part of this problem of rapid turnover within social work, which later surveys between 1948 and 1953 put at 16 per cent of all positions per year, was a result of low salaries, as workers drifted quickly into other jobs within and outside of the profession in search of better pay or more responsibility. A large part, however, was also due to marriage. Social work was, above all, a career for single women. Employment for married women within the profession, as within most other lines of women's work in Canada before World War II, was extremely rare, so rare in fact, that a 1930 article in *Social Welfare* on "Married Women in the Profession" simply assumed that "bereavement" was the only reason for married women to work in the field. A survey of 478 women graduates of the University of Toronto's School of Social Science between 1914 and 1938, confirmed this point. One hundred and twenty-one or 25.3 per cent of the graduates, the survey revealed, had since married and only six of those women remained in social work. A later, more comprehensive survey of almost four thousand positions in Canadian social welfare in 1953 discovered that 22 per cent of all women in the field resigned their positions each year. The reason in 41 per cent of these cases was marriage.[12] This pattern of career disruption due to marriage clearly played some role in preventing women's advancement into greater executive responsibility within the ranks of Canadian social work.

By far the most significant constraint shaping women's career patterns within social work, however, was the sex-typing or sexual division of labour that was built into the profession from its origins. Eli Zaretsky, in a seminal article on "The Place of the Family in the Origins of the Welfare State", has explained the roots of this dilemma. "The central problem that all tendencies of the [first] women's movement faced," Zaretsky points out, "was that of reconciling the spread of the marketplace, with its emphasis on individualism and competition, with the traditional values of 'women's sphere' — benevolence and selfless nurturance." One way in which the first generation of college-educated women tried to do this was by "search[ing] for a politics that could combine wage labor and economic independence, especially for

10. Patricia Rooke and R.L. Schnell, "Child Welfare in English Canada, 1920-1948", *Social Service Review* (September 1981).
11. Dr. Helen Reid, "Volunteer Values", *Social Welfare* (October 1927).
12. B.H. McKinnon, "The Married Worker in the Family Welfare Field", *Social Welfare* (June 1929); Agnes McGregor, *Training for Social Work in the Department of Social Science, University of Toronto, 1914-40* (Toronto, 1940), p. 30; PAC, Canadian Council on Social Development Records, MG 28 I10, vol. 148, file 528, "Committee on Personnel in Social Work, Survey of Welfare Positions: Discussion of Implications", 15 November 1954, chapter 7.

middle class women, with state protection of the family, especially among the poor".[13]

Through asserting a need for the protection of the working-class family, and particularly of mothers and children within it, middle-class, college-educated single women could define a professional field for themselves, linked closely to women's traditional nurturing identity. To the extent, then, that the rise of social work in the early twentieth century was linked to the protection of the family, and particularly women's traditional role within it, the sex-typing of women by the profession, and the sex-typing of women in the profession, was assured.

The result was a paradox. Although composed primarily of career-oriented single women, social work as a profession, in the years following World War I, could not view the role of women in Canadian society outside of the constricting framework of motherhood. From the 1920s until the 1940s, keeping women in the home, as part of its crusade to reduce infant mortality and to enhance family life, became a principal objective of the profession. "The fundamental need . . . of every family," professional spokespersons argued in the 1920s, was "a mother who can be with her children until they reach maturity."[14] Twenty years later, even as tens of thousands of married women began entering the workforce under the impetus of World War II, the essential message of social work remained unchanged. The working mother was a "threat to the stability of the home". Her true "patriotic duty", women in the profession argued, was instead to "see to the security and safety of her young before embarking on any enterprise which takes her from the home". Women who had worked during the war, and thus learned to "make all the decisions while the husband was away," were advised during the reconstruction period, to "learn to share

13. Eli Zaretsky, "The Place of the Family in the Origins of the Welfare State", in Bonnie Thorne and Marilyn Yalom, eds., *Rethinking the Family: Some Feminist Questions* (New York, 1982), pp. 211-2; Jill Conway identified the same dilemma in an earlier article. "Middle-class American women of Jane Addams' generation . . . had to work within the tradition which saw women as civilizing and moralizing forces in society. . . . Yet within American society there was no naturally occurring social milieu in which these assumptions about the exclusive attributes of women could be seen for what they were. Women had to create the very institutions which were their vehicle for departure from middle-class feminine life, and in doing so they naturally duplicated existing assumptions about the sexes and their roles." See "Women Reformers and American Culture, 1870-1930", *Journal of Social History,* V (Winter 1971-72), p. 174.

14. "The Canadian Mother", *Social Welfare* (May 1923). For an excellent discussion of maternal inadequacy and the professionalization of child care in the 1920s see Veronica Strong-Boag, "Intruders in the Nursery: Childcare Professionals Reshape the Years One to Five, 1920-1940", in Joy Parr, ed., *Childhood and Family in Canadian History* (Toronto, 1982).

responsibility, to make a place for him and to help him recover his role as head of the family''.[15]

Within the family, women's role was viewed by the profession in equally traditional terms. The mother was the ''constant companion of her children and the central figure in every family group,'' Dr. Janet Long of the Canadian Welfare Council remarked in 1940, ''who cares for every need of her infant, growing children, and husband.''[16] If the family was in trouble, chances were high that the mother was at fault. Often, sheer ''ignorance and apathy on the part of the mothers themselves'' was a principal cause of infant death. At the other extreme, a ''mother's love, if . . . not controlled by insight,'' women in the profession warned, could ''become a cloak for the most intense selfishness'' that could destroy a child's happiness in adult life.[17] More typically, a mother's inability to manage her household properly was a continual source of family breakdown, as Malca Friedman, a Montreal social worker related in one case study of ''Behaviour Problems'' within the family.

> Sammy's father works hard in an iron foundry at some distance from his home. After the heat, the noise, the physical strain and mental tension, he craves at the day's end a restful home atmosphere which Sammy's mother has not been able to create. She also lacks the ability to buy or prepare food economically, or to make her husband's hard-earned wages meet the needs of the family. It is not difficult, then, to know why Sammy's father sometimes abuses his wife, and has at times deserted his family, even if his actions are not entirely justified.

Here was a woman who needed to be ''taught to buy and prepare food carefully and [to] keep her home clean and inviting,'' Friedman concluded.[18] ''If a housekeeper cannot be thrifty with $18.00 a week, why give her $25.00 a week to mismanage,'' Jean Walker of Toronto's Big Sister Association pointed out in putting forward the social work case against familly allowances in the 1920s. ''Why not give her instead a home economist . . . who will take the drudgery out of her life?''[19]

15. Jean Henshaw, ''Child Welfare and the War'', Canadian Conference on Social Work *Proceedings* (hereafter CCSW *Proceedings*), VIII (1942). Charlotte Whitton was even more vociferous in her opposition to married women entering the labour force. In her view, the ''gravest attacks upon the family'' had come from the ''disinclination of [middle-class] women who married to take up their traditional place and task within their homes''. In Whitton's view, the ''full-time gainful occupation of married women'' was inevitably associated with ''a decreasing birth-rate . . . more legal separations, looser divorce provisions . . . and such attempted rationalization of sexual indulgence as companionate marriage''. PAC, Whitton Papers, vol. 82, ''Towards a New Era in Family Life'', n.d. but *circa* 1942. Concerns over married women working were not limited to conservatives in the profession. Radicals such as Bessie Touzel were also disturbed at the trend. For Touzel, equal pay for equal work was to be supported as a means of *reducing* the demand for married women workers. See Touzel, ''Women in Industry'', CCSW *Proceedings*, VIII (1942).
16. Dr. Janet Long, ''Maternal Health is Family Welfare'', CCSW *Proceedings*, VII (1940).
17. *Ibid;* Helen Bott, ''Child Study and Parent Education'', *Social Welfare* (July 1927).
18. Malca Friedman, ''Behaviour Problems as Related to Family Rehabilitation'', *Social Welfare* (April 1927).
19. Jean Walker, ''Gaps in Social Resources and Their Relation to Casework'', *Social Welfare* (June-July 1926).

Anxious to bolster the family and women's traditional role within it as a means of defining a field for their own casework intervention, women in social work, ironically, themselves became vulnerable to a similar form of sex-typing which ghettoized their sphere of influence within the profession. "The natural born social worker," leading American social work educator Frank Bruno pointed out in a 1930 article in *Social Welfare*, "[is] usually . . . a young woman who shows from the first day of her work . . . an almost uncanny intuition in choice of method of approach to a client or community problem."[20] Ethel Dodds Parker, one of the most prominent women in the Canadian profession agreed. "Social work with families is more successfully carried out by a woman," she wrote in her 1939 survey of welfare services in Moncton:

> The essential element in the budget of a [social] Service Bureau is not material aid, but qualified, understanding staff. . . . A woman, with the discerning mind and understanding heart, which good personal service demands, must possess the natural gift of arousing and encouraging the confidence of men and women.[21]

Why were women more likely than men to possess this "natural gift" of encouraging confidence in their clients? Insofar as casework within family agencies focused primarily on the mother, women social workers were assumed to possess a more likely bond of rapport with this key element of the family. The successful caseworker, according to Vera Moberly, a Toronto Children's Aid Society supervisor, had to be "well-trained in child care"; she had to "have a knowledge of health needs" as well as the ability to "help the . . . mother with housekeeping problems and budgeting to be sure that the family are getting . . . well-balanced meals". Women, it was assumed, were more likely than men to possess such knowledge. As a consequence, they would be able, on their first visits, to "engage the interest of . . . [the] mother," and "gradually . . . as the mother talks about her own family, her children, her husband, her difficulties [and] her neighbours," Moberly continued, ". . . her habits, housekeeping ability and personality will be evident and so the worker will learn the heart of the home."[22]

Beyond their "uncanny intuition", "understanding hearts", and natural bond of rapport with working-class mothers, women were deemed particularly suited for social work for one other reason. As single career women without a family, they more than men, it was widely assumed, were willing to work primarily for love, not money. Today's professional social worker, Stuart Jaffray, director of the University of Toronto's School of Social Work, told the readers of *Saturday Night* in 1942,

> increasingly is a young woman who has prepared for her profession and loves it, who works long hours for too low a salary, but who reaps deep satisfaction from an intensely human job well-done. . . . Her interest in humankind is fundamental.[23]

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20. Frank Bruno, "Why Have Schools of Social Work?", *Social Welfare* (November 1930).
21. PAC, Canadian Council on Social Development Records, vol. 132, file 600, A.E. Parker, "Welfare Services in Moncton — Report 1939".
22. Vera Moberly, "Supervision", *Social Welfare* (September 1931).
23. Stuart Jaffray, "Social Work: The Newest Profession", *Saturday Night* (July 1942).

Women social workers in the interwar years agreed that a spirit of self-sacrifice was essential equipment for the profession. "One who selects a profession like social casework must live a large part of her life through the lives of others," Bertha Reynolds, the great American social work educator told the readers of *Child and Family Welfare* in the 1930s.[24] "Life is under no bond whatever to give her happiness," Lyra Taylor pointed out in the same decade. "Indeed as she looks at her clients' problems, life must sometimes seem a clever invention for causing pain. But these same clients are the only reason she knows of for her existence and certainly the only reason for her work."[25] Alluding to the impact of World War I in thwarting many in her generation's hopes for family life, Charlotte Whitton made a similar point in 1944: "many a woman preferred to go proudly unwedded, dedicated to throwing into her life's work, the strength, affection, and inspiration laid away with shattered dreams."[26] Although insisting that university education and extensive training in casework skills were essential prerequisites for the practice of social work, leading spokespersons for the profession in the interwar years were still convinced that women, as in the nineteenth century, by reason of natural aptitude, personality and a sense of vocation, were best fitted for social work.

What about men? Here too sex-typing was equally prevalent. If women were suited by temperament and experience for family casework, then the proper sphere for men in the profession, apart from working with delinquent boys in juvenile and probation work, was administration. This was held to be the case for a variety of reasons. First, precisely because many people both within and outside of social work agreed with Charlotte Whitton's 1944 observation that women were "on the whole more sensitive souls, naturally more finely attuned to the sharp twinge of conscience . . . than men,"[27] they could not be trusted to administer efficiently and economically the large sums of money granted to private charities and government relief agencies. Margaret Gould, director of Toronto's Child Welfare Council in the 1930s, and one of the leading radicals in the profession, illustrated this point well in relating a 1934 conversation she had with one government official as to why more social workers were not appointed to administer public relief:

> He looked at me quizzically and said, 'I wouldn't trust social workers with the big job of administering large sums of money. After all, who are social workers but the old set of "uplifters" in modern dress? They are theoretical, impractical, sentimental, with expensive ideas.

Gould recounted that she "tried hard to explain that the modern social worker is a

24. Bertha Reynolds, "Social Casework: What is It? What is its Place in the World of Today?", *Child and Family Welfare*, XI (June 1935).
25. Lyra Taylor, "Essentials in the Equipment of a Family Case-Worker".
26. PAC, Whitton Papers, vol. 88, "Canada Looks Forward: The Place of Women", 1944.
27. *Ibid*, "Where Do We Go From Here", n.d. but *circa* 1944.

different species from the old-time 'uplifter' . . . [with] . . . knowledge and training which makes her different".[28] The official remained unconvinced, however.

His skepticism was hardly surprising since even within the profession it was widely assumed that women lacked essential administrative skills. "Business administration is foreign to the tasks of the average social worker," one anonymous contributor to *Social Welfare* pointed out in 1928,

> and therefore in a vast number of cases is done very badly by executives and department heads in social agencies. . . . This feeling of inadequacy in business administration is shared by most women's boards and leads them to appoint a male "Advisory Board" and then to refuse recognition to their paid executive at their meetings.[29]

Where women did form a majority on an advisory board, their advice was often distrusted precisely because of their sex. In the spring of 1936 Harry Cassidy, Director of Social Welfare for British Columbia, successfully pushed through an amendment to the province's Mothers' Allowance Act stipulating that a majority of its five person advisory board should be women. Cassidy claimed he was acting in order to "satisfy women's organizations",[30] but his reward for this experiment in positive discrimination was a sharp blast from none other than Charlotte Whitton. "I tell you, you will be a sorry boy if an advisory board composed chiefly of women — and I think I know who some of them will be — set out to exercise as much power as they really have under . . . [this] . . . statute," she warned the British Columbia director. If the administration of Mothers' Allowances was shaped primarily by women's organizations rather than trained professionals, the act would soon be "wide open to . . . abuse and deterioration" as a result of emotional decision-making. "I would be willing to take a bet that within a year the majority of the women on your Board will force the inclusion of certain cases," Whitton argued. Instead, such a board should be composed of the "five best people you can get in British Columbia in this field" and

28. Margaret Gould, "For Whom Do Social Workers Work?", *The Social Worker,* III (November 1934).

29. "What Should Be the Relationship Between the Board and the Staff of a Social Agency?" *Social Welfare* (July 1928). A similar attitude was expressed by Ethel Parker in her survey of welfare services in Moncton. "A danger to be avoided is the tendency to select the directors [of the proposed Moncton Welfare Council] to 'represent' other agencies. . . . The financial stability and good administration of the whole Council depends on drawing into this Board the best of Moncton's many socially minded business men. It is not intended to imply that it should have no women, but they too should be selected for their business capacity. . . ." Parker, "Welfare Services in Moncton — Report 1939".

30. PAC, Canadian Council on Social Development Records, accession 1983, box 60, file "B.C. Provincial Secretary's Department", Harry Cassidy to Charlotte Whitton, 28 December 1937.

Whitton confessed she did "not think they would [be women]".[31] It was perhaps in part to counter her own fears as well as the widespread stereotype that women were "overly sentimental" and therefore "poor administrators", which led the CWC director to drive home so ruthlessly the need for economy and efficiency in relief administration to both the Bennett and King governments during the 1930s.[32]

By far the most flagrant example of women within social work being sex-typed as untrustworthy administrators, occurred within Ottawa's Public Welfare Board in 1936. From 1933 onwards, Ottawa had been one of the few Canadian cities to employ professionally trained social workers in the distribution of public relief and, in consequence, the city dispensed a scale of aid that was relatively generous by provincial standards. Complaints had been growing within the local press and on city council against the steadily rising cost of the dole and a federal relief cutback in the spring of 1936 brought the whole issue to a head. In order to make up the difference, the city was forced to hike property taxes stiffly. The result was an immediate backlash against the city's new Welfare Board. Social service was an "evil", one city controller charged, that was "creeping into the Public Welfare Board which had been appointed to administer relief, not to build up a body of social workers". The local press agreed. Social workers in the Welfare Board, the *Ottawa Citizen* pointed out, had tended "to treat those on relief as chronic help-receivers, as public charges and as a class apart [which] leads on the one hand to a recognition of a class of professional relief beneficiaries and on the other, to a class of professional social workers whose career is to treat the unfortunate according to well-defined principles".[33]

Forty women social workers, employed by the Public Welfare Board, became the scapegoats of this attack. Over the course of the summer, in response to these criticisms, they were fired by the Ottawa city council and eleven male "detectives" were installed in their place to reinvestigate the Board's caseloads and to root out chiselers. "Women were good for social service," Ottawa's mayor pointed out in justifying this move, but it was the city's intention to "divorce direct relief from social service. . . . The men investigators did better work than women; they were not

31. *Ibid,* Whitton to Cassidy, 13 December 1937. Whitton's fears proved to be misplaced. As Cassidy pointed out, "the [three women] members of the Board are willing to back up the Department in what we consider to be sound policies. There has been some small agitation for an increase in the age of dependent children under the act from 16 to 18 years, but the members of the Board backed [the Department] recently in opposing any such change. . . . As it happens the Board does not . . . contain any women who were troublesome on the question of mother's pensions when you did your survey in British Columbia." Cassidy to Whitton, 28 December 1937.
32. For Whitton's attitude to relief administration and social work professionalization during the 1930s, see James Struthers, "A Profession in Crisis: Charlotte Whitton and Canadian Social Work in the 1930's", *Canadian Historical Review*, LXII (June 1981).
33. PAC, Canadian Council on Social Development Records, vol. 155, memo from Jean Walker, 22 October 1936 containing extracts from the *Ottawa Citizen*, 18 August and 12 September 1936.

interested in social service but in seeing that those on relief gave the city the right information and reported their earnings."[34]

This purge sent shock waves throughout the ranks of Canadian social work. Bessie Touzel, staff supervisor of the Welfare Board and the person most responsible for building up its professional staff, resigned in protest against the arbitrary dismissal of her female colleagues and the destruction of relief policies she had worked so hard to establish. Her resignation and the dismissals became, briefly, a *cause célèbre* within Canadian social work.

What is significant about the profession's response to these firings is that the sex-typing issue — that is, the assumption that women were too "service-oriented" and therefore poor administrators — was ignored almost entirely. Touzel herself, commenting on the events in *The Social Worker*, simply claimed that the whole question of "whether male or female investigation is preferable" had been "misunderstood". The fundamental issue, she argued, was that "employees who had given service of good quality were being dismissed without any adequate examination of . . . their work."[35] Other commentary within the profession took a similar position of ignoring the sex-typing issue entirely. Instead, letters to the editor of *The Social Worker* either focused on the question of wrongful dismissal, claimed that Ottawa's relief expenditures were not that high, or argued that the stress on relief chiselling was false economy.

To those within Canadian social work, the fundamental principle at stake in the firings of Ottawa's forty women social workers was not sexism, but professionalism. What angered Touzel and her colleagues was not that women were being replaced by men, but rather that trained caseworkers were being replaced by untrained detectives. To Ottawa's press and city council, however, it was precisely the "feminine" nature of social work that made it suspect in the first place, particularly where public money was concerned.

Once the entire public welfare field began to expand enormously in the 1930s and 40s, one fact soon became clear. Unless trained men could somehow be attracted into social work, its future prospects for professional recognition and acceptance within the emerging public welfare sector remained bleak. As a result, luring men into social work became one of the profession's key priorities during the 1930s and 40s in order to enhance its prestige and general salary level. "Qualified men are even more urgently needed than women," a University of Toronto School of Social Service recruiting pamphlet pointed out in 1930, and those who showed competence could "anticipate rapid advancement to executive posts carrying salaries . . . rang[ing] from $2400 to $5000 per annum or more". Although the field had been "looked upon as peculiarly a woman's preserve," the authors of the pamphlet conceded, social work nevertheless

34. Bessie Touzel, "What Happened in Ottawa", *The Social Worker*, V (November 1936).
35. *Ibid.*

contained many positions that "offer[ed] scope for activity quite sufficient to satisfy masculine ideas of dignity and difficulty in work".[36]

To drive home this point, others in the profession urged that the period of social work training be lengthened. "In order to bring in enough young men . . . of the right type," Ethel Parker argued in 1928,

> we may have to batter at the doors of our universities and insist upon a graduate course in social work. There is no lack of fine young men starting long courses in medicine, engineering and law. The very length and thoroughness of these courses is a challenge to them. Our shorter courses . . . will probably always exist, but for executive, administrative, and research work, we need a higher type of education and special training than is available.[37]

Once the Depression struck, Charlotte Whitton hit upon an even quicker strategy. Why not simply recruit unemployed male professionals and businessmen directly from other fields? With the Depression now in its fourth year, she told the Toronto branch of the Canadian Association of Social Workers in 1934,

> the task becomes one of a businesslike organization of relief. . . . Excellent staff officers are emerging from the ranks of businessmen; engineers, and other professions are giving fine leadership and will soon take their place with us as social work leaders. . . . I say: "Lord give us men." Speaking absolutely professionally, there are administrative problems which are by their weight beyond the nervous capacity of the average woman to carry for a long time.[38]

Ironically, five years later Whitton herself, on the verge of a nervous breakdown, would be asked to step down as executive secretary of the Canadian Welfare Council by its president, Southam publishing magnate, Philip Fisher, in favour of a man. "The question of finance and routine administration must drive you to distraction," George Davidson, her eventual successor, wrote to her in conveying Fisher's suggestion:

> You are not by any means the easiest person in the world to work with and I think that that may be influencing Fisher in his suggestions in regard to a man rather than a woman [as your replacement] . . . as he seemed to have in the back of his mind . . . that he could not think of any woman . . . who could maintain, in such a delicate position, a satisfactory working relationship with you.[39]

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36. PAC, John Joseph Kelso Papers, MG 30 C97, vol. 6, copy of pamphlet published by the University of Toronto School of Social Service entitled "Social Work as a Profession", n.d. but *circa* 1930.
37. A. Ethel Parker, "The Art of Helping", *Social Welfare* (July 1928).
38. Canadian Association of Social Workers Records, vol. 18, file 28, minutes of the Toronto Branch meeting, 30 January 1934, containing a speech by Charlotte Whitton on "Some Forward Glimpses in Canadian Social Work".
39. PAC, Whitton Papers, vol. 18, George Davidson to Whitton, 19 April 1939. Whitton replied, somewhat testily, that she had on her desk "three letters and . . . two personal assurances and a long distance call, coming in all from six different women", who were willing to work with her if she stayed on in some capacity at the Council; Whitton to George Davidson, 26 April 1939. She eventually resigned, under similar pressure, in 1941.

Throughout the 1930s and 40s, recruiting pamphlets published by the University of Toronto School of Social Work and the CASW, continued to stress the need for males within the administrative hierarchy of the profession. As one 1938 CASW pamphlet pointed out,

> the opportunities for men who take up social work as a profession are particularly good. They are most likely to be in demand in connection with boys' work, juvenile delinquency, hostels, prisons, relief administration . . . and executive positions in all parts of the social work field. Women will occupy the greater number of positions in child welfare, medical social work, and family welfare.[40]

The same recruiting pamphlets also routinely noted in passing that while women in the profession could make a maximum of $3000 a year, "men may receive more, especially in . . . a few executive positions where their salaries will range up to . . . $5000 and $6000 annually."[41]

This strategy of upgrading the profession by attracting more trained males into its administrative ranks was only marginally successful. Until the late 1940s, women overwhelmingly comprised the bulk of graduates of Canada's schools of social work, 93 per cent of the total between 1931 and 1935, 83 per cent between 1940 and 1945.[42] Men did increasingly move into the field during the 1930s and 40s, and they did move into its administrative positions, particularly in the burgeoning public welfare sector. For the most part, however, they remained untrained and those men who were trained in social work did not receive any particular advantage because of it in the newly-emerging welfare state bureaucracy. "The men who openly joined our ranks and took the necessary training plus a good deal of banter from their friends," Amy Leigh, one of British Columbia's leading women social workers, observed bitterly in 1942,

> are earning salaries of from $85.00 to $100.00 per month. Men who are going into the new jobs have not, generally speaking, had social work training, nor are they known as 'social workers', with the excellent result that they get quite decent salaries.[43]

A growing number of articles in social work periodicals during the 1940s on the issue of salary and job disparities within the field of social welfare bore Leigh's point out. There was a "great disparity in the salaries of men and women executives in comparable positions," the Hamilton branch of the CASW noted in 1942. In that city

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40. PAC, Canadian Council on Social Development Records, vol. 155, copy of CASW pamphlet, "Social Work: A Vocation", 1938. The 1944 CASW recruiting pamphlet made an identical statement.
41. *Ibid.*
42. Svanhuit Josie, "Canada's Professional Social Workers", *The Social Worker,* XVI (February 1948).
43. Amy Leigh, "Recruiting", *The Social Worker,* XI (April 1942).

men in the profession were making as much as $700. per year more than women.[44] A 1946 CASW survey of personnel practices in the profession reached similar conclusions on a national scale. Although men represented only 13 per cent of the CASW membership, they occupied 32 per cent of the executive positions surveyed and were often receiving twice as much as women for comparable work. As the 1946 study concluded, "numerically the field continues to have more women than men but there is evidence of an unfair disadvantage to qualified women who are paid less for equal work or are sometimes excluded from administrative posts because of their sex."[45]

Even Canada's leading social welfare organizations were serious offenders. In 1944, when the position of director of family allowances within the newly formed Department of National Health and Welfare was advertised, men only were invited to apply.[46] Within the Canadian Welfare Council, sexual discrimination was openly practiced well into the 1950s, albeit in the face of growing resistance. When Bessie Touzel rejoined the Council in 1947 as assistant executive director she was informed that her position as second in command in no way implied the second highest salary in the organization. "In order to secure the services of a particular man for the staff . . . it might be necessary to pay [him] a larger salary than you are receiving," CWC director R.E.G. Davis told Touzel in offering her the job. However, he was sure this was a "practical problem which . . . you and I can work out if and when the necessity arises".[47]

Six years later, Elizabeth Govan, one of the first women in Canada to hold a Ph. D. in social service administration, proved to be less agreeable. Offered a research position within the CWC, Govan first demanded to know the salaries of men working within the Council. Arguing that she knew there was a "considerable discrepancy . . . between the salaries given the men on the staff and those given the women . . . which is not related to training, experience, or ability," Govan told Davis that it was a "matter of principle" for her to be paid on the basis of her competence, not her sex.[48]

Such forthright protests as Govan's remained the exception rather than the rule during this period, however. More typical, perhaps, was the experience of one Calgary

44. "Report of Hamilton Branch Committee on Salary Standards and Employment Practices", *The Social Worker*, XI (December 1942).
45. "Report of a Study on Salaries and Other Employment and Personnel Practices in Canadian Social Work", *The Social Worker*, XIV (April 1946). All seventeen members of the committee which wrote the report were women.
46. *Ibid.* Due to stiff protests from the CASW and several women's organizations throughout the country, the competition was finally opened to women, although as the report noted, "the few days allowed for filing . . . remained a handicap in obtaining a nation-wide recruitment."
47. PAC, Canadian Council on Social Development Records, accession 1983, box 295, file "TI-TZ", R.E.G. Davis to Bessie Touzel, 3 May 1947. Touzel was described as "one of Canada's most capable social workers" in the CWC press release announcing her appointment. Her starting salary was $5200.
48. *Ibid*, box 290, file "Govan", Elizabeth Govan to R.E.G. Davis, 12 May 1953; 24 January 1953.

social worker as described by CWC recreation division secretary John Farina:

> She is a charming, bright, live-wire girl, full of energy . . . just a shade under 30 years old. . . . She joined the staff of the Calgary Recreation Department . . . about 1950 and quickly moved up to the second in command position. I would say she is presently one of the most competent municipal programme directors in the country. Like so many girls, however, she will never get to be the director of recreation for the city simply because she is a girl. She has a lot more on the ball than many of the present directors and is beginning to feel a bit frustrated.[49]

The massive Department of National Health and Welfare survey of four thousand social welfare positions within Canada, conducted between 1948 and 1953, confirmed this pattern of male dominance and sexual inequality beyond a doubt. Fifty two per cent of all those working in social welfare, the department discovered, had no training whatsoever. Of this total, 63 per cent were men, although they represented less than half of those working in the field. On the other hand, 71 per cent of all those with completed social work degrees were women. Men, nevertheless, occupied 60 per cent of all administrative positions surveyed by the department.[50] As of the 1951 census, men in social work averaged $2657 annually compared to $1824 annually for women, an $800 or 30 per cent differential, although there was almost no appreciable difference in average age.[51]

Within the social welfare field as a whole, the Health and Welfare survey noted, "family and child welfare paid the lowest salaries . . . because these two areas are largely voluntary agencies and employ the largest number of women."[52] From a slightly different perspective Albert Rose, of the University of Toronto's School of Social Work, pinpointed in 1948 why men within the profession were more likely to be found in its executive and administrative positions:

> They are very often married and have children. They cannot, literally, afford to become social work practitioners at the professional level and meet post-war costs of maintaining a family. They seek, demand, and obtain supervisory and executive or administrative posts carrying much higher salaries.[53]

By the end of the 1940s, three decades after social work first emerged as a paid career in this country, a pattern of male dominance within the profession and a sexual

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49. *Ibid,* box 295, file "WO-WZ", John Farina to Kenrick Marshall, 23 July 1957.
50. *Ibid,* vol. 148, file 528, "Committee on Personnel in Social Work, Survey of Welfare Positions", 15 November 1954.
51. "Employment of Social Welfare Workers in Canada", *The Social Worker,* XXI (July-August 1953). Women comprised 63 per cent of the 3995 people listed as social welfare workers in the 1951 census. Their average age was thirty eight years compared to forty one years for men. Significantly, the proportion of married women in the field rose from 7 per cent to 24 per cent of the female total between 1941 and 1951.
52. "Committee on Personnel in Social Work, Survey of Welfare Positions".
53. Albert Rose, "Personnel Practices in Canadian Social Work", *Canadian Welfare* (September 1948).

the profession and over 70 per cent of all those with social work degrees, were concentrated in the low-paying practitioner sector. Men, with much less training, division of labour was firmly in place. Women, although comprising a majority within occupied the better-paying administrative positions throughout the field. In this regard, and for much the same reasons, social work merely duplicated a pattern of sexual inequality which also emerged in its sister helping professions, teaching and nursing, a pattern, indeed, which was reflected in the double ghetto of women's work within Canadian society as a whole.

The position of women within social work also contained a special irony, however. Although from the profession's earliest years as a form of paid employment in the post-World War I era women had protested against the injustice of men, with less training, dominating the administrative hierarchy, they were, in some ways, protesting against the results of an image of women they had themselves helped to foster. Much of the drive for the professionalization of social work first emerged out of an assertion that women's special capacity for nurturing within the family had a larger role to play within society itself. Well into the 1940s, women leaders within the profession continued to insist that just as women's natural role was within the family, so too within social work were the unique characteristics of the female psyche especially suited for work with families.

At the same time, in order to attract men into social work as part of a campaign to enhance its prestige within society as a whole throughout the 1930s and 40s, women and men in the profession stressed that males were particularly needed to fill its enlarging administrative dimensions. As a consequence, employment patterns within social work simply mirrored the images of appropriate male and female spheres of work which the profession itself disseminated.

Confronted with structural barriers to equality which perhaps provided few alternative strategies for mobility, women within Canadian social work nevertheless paid a heavy price for their professionalism. By concentrating so exclusively on the advancement of their occupation in the three decades after World War I, they also remained wedded to a social work vision of women's role in society which made their own eclipse by men within the social service sector difficult to challenge.