A Visible Presence:
The Victoria Business and Professional Women's Club
1921-1960

by

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ABSTRACT

This study of the Kumtuks, later known as the Victoria Business and Professional Women's Club, covers the years 1921 to 1960. The Kumtuks distinguished themselves from other women's organisations by limiting their membership to professionally employed women. The club's willingness to address issues that affected working women, however, evolved overtime. In the 1920s, the Kumtuks' commitment to voluntary service often overshadowed the club's broader mandate to address the problems facing working women. In the 1930s, the club cautiously defended the right of married women to paid work. By the 1940s and 1950s, the club would argue that access to employment, unemployment insurance, and to decent wages should not be circumscribed by gender, race, or marital status. The club's increasingly progressive demands for economic and political equality challenged an ideology of financial dependence placed on women by the state and by society in general.

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This thesis is dedicated to my children
Julia Marie and Anna Carmela Schillaci-Ventura
and to the memory of my father
Clifford Anthony (Tony) Brocklehurst
(19 July 1929 - 14 January 2000)

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines how one group of women in British Columbia, the Victoria Business and Professional Women's Club (VBPWC), conceptualised the right to work between 1921 and 1960. In terms of access to positions of influence or political power, historians have emphasised that there were few real gains made by women during this period. Such conclusions diminish the energy and commitment of groups like the VBPWC, which in spite of a back-drop of social conservatism, consistently demanded that women be recognised as a permanent part of the waged labour force, and highlighted the issues of sex discrimination in public policy, in wages, and in hiring practices.

Initially the VBPWC was known as the Victoria Kumtuks. This organisation adopted the more formal name and constitution of the VBPWC in 1930. The club reminded its members of the responsibilities attached to citizenship, and gave them the opportunity to gain confidence as public speakers. From its inception, the VBPWC was comprised of professional employed women who felt that working women in general were entitled to reasonable wages, decent working conditions, and a political voice.

The influence and energy of business and professional women as an organised network of women committed to change has been relatively overlooked by historians. Doris French's examination of the Federation of Women Teachers' Association of Ontario between 1918 and 1968 is one of the

few extended, albeit dated, studies of Canadian professional women's activism.[1] The voluntary club work and church activities in which many Canadian women were involved, on the other hand, have received much attention. These studies have focused on prominent, essentially philanthropic associations of women, such as the National Council of Women (NCW), the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), and Women's Institutes.[2]

While waged work does occupy a place in these studies, the emphasis is often on the moral anxieties these organisations expressed over women working. Concerns over the sexual purity and reproductive capacity of the working woman herself formed the basis of most attempts by these groups to reform contemporary labour and employment practices. In her article, "A Response to the Depression: The Local Council of Women in Vancouver," Mary Patricia Powell provides a preliminary discussion on how one such organisation conceptualised a women's right to work during the 1930s and the ways in which the dimensions of these arguments shifted over a decade.[3]

The Kumtuks sought to attract the interest of professional working women. While many women's organisations in British Columbia in the 1920s had attracted employed women as members, the Kumtuks, and most likely their Vancouver counterpart, the Vancouver Business and Professional Women's Club, appear to have the distinction of being the only clubs to limit their

membership to employed women.[4] The Kumtuks' commitment to service works in the 1920s, however, often overshadowed the club's broader mandate to examine issues affecting working women. Between 1930 and 1960, the club distinguished itself from service groups by identifying itself, first and foremost, as a professional association of employed women dedicated to addressing the problems facing working women, both nationally and at the local level. This study, nonetheless, acknowledges the ways in which early voluntary associations, through their activism and organisational forms, appear to have influenced later groups of women such as the VBPWC.

The activities of women in voluntary associations provide a view of the ambitions and motivations of a larger, and increasingly prominent, sector of society. By the early 1900s, women in many of these groups had become effective speakers who wielded considerable social and political influence. In matters of social reform and social welfare, their opinions were often sought and their services secured by government bodies. More importantly, these organisations provided many women with an opportunity to assume a public life without too deeply challenging traditional gender roles.

In *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History,* Anne Firor Scott provides the only comprehensive examination of women's voluntary associations over an extended period of time.[5] Scott argues that the political

and social influence of these organisations increased in the early twentieth century as women began to address a wide range of civic issues, such as conditions in prisons, child-welfare, education and health services. These concerns culminated in demands for female suffrage, improved workplace conditions for female workers, and an assumption of responsibility by governments for the well being of mothers and children. Although Canadian historians have not attempted to duplicate the breadth of Scott's research, a significant body of Canadian research exists on the social reform movement and the efforts of women's organisations to achieve female suffrage.[6]

By the middle 1920s, most Canadian provinces had granted women the right to vote. Historians have questioned the impact the franchise had on the lives of Canadian women. Carol Bacchi, for example, maintains that the aspirations that had united women in the suffrage movement did not survive into the 1920s.[7] Veronica Strong-Boag shows in her study of the social and economic status of Canadian women in the 1920s and 1930s that very little changed for Canadian women during this time.[8] Socially, women continued to be held responsible for the health and welfare of family members. Waged employment continued to be considered the preserve of men, especially in times of economic need. Social and legal barriers conspired to make it extremely difficult for women to obtain and keep positions of power and influence. Marriage continued to be heralded by both

the public and by legislators as a woman's primary life goal. Women who did not marry and were dependent on their own income for survival faced the harsh realities of earning less money than male workers and an uncertain financial future in old age.

Lois Scharf and Joan Jensen examine how American women fared during the 1920s and 1930s in *Decades of Discontent*.[9] This anthology surveys the lives of a broader range of women than are covered in Veronica Strong-Boag's Canadian study, *A New Day Recalled*. American working women faced the same social barriers and lack of opportunity to advance in the workplace that Canadian women faced. Women of colour, however, faced the double burden of gender discrimination and racism. How professional working women and their organisations responded to the Depression years are addressed in this anthology in Lois Scharf's essay, "'The Forgotten Woman.' Working Women, the New Deal, and Women's Organisations."[10] Scharf illustrates the willingness of different organisations, for example, the National Women's Party (NWP), the League of Women Voters, and the National Association of Women's Lawyers, to put aside their differences and to unite in the face of unprecedented expressions of hostility towards women wage-earners. Scharf shows that BPWCs in the United States were also vocal defenders of both married and single women's right to work.

Adopting an approach similar to Scharf's, Margaret Hobbs' dissertation, "Gendering Work and Welfare: Women's Relationship to Wage-Work and Social Policy in Canada During the Great Depression," examines how Canadian women responded to the issues of employment, unemployment, and social policy during the 1930s.[11] Much of Hobbs' discussion on BPWCs focuses on the actions of the leadership of the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs (CFBPWC). Women's activism, however, can often be better understood on a local or regional level than on a national one. In the 1930s, for example, the administration of relief and the problem of female unemployment, while national issues, were handled locally. What is needed is a study of how Canadian women responded to the issues of work, wages, and unemployment in their own communities and over time.

The most in-depth discussions on American women's wages over time may be found in Alice Kessler-Harris' two books: *Out To Work* and *A Woman's Wage*.[12] In both books, Kessler-Harris argues that the concept of a 'woman's wage' is socially constructed. The author shows that, historically, wage levels for men and women have been determined by gender, and that the choices women make in the labour market are constrained by ideological beliefs that surround women's place in the family.

The emphasis in *Out To Work* is on working-class women; as a result, the author does not discuss the work done by

professional women. In *A Woman's Wage,* Kessler-Harris examines more closely the debates surrounding the idea of a family wage, the minimum wage, how an ideology of domesticity influenced entitlement to work, and the multiple meanings attached to equal pay. Kessler-Harris, however, makes no mention of how professional women, for example, the American Federation of Business and Professional Women, a society of longer standing and more influence than its Canadian counterpart, responded to the issues discussed therein.[13]

Kessler-Harris argues for a gender-neutral understanding of work.[14] In the 1930s, she contends, men and women, married and single, were not calling for a return to 'traditional' roles in the expectation that in doing so, the crisis of unemployment would be resolved, but were demanding instead a new economic system where employment would go to those most in need. Margaret Hobbs, who has also written extensively on the 1930s, responds to Kessler-Harris by making the argument that a gender-neutral analysis ignores the fact that the Depression intensified social fears that long-term male unemployment would undermine cultural images of masculinity, while female employment threatened the image of domesticity for women.[15] As Hobbs notes, if gender had not played such an important role in determining entitlement to wages it would not have mattered who brought home the family wage.

Ruth Roach Pierson's book, *They're still Women After All*, begins where *The New Day Recalled* and *Decades of Discontent* end by examining the impact of World War Two on working women.[16] Pierson deconstructs the belief that World War Two played a significant role in emancipating Canadian women. Her examination of government policy and the attitudes of the military towards women demonstrate that the economic and social gains experienced by women during this period were transitory. The Canadian government reasserted a traditional domestic role for women at the war's end. Women were encouraged to forego waged employment and establish homes of their own, or to accept employment in other women's houses. The popular post-war image of the family-oriented woman lasted well into the 1950s.

The experiences of American women in the 1950s are explored in detail by Leila Rupp and Verta Taylor in *Survival in the Doldrums*.[17] Rupp and Taylor examine the actions of groups and individuals that defended working women's rights during the post-war years. The actions of the NWP occupy a central place in this book. The authors characterise the NWP and its affiliated groups (which included the American BPWC) as an elite class of women committed to the achievement of a middle-class vision of equality. The authors contend, nonetheless, that in spite of their limitations, the activities and issues addressed by this group, such as pay equity, the right to participate

in the formation of public policy, and their questioning of the extent to which contemporary wage legislation benefited working women, were important issues that were expanded upon and taken up by the women's movement in the 1960s.

Studies on the efforts of Canadian women to secure the protection of the law in regard to minimum wages, safer working conditions, reasonable working hours, and equal pay between the 1920s and 1960s (especially in British Columbia) often focus on the lives and actions of individual women and their political parties. The contributions of these remarkable individuals to improving the social and economic conditions of women are extraordinary; these women are also exceptions, however, because of their level of activity and prominence.[18]

The influence of women's organisations in the passing of protective wage legislation such as the minimum wage in British Columbia has been noted.[19] The efforts of women's organisations to secure equal pay in this province, however, is sparse and in need of revision. Josie Bannerman, Kathy Chopik, and Ann Zurbrigg's article, "Cheap at Half the Price: The History of the Fight for Equal Pay in BC," focuses on the role of trade unions in the development of equal pay legislation in British Columbia.[20] Only the slimmest mention is made of the interest shown by women's organisations in this issue, and that which is made focuses on the NCW. The records of the VBPWC demonstrate that BPWCs across the province expressed a lively interest

in the passage of this legislation, clearly pointing to the need for further study in this area.

Shirley Tillotson's examination of the Business and Professional Women's Club in Ontario, however, provides a valuable insight into how this group of professional working women defined equal pay in the 1950s.[21] Tillotson's emphasis is on the relationship between unions, the use of human rights law in the development of pay equity, and the role of the Ontario BPWC in leading the campaign for equal pay legislation. In examining the contribution made by the BPWC to secure pay equity for women in Ontario, Tillotson's article stands apart from other studies that place emphasis on the initiatives of unions or their female auxiliaries in this area.

In union-centred literature, discussions surrounding entitlement to work are often placed within the working-class context and confined to the limited successes, and more obvious failures, of the male-dominated labour movement to accommodate demands made by women workers for higher wages, better working conditions, and regulated hours of employment.[22] Considerable effort, however, has been made in recent years to emphasise the important roles women have played within the union structure to improve working conditions and wages for women.[23] The roles of the BPWCs, organisations of professional working women, however, to secure improved terms of employment and pay equity for Canadian women have been mostly overlooked.

This thesis does not suggest that women such as those in the VBPWC were the only harbingers of social change during these years. A collection that considers the political efforts of women from different classes and cultures, and the organisations they formed at the community level in the period between 1920 and 1960, can be found in *Beyond the Vote: Canadian Women and Politics*, edited by Linda Kealey and Joan Sangster.[24] What is needed, however, is a study of changes in women's ideas about social and economic inequality over time and at the local level.

Throughout, this study challenges the thesis put forward by Carol Bacchi that the aspirations that had united women in the suffrage movement did not survive into the 1920s.[25] Like Carol Bacchi, Veronica Strong-Boag also fails to take into consideration the lasting impact that achieving the franchise had on many women's lives. From its inception, the VBPWC maintained that as an organisation of enfranchised women, they had the potential to use the vote to secure improvements that would benefit Canadian women in general.

The controversy that has inevitably surrounded women's right to work and wages between 1920 and 1960 has been examined by both Canadian and American historians. The hostility directed towards working women in the 1930s, for example, has received much attention. Research into the 1940s has emphasised the temporary gains experienced by

working women during the war years. Shirley Tillotson's study of the Ontario BPWC and their efforts to introduce equal pay legislation in the 1950s provides one of the few examples of how professional working women in Canada sought to establish the rights of working women to wages commensurate with those of men. Missing from this body of research is an examination into how, over time, locally-based organisations of professional working women responded to the government- and media- endorsed idealisation of domesticity for women and the vilification of the female wage-earner that often accompanied such ideals. This thesis will attempt to begin to fill this gap with a study of the BPWC of Victoria, British Columbia.

The three chapters forming the body of this study are grouped chronologically. The first chapter addresses the 1920s, the second the 1930s, and the third chapter the 1940s and 1950s. Periodization such as this presents its own difficulties. For example, recurring themes such as the gender discrimination faced by working women, and a government-endorsed ideology of domesticity for women in general, both predate and extend beyond these parameters. This approach does, nonetheless, illustrate how the VBPWC responded to these issues in decades that have been ascribed with their own specific characteristics. This method also clearly illustrates how one group of employed professional women's perceptions of entitlement to work and wages changed over time, as they addressed the issues of

employment, unemployment, and the limited coverage contemporary wage legislation offered working women both within their own community and on a national scale.

This thesis relies heavily on the minutes of monthly meetings of the VBPWC from its inception in 1921 until 1959, and on informational scrapbooks kept by the club to record its official progress and club press releases.[26] A full analysis of the Kumtuks'/VBPWC's responses to issues concerning waged employment for women between 1920 and 1960 is constrained by the amount of information available.

The expansive record keeping style of the VBPWC in the 1930s reveals the strong opinions certain members held on topics such as domestic employment, and the rights of women to hold waged employment. The minutes kept of discussions by club members on work related issues in the 1920s, and again in the 1940s, and 1950s, however, are often brief and only hint at the attitudes of club members towards other working women. As a result of the limitations of the sources, my analysis of the club's approach to employment issues is, in many cases, speculative. I have examined the legislation that interested club members, and drawn conclusions from other sources of information, such as the published opinions of women's organisations with which the Kumtuks/VBPWC appear to have had close contact.

Chapter One begins by outlining the political and social influences present when Lottie Bowron formed Victoria's first private club for professional working

women, the Kumtuks in 1921. In spite of the club's general commitment to issues that affected employed women, the Kumtuks remained primarily a women's service club at this time. This chapter shows how, over a ten year period, the Kumtuks' emphasis on voluntary service work declined as the club's membership identified more strongly with other employed women and their organisations. The Kumtuks' constitutional objectives, and their interest in legislation such as Girls' and Women's Protection Act and the Minimum Wage Act, highlight club members' attitudes towards other working women.

Chapter Two shows that in spite of the economic, social and political disruption of the 1930s, working women organised in an effort to protect their own economic interests. In 1930, the Kumtuks helped found the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women (CFBPWC). As part of a national organisation of working women committed to improving the status of working women in Canada, VBPWC members became more outspoken on employment related issues. What constituted a fair and equitable wage for women became a topic of interest for Canada's national women's organisations, as well as local groups such as the VBPWC. During this time period, the VBPWC addressed the rights of married women to work and wages, the gendered dimensions of relief distribution, the vulnerability of older women who were considered in many cases to be unemployable, and the

status of domestic workers. The VBPWC also supported equal pay for female teachers.

Chapter Three explores both the 1940s and the 1950s. In spite of the limitations imposed on working women in the post-war years, as described by Pierson, the wartime experiences of working in jobs that had formerly been regarded as belonging to men provided women, such as those belonging to the VBPWC, with a new-found sense of accomplishment and confidence. The arguments made by the VBPWC in regard to wages, and the right to hold employment regardless of marital status in the late 1940s and 1950s, appear to have been related to the freedom experienced by working women during the war. As a result, combining these two decades provides a sense of continuity that would otherwise be absent from this record.

In the decades between the suffrage movement and the 1960s, the clubwomen in this study became increasingly willing to challenge the limitations of an ideology of financial dependence placed on working women by the state and by society in general. During these years problems that affected working women gained ascendancy over other issues in the club's mandate and were addressed in increasingly progressive ways. In the 1930s, for example, the club's defence of employed married women remained cautious and their advocacy of equal pay minimal. By the 1950s, however, the club confidently asserted that employment and equitable wages were a right not to be

circumscribed by gender, race, or marital status. This shift towards a more egalitarian attitude is also evident in the club's arguments for representation on appropriate commissions, in the formation of public policy, and for pay equity between 1940 and 1960.

[1]Doris French, *High Button Bootstraps. Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario, 1918-1968* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1968).

[2]Veronica Strong-Boag, *Parliament of Women: The National Council of Women in Canada, 1893-1929* (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1976); Naomi Griffiths, *The Splendid Vision: Centennial History of the National Council of Women* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1993); Wendy Mitchinson, "The YWCA and Reform in the Nineteenth Century," *Histoire sociale/Social History*, vol. XII no. 24 (November 1979), 368-384; Alexandra Zacharias "British Columbia Women's Institute in the Early Years: A Time To Remember," *In Her Own Right: Selected Essays on Women's History in B.C.*, eds. Barbara Latham and Kathy Kerr (Victoria BC: Camosun College, 1980), 55-77; Carol Dennison, "They also Served: The British Columbia Women's Institutes in the Two World Wars," *Not Just Pin Money. Selected Essays on Women's Work in British Columbia*, eds. Barbara Latham and Roberta Pazdro (Victoria BC: Camosun College, 1984), 211-219; Josephine Harshaw, *When Women Work Together. A History of the Young Women's Christian Association in Canada, 1870-1966* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1966).

[3]Mary Patricia Powell, "A Response to the Depression: The Local Council of Women in Vancouver," *In Her Own Right*, 255-284.

[4]See Gillian Weiss, "The Brightest Women of Our Land: Vancouver Clubwomen, 1910-1928," *Not Just Pin Money*, 199-207.

[5]Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992). Scott's study begins in 1770 and ends in the early 1920s.

[6]Several standard studies in this area are: Catherine Cleverdon, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970); Carol Lee Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred? The Ideas of the English Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982); Veronica Strong-Boag, "'Ever a Crusader': Nellie McClung, First Wave Feminist," *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History*, second edition, eds. Veronica Strong-Boag and Anita Clair Fellman (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1991), 308-321.

[7]Carol Lee Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred? The Ideas of the English Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918.*

[8]Veronica Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled. Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939* (Ontario: Copp Clark Pittman Ltd., 1988). Jeff Kershon, "Revisiting Canada's Civilian Women During World War II," *Histoire sociale—Social History*, vol. XXX, no. 60 (November 1997), 239-66.

[9]Lois Scharf and Joan M. Jensen, eds. *Decades of Discontent: The Woman's Movement, 1920-1940* (Boston: North-Eastern University Press, 1983).

[10]Lois Scharf, "'The Forgotten Woman': Working Women, the New Deal, and Women's Organisations," *Decades of Discontent*, 243-260.

[11]Margaret Hobbs, "Gendering Work and Welfare: Women's Relationship to Wage-Work and Social Policy in Canada During the Great Depression" (Ph.D., University of Toronto, 1995).

[12]Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out To Work. A History of America's Wage-earning Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); and her, *A Woman's Wage. Historical Meanings and Social Consequences* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1990).

[13]Introduction, *Decades of Discontent,* 7.

[14]Kessler-Harris, *A Women's Wage*, 65; Alice Kessler-Harris, "Gender Ideology in Historical Reconstruction: A Case Study From the 1930s," *Gender and History*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Spring 1989), 31-49.

[15]Margaret Hobbs, "Rethinking Antifeminism in the 1930s: Gender Crisis of Workplace Justice? A Response to Alice Kessler-Harris," *Gender and History,* vol. 5, no. 1 (Spring 1993), 4-19.

[16]Ruth Roach Pierson, *"They're Still Women After All." The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood* (Toronto: McCelland and Stewart, 1986).

[17]Leila Rupp and Verta Taylor, *Survival in the Doldrums. The American Women's Rights Movement, 1945 to the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[18]Franca Iacovetta, "'A Respectable Feminist': The Political Career of Senator Cairine Wilson, 1921-1962," *Beyond the Vote. Canadian Women and Politics*, eds. Linda Kealey and Joan Sangster (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 63-88; Veronica Strong-Boag, "'Ever A Crusader'": Nellie McClung, First Wave Feminist," *Rethinking Canada,* 308-321; Irene Howard, *The Struggle For Social Justice in British Columbia. Helena Gutteridge. The Unknown Social Reformer* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1992), 57-58; Elizabeth Norcross, "Mary Ellen Smith: The Right Woman in the Right Place at the Right Time," *Not Just Pin Money*, 360-361.

[19]Margaret Hillyard Little, "Claiming A Unique Place. The Introduction of Mother's Pensions in BC," *BC Studies*, vols. 105-106 (Spring/Summer 1995), 80-102.

[20]Josie Bannerman, Kathy Chopik, and Ann Zurbrigg, "Cheap at Half the Price: The History of the Fight for Equal Pay in BC," *Not Just Pin Money,* 297-313.

[21]Shirley Tillotson, "Human Rights Law as a Prism: Women's Organizations, Unions, and Ontario's Female Employees Fair Remuneration Act, 1951," *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. LXXII, no. 4 (December 1991), 532-557.

[22]Julie White, *Sisters and Solidarity. Women and Unions in Canada* (Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing Inc., 1983); Diane Balser, *Sisterhood and Solidarity. Feminism and Labor in Modern Times* (Boston: South End Press, 1987); Bannerman, Chopik, and Zurbrigg, "Cheap at Half the Price: The History of the Fight for Equal Pay in BC," 297-313; Ruth

Frager, "No Proper Deal: Women Workers and the Canadian Labour Movement, 1870-1940," *Union Sisters: Women and the Labour Movement*, eds. Linda Brisken and Linda Yanz (Toronto: Women's Press, 1983).

[23]The literature in this area is extensive. Some useful Canadian examples are: Julie White, *Mail and Female. Women and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers* (Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing Inc., 1990); Linda Brisken and Linda Yanz, eds, *Union Sisters: Women and the Labour Movement* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1983); Ruth Frager, *Class, Ethnicity and Gender in the Jewish Labour Movement of Toronto, 1900-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

[24]Linda Kealey and Joan Sangster, eds. *Beyond the Vote. Canadian Women and Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989).

[25]Carol Lee Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred? The Ideas of the English Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918.*

[26]Victoria Business and Professional Women's Club Records, 1921-1969. Provincial Archives of British Columbia (hereafter PABC), ADD MSS 80-161, boxes 1-3. Business and Professional Women's Club's of British Columbia and the Yukon, 1948-1969 (hereafter Provincial Club Records), PABC, ADD MSS 82-32.

CHAPTER 1

The Kumtuks, 1921-1929. From Community Service to Working Women

In the 1920s, Canadian business and professional women came together to offer each other support and to assume a more visible presence in their communities. The Victoria Kumtuks provide an example of one such group of women. Founded in 1921, the Kumtuks' organisation gave its members the opportunity to be involved in community service, to gain confidence in public speaking, and to address issues that affected working women. Many of these women had experience of the suffrage movement, greater access to higher education compared to women before them, and well-defined career aspirations. Above all, they were newly enfranchised citizens who anticipated using their vote to affect legislative changes that would improve the political and economic status of women and children.

By the middle 1920s, most Canadian provinces had granted women the right to vote.[1] The Kumtuks, as will be shown, believed that attaining the franchise heralded a new era for women. This optimism had its roots in an earlier generation of activism for social reforms. Since the late 1880s, women had called for changes that would allow them to assume a more public role in the formation of social policies. With the franchise came the responsibilities of citizenship. Women's organisations, such as the influential National Council of Women and its local affiliates, encouraged the newly

enfranchised woman to inform herself on issues of the day, and to exercise her vote in an effort to secure new and better legislative protection for women and children.[2]

Ideas of citizenship evolved with changing visions of the role of the state. After World War I, the belief that the state had a responsibility to provide its citizens with fair wages, safe working conditions, and a reasonable standard of living gained more currency.[3] Citizenship provided the individual with access to legislative processes that could be used to effect social, economic, and political reforms.

Whereas young women from working-class backgrounds had often worked for wages outside the home before marriage, by the early twentieth century it had becoming increasingly accepted that girls from middle-class families would also enter the waged labour force temporarily. Young women from working-class backgrounds had traditionally found employment as domestic servants or in the blue-collar manufacturing sector as factory workers. Girls from middle-class backgrounds tended to seek white-collar employment. In this thesis white-collar work refers to "all categories of work in clerical, commercial and financial, professional, proprietary and managerial positions."[4] The work experiences of one woman, Lottie Bowron, reflect this pattern.

Born into a prosperous middle-class family in Barkerville, British Columbia in 1879, Lottie Bowron's private girls' school education prepared her for employment

in the clerical sector. In 1904, as a clerk and stenographer in Conservative Premier Richard McBride's office, Bowron began a career in the civil service that would last almost thirteen years. McBride's resignation in 1915 and eventual relocation to England marked a shift in Bowron's career. When the Liberal Party came to power in British Columbia in 1916, Bowron secured a leave of absence, departed for London, and from 1917 to 1918, Bowron worked in the Admiralty Office. On her return to British Columbia, Bowron worked as a stenographer until her appointment as Rural Teachers' Welfare Officer in 1928.[5]

Bowron regarded her experiences in England as pivotal in her understanding of women's rights and the potential of the franchise to improve the position of women in Canadian society:

> ...I was privileged to spend the years 1917-1918, of the Great War in London, working with those splendid women--previously my work had chiefly been with men. I realised that what women could do, what the future of our sex must be, what responsibilities and privileges it would entail, and the great need of preparation for the future. I returned to my country full of enthusiasm for Canadian Women--now enfranchised--and proud to be one.[6]

Bowron maintained that "...through that war women rose higher, not only higher but her desire for her rightful place" next to men also crystallised.[7] In 1920, Bowron discussed with friends the idea of organising a club for "business women...like the Rotarians [where women] can meet for lunch and discuss public affairs etc."[8] Encouraged by the support of other women, in 1921, Bowron founded the 'Kumtuks'

(Chinook word for "to know, to understand"), a private club for business and professional women living and working in Victoria.[9] According to Bowron:

> The chief reason for [the club's]...being, [was] to educate us in public affairs, so that we, as intelligent women with the vote, might know how to properly play our part in the life of Canada, and that we might not only know how, but [could] play it...[10]

Recognising that the transition from private to public life for many women remained a difficult one, Bowron maintained that, "An organ of our own was a necessity, where we could express our views, [and] learn to speak..." After all, Bowron averred, "if you can't express your views...you [don't] carry much weight in public life."[11]

Bowron's initial vision for the Kumtuks was not unique. After World War I, business and professional women all over Canada came together for support and fellowship in much the same way in their own communities.[12] Such clubs appear to have been initially modelled on men's clubs such as the Rotarians, whose primary aim was to provide service to the community.[13] The Kumtuks' constitution, however, reveals Bowron's broader vision for the club. The first "stated object" of the club was "to promote social intercourse and the educational development of its members."[14] Kumtuks were also charged to "aid and assist financially...any national, patriotic, philanthropic, charitable, scientific, educational, [or] social" society the club deemed worthwhile, and to "take such action on social and economic questions affecting the members of the club as business women and

citizens."[15] While this chapter focuses on the Kumtuks' gradual identification with working women to the exclusion of other activities, a brief discussion of the club's interpretation of its other "stated objectives" is warranted.

Club members were encouraged to take an active interest in the areas of education and social welfare, and to become acquainted with laws that affected women and children. Lectures were given by individual club members detailing the political and social progress women had made over the years. Presumably, the origins and achievements of the suffrage movement and the value of the franchise for women formed part of these discussions.

Bowron envisioned that the club would provide "...a place for our much larger work of community service."[16] The Kumtuks engaged in such outreach activities as supporting local charitable causes through tag days and other activities. The local Sailors Institute was just one group to benefit from the club's tag-day activities.[17] The club's charitable work often focused on children and young women. Club members often visited and supported a local Protestant Orphanage with financial donations and gifts for the children.[18] On at least one occasion, the club sponsored a child to attend the Social Service Summer Camp.[19] Another venture was to 'adopt' the Tillicum Company of Girl Guides. The Kumtuks supported the troop financially and materially by contributing to the cost of new uniforms for the girls.[20] On another occasion, club members donated ten dollars "in order

that a 16 year old girl might be made more physically fit by the supply of artificial teeth."[21]

The Kumtuks' commitment to community work can also be seen in their support of local business and service organisations. The club often assisted the efforts of the Victoria Chamber of Commerce to promote tourism in Victoria. In many cases this meant club members acted as hostesses for public functions such as balls and galas, and on occasion, provided those gathered with light entertainment.[22]

Bowron's emphasis on community work appears to have been, in part, intended to enhance the club's standing in the community. In 1923, Bowron appeared to be well satisfied with the club's service record. Bowron concluded her Presidential Report to members that year with the following remarks:

> I can truthfully say that we have advanced a little further on the way towards better work in our community. We stand firmer and stronger than twelve months ago. We accomplish more with less effort and I think we are now able to convince fellow citizens in Victoria that the Kumtuks club has come to stay.[23]

Two years later Bowron resigned as club president. In her closing address to club members, she counselled members to "Put into your club the belief that it can accomplish <u>well</u> what is its work to do and go forward courageously never doubting your right to 'carry on' the good work of your community."[24]

Bowron appears to have anticipated that the Kumtuks would eventually evolve into a club that would more directly

address issues related to working women. Candidates for admission to the Kumtuks, for example, had to be employed. Employment issues during this time period, however, were often overshadowed by the club's commitment to community service. Club members did, nonetheless, express an interest in the economic welfare of white, working-class women. The Kumtuks' perceptions of class and race can be seen in the club's selective admission policies.

Admittance to the Kumtuks depended on the candidate fulfilling a number of specific conditions. Membership in the club was open only to women who were "registered as a voter on the current lists of voters at Federal, Provincial, and Municipal elections and plebiscites."[25] Bowron stressed the importance of exercising the franchise. Club members, she argued, had an "obligation on them to register on the voter's list and to vote at every election."[26]

Membership was open to "any woman, whether of full age or not, engaged in business in the district of Victoria except persons of Asiatic Birth or extraction."[27] Given the prevailing racial tensions of the time, the anti-Asian clause is not surprising, though it does not fully explain the club's formal exclusion of Asian women. Proportionately, the number of Asian women in British Columbia at this time was extremely low. A series of racially exclusive laws primarily aimed at the Chinese population had successfully limited the number of Chinese women arriving in Canada. Cultural antagonism in British Columbia had also severely limited the

employment opportunities open to Asian women. Discriminated against on the basis of their race, Asian women were repeatedly denied access to professions such as teaching or nursing, or to employment in white-owned retail stores.[28] The origins of anti-Asian sentiment within the club are difficult to identify specifically. But as historian Patricia Roy notes:

> Some whites based their antipathy toward Asians on real or anticipated economic conflicts; some were inspired by notions of racial differences; most had a number of reasons, both real and irrational, for their hostility and would have had difficulty ranking their objections.[29]

The anti-Asian membership clause was not accepted by all club members. Kumtuk records show that from 1924 onwards, Bowron moved for the removal of the clause from the club's constitution.[30] It is worth noting that in each case, the motion was lost only by a small margin. The clause was finally revoked in 1929.[31]

Membership to the club was open to women irrespective of their marital status. In 1924, the question was raised as to whether or not "a woman who keeps her husband's books [would] be eligible as a Kumtuks member."[32] Those present at the meeting concurred that "the constitution says (implies that) that any woman earning a salary is considered eligible" for membership.[33] The Kumtuks took no official stand on the question of married women participating in the work force. Club records indicate, however, that between 1921 and 1929 thirty-six (21%) members were employed and married.[34]

In theory, membership in the club was open to all women, regardless of the applicant's familial status. It may be assumed, however, that the family responsibilities of those Kumtuks who were mothers were limited. The 1921 Census suggests that most women withdrew from the work force upon marriage in the 1920s, with only a few resuming formal employment in later years when their familial responsibilities had diminished.[35] The Kumtuks' records appear to support these patterns. Most clubwomen appear to have left the work force and the Kumtuks upon marriage to fulfil household and family obligations. The Kumtuks offered associate (non-voting) membership privileges to women who chose to marry and leave the workforce, and/or who for reasons such as age or ill health, retired from formal employment.[36] Very few women, however, appear to have applied for associate membership after marriage.[37]

In the 1920s, membership in the Kumtuks appears to have been drawn from the ranks of the middle-class. Class position has traditionally been measured by an individual's relationship to the means of production. As participants in a capitalist society and within a patriarchal system, men have relied on skill levels and their access to power to determine their working conditions and wages. Women's familial roles and economic dependence on men, on the other hand, have mediated their experiences in waged and non-waged work.[38] As Veronica Strong-Boag notes, "while class designation may sometimes be useful," it does not represent

"a reliable measure of women's ability to command resources or share in full the values of male capitalist society."[39]

In this chapter, the designation 'middle-class' is used to refer to the Kumtuks. While this definition is in no way definitive, the club's commitment to voluntary service in the community, their emphasis on the potential of the franchise to reform society for the better, the occupational choices of club members, and the social status, responsibility, and respectability attached to their professions appear to support this conclusion.

By the 1920s, white-collar employment was sought after by both working-class and middle-class women. Office and retail employment provided working-class women with an attractive alternative to blue-collar work in factories or domestic service by offering higher wages. The respectability and social status attached to white-collar work made it a suitable employment choice for middle-class women.[40] Popular fiction and the advice columns found in widely read women's magazines, such as *MacLean's,* encouraged women to take up (albeit temporarily) white-collar employment. Articles that addressed women's paid employment emphasised the status and respectability attached to such work, while highlighting the feminine qualities a working woman could bring into the office situation.[41]

The status of clerical work in the early twentieth century has been the subject of much discussion. Historians have devoted a considerable amount of attention to the

proletarianisation of such work. At the end of the nineteenth century, technological advances such as the typewriter, the expansion of the clerical sector in general, and an increased emphasis on scientific management, facilitated the reorganisation of office work. By the 1930s clerical work had become increasingly routine, fragmented, segregated, and feminised.[42]

In most cases, female clerical workers were employed as typists or as general office clerks. For women who had the advantage of an extended education or specialised training, the office structure often offered (limited) opportunities for advancement. Private secretaries and stenographers, for example, often had specialised skills that gave them more responsibility and prestige than other women had in the same field.[43] In the early 1920s, the more skilled office worker could earn wages comparable to those found in other professional occupations such as teaching or nursing.[44]

Fifty-four (31%) Kumtuks worked in a variety of white-collar occupations. The occupational information available for club members between 1921 and 1929 indicates that, at least some of these women were employed in areas of work that required certain levels of administrative and supervisory responsibility. A sample of the higher status office work positions held by some club women include: Secretary of the Minimum Wage Board of British Columbia, General Secretary of the YWCA, Secretary for the Provincial Secretary, and Secretary for the British Columbia Teacher's Federation.[45] In

all likelihood these positions were salaried and thus of higher status than wage work.

In the early twentieth century women from middle-class backgrounds tended to work in the few professional occupations open to women such as teaching, nursing, social work, and library science. In spite of low wages, these occupations were considered both feminine and respectable, and were assumed to have a higher social status than domestic service or factory work.[46] The occupational profiles of the Kumtuks support these patterns. Twenty-three (13%) Kumtuks were employed as teachers, ten (6%) in nursing or health related fields, and nine (5%) in library or archival work. Three club members were listed as lawyers. Fifteen (9%) members were employed in the retail sector, in what appear to often have been managerial positions.[47] Other occupational categories for the Kumtuks included: journalist, author, visual artist, photographer, musician, and social service work.[48] Thirty-eight (22%) of the one hundred and seventy-two member profiles available for these years provided no occupational information.

In principle, any employed, white woman was welcome to apply for membership to the Kumtuks. The application fee, annual membership dues, time commitment expected of members at meetings, and volunteer work taken up in the community would, however, have been a deterrent for poorer women, women on intermittent/seasonal incomes, and/or women with dependants. Processes were also in place to ensure that only

'desirable' candidates were admitted to the club. Women who aspired to join the Kumtuks had to have their applications sponsored by two club members in good standing. Once admitted, clubwomen were expected to maintain certain levels of conduct. Behaviour judged to be of "so grave a character" that it would be detrimental to "the interests of the club" could "warrant [the offending club member's] immediate expulsion."[49]

During the 1920s, employment issues occupied only a minor place in the Kumtuks' mandate. Community service continued to play an integral, if not dominant, part of the club's daily activities. The club's interest in contemporary labour legislation, however, indicates how the Kumtuks interpreted issues affecting working-class women.

While there is no evidence to suggest that the Kumtuks perceived Asian women as economic competition in their own professions, there is evidence to suggest that the club perceived the poorly paid Asian male houseworker as a potential threat to the job security of white, working-class women. The introduction of what became known as the "Janet Smith Bill" reignited many of the racial tensions already present in British Columbia. An in-depth discussion of the causes of the racial conflicts in British Columbia during this period is beyond the scope of this paper. While the hostility exhibited toward Asian communities in particular, may be attributed to several conditions, only a few will be mentioned here.

Hostility toward Asian groups in British Columbia was often sustained by economic and social fears. The poorly paid Asian male was often portrayed as a threat to both the job security of white male workers, and to the sexual purity of white women.[50] Racial anxieties such as these had the appearance of being legitimised by protective labour laws that attempted to restrict contact between Asian men and white women. One example of legislation that attempted to regulate contact between the races is the Girls' and Women's Protection (GWP) Act.

Brought before the legislature by Mary Ellen Smith in 1923, the GWP Act was originally written as a measure to prohibit the employment of white women in any businesses owned by "members of the Chinese race."[51] Concerns over the legality of this phraseology resulted in changing the wording of the Act to prevent the employment of white women by an "undesirable of any race."[52] Despite this cosmetic alteration, the original intent of the Act remained the same.

In 1924, anti-Asian sentiment in British Columbia was fanned by the murder of Janet Smith, a young, Scottish housekeeper in Vancouver. Popular opinion held that Smith had been murdered by her Chinese male co-worker. In response to the incident, the public demanded that new and harsher legislative reforms be enacted to offer "more and better protection to white girls working in establishments where Orientals are also employed."[53] Popularly referred to as the "Janet Smith Bill," an amendment to the existing GWP Act was

introduced by Mary Ellen Smith to the legislature. Whereas the previous bill had targeted the employment of white women in Chinese restaurants, the new Act aimed at prohibiting the employment of "white girls in the same private homes in which Orientals are engaged."[54]

The Kumtuks responded negatively to the introduction of "Mrs. Smith's new bill."[55] The club's objections to Smith's bill are not explicit. A survey of several newspaper commentaries surrounding the case at the time, however, allows room for speculation in this regard. The *Vancouver Evening Sun* reported misgivings from "many girls and women now in house service" over the proposed bill.[56] The *Daily Colonist* expressed concerns that Smith's bill would jeopardise the employment security of white women, not the more poorly paid, and therefore more affordable, Chinese male houseworker.[57] Such statements appear to be supported by the Kumtuks' member Nancy Hodges, who expressed concern regarding "the evil effect" the new legislation would have.[58] Hodges believed the new bill "would mitigate against the white girl, instead of the Chinaman as intended," an opinion that appears to have been accepted by the club's membership.[59] The club elected to remain with "the good effect already experienced from the passing of the former bill," the Girls' and Women's Protection Act.[60]

The Kumtuks' interest in issues that affected working-class women may also be seen in the club's attention to minimum wage laws. Initial minimum wage legislation provided

protection for women only. Such laws were considered appropriate for women because they reinforced a gender ideology of dependence. In this case, women who could not depend on the family for financial assistance could depend on the state. Men, on the other hand, were assumed to be economically independent. Assumptions that men were more likely to have their interests guarded by trade unions also contributed to the belief that men were less in need of protective labour legislation than were women.[61]

British Columbia's first female minimum wage law was passed in 1918. Areas of employment covered by the legislation included retail work, laundry industries, restaurant work, office occupations, some aspects of the manufacturing industry, and personal service occupations such as hairdressing. Age, experience, and field of employment determined wage scales. Domestic workers were just one of the predominantly female occupations excluded from the Act's coverage.[62]

Minimum Wage Boards were formed to enforce the Act and to establish a minimum living wage for each occupational category covered by the legislation. Boards consisted of three persons, with the proviso that "one member of the Board shall be a woman."[63] While board members did not receive a salary, some did receive an honorarium. Funds were also made available to secure the services of "a secretary and such expert clerical and other assistants as may be necessary to carry out the purposes of the Act."[64] A "woman Inspector [was

hired] to visit factories and places of business where women are employed."[65] The inspector's principal duty was to make "effective representations to the parties concerned where undesirable conditions were found to exist."[66]

Organised labour supported the establishment of a minimum wage for women. Its motives for doing so, however, were hardly altruistic. Employers increasingly regarded female workers as a source of cheap labour. Union leaders argued that the low wages paid to women threatened male job security and undercut demands for a male family wage. The concept of a family wage was premised on the idea that men, not women, should participate in the labour force, and reinforced the male breadwinner/dependant female dichotomy.[67]

Minimum wage legislation was only partially accepted by the business community. Fines of "twenty-five and not more than one hundred dollars" provided little incentive for many employers to comply with the legislation.[68] The more aggressive commercial interests protested against what they saw as state interference in normal business practices. In 1922, for example, the Canadian Manufacturers' Association (CMA) pushed to have the minimum wage laws amended in such a way as to favour commercial, and not labour, interests. Among other issues, the CMA sought to "fix the wages of female labour without taking into consideration the cost of living...," and asked that "all restrictions shall be removed in regard to the number of...unskilled assistants who may be

employed at less than the minimum [wage] fixed for skilled employees."[69]

The sparse nature of the Kumtuks' records in this period makes it difficult to establish the extent of the club's activism on minimum wage laws. While the club went on record as being opposed to changes to the existing legislation such as those sought by the CMA in 1922, the reasoning behind its position remains open to speculation.[70] The Kumtuks' close association with other women's groups, however, makes their endorsement of the position taken by groups such as the Victoria Women's Canadian Club (VWCC) a strong possibility.[71] The VWCC condemned the CMA's proposals, claiming that the Association "failed to recognise the 'vital principle' of minimum wage legislation, namely that wages must be adjusted to the cost of living."[72] The resolution went on to state that "increasing the proportion of young girls...and inexperienced workers employed at a plant, would tend to the exploitation of cheap labour."[73] The VWCC concluded that "allowing employers to make their own regulations" would have the effect of "practically neutralising the effect of the Minimum Wage Act."[74] The Kumtuks' statement that amendments such as those sought by the CMA "would defeat the purpose of the [Minimum Wage] Act" appears to support the position taken by the VWCC.[75]

The active participation of individual club members as employees and public-interest representatives on the Minimum Wage Board make it likely that minimum wage issues were

included in many of the club's discussions. Kumtuks member Helen Stewart had been one of the original Minimum Wage Board representatives in 1918.[76] Mabel Cameron worked as secretary for the Minimum Wage Board in the early 1920s.[77] In 1923, Violet Smart "succeeded the late Mrs. Winifred Mahon" as an investigator for the board, while clubwoman and journalist Nancy Hodges represented the public interest in minimum wage hearings.[78]

As Margaret McCallum and Gillian Creese point out, minimum wage legislation failed to offer any real protection to working women. The low wages paid to female employees reflected societal assumptions about the dependence of women on male family members.[79] Theoretically, the Act established the base wage upon which working women could enjoy a modest standard of living. Employers who were reluctant to pay the adult minimum wage, however, found numerous exceptions within the framework of the legislation. Lower wages, for example, could be paid to women based on their age, physical ability, or inexperience.[80]

The Kumtuks' involvement with minimum wage legislation appears to have been limited. Despite this, the importance of the minimum wage for women and of the Kumtuks' support of this law cannot be overlooked. While early legislation was often difficult to enforce, and limited in the extent of the protection it offered, it helped to legitimise the permanence of the female wage-earner.[81] In light of the fact that few women either belonged to or could rely upon unions to protect

their interests, legislative reforms such as the minimum wage laws provided working women, at least in theory, with the protection of the law. The creation of laws to establish just labour practices also suggests a redefinition of the role of the state. By endorsing the minimum wage, even in such a limited fashion, the Kumtuks also accepted that it was the role of the state to ensure that its citizens, in this case working women, received a living wage in return for their labour.[82]

In spite of the introduction of protective wage legislation for women, poverty, lack of education, youth or old age, and racial barriers meant numerous women continued to work irregular hours in unregulated industries for poor wages. For many women, employment opportunities were limited to domestic service.[83] References to domestic work as an occupation is absent from the Kumtuks' records. It may be assumed, however, that like many other women's organisations, the Kumtuks viewed household training in the schools as an effective way to prepare some young women for domestic service, and most, ultimately, for marriage.

The Kumtuks accepted the dominant gender ideology that characterised women as the primary influence within the home. The deaths of so many young men in World War I had also accentuated concerns over the moral and physical health of future generations of Canadians.[84] Club members believed that establishing household training courses in the school system would play a substantive role in "producing better homes in

the coming generations."[85] To this end, a motion was passed "that more time be given to systematically teaching Household Science in grades 7 and 8 of the public school and the High Schools."[86]

The introduction of domestic science into the British Columbia school system in the 1920's had been initiated by and received enthusiastic endorsement from women's organisations, such as the Victoria Local Council of Women (LCW), as well as from the provincial Department of Education. The main function of these courses was to educate young girls in their role as future homemakers. The National Council of Women (NCW) also predicted that such programmes would raise the social status of domestic service while improving the quality service provided by domestic help.[87]

In spite of societal convictions about the gender-appropriateness of domestic service for women, its low status, isolation, meagre wages, and long hours made it an unpopular employment option. For many women, household service remained a temporary occupation undertaken in times of economic desperation. Such employment was taken up reluctantly and often abandoned as soon as possible. Faced with the problems inherent in hiring reluctant, and often untrained household workers, middle-class women's organisations like the NCW had found it expedient to concern themselves with the quality and availability of servant help.[88]

Even worse than the harsh working conditions and poor wages that characterised domestic employment was the spectre of unemployment. In the absence of any federal social security initiatives, the unemployed worker often depended on the support of other family members or on charity for survival. The issue of male unemployment received union support and public sympathy. Female unemployment, on the other hand, remained largely unacknowledged by unions, by the public, or by those with the power to influence public policy.[89]

The invisibility of female unemployment was reinforced by the assumption that in times of economic need women would be provided for in some way by male family members. In cases where no familial support was forthcoming, women seeking work were directed toward domestic service, the one occupation where the demand for workers continued to exceed the supply.[90] Contrary to the prevailing view that women could draw upon male family members for support in times of economic distress, the unemployed woman was in fact often left to fend for herself.

The Kumtuks were aware of the precarious position occupied by women who depended on their own incomes. While club members were unable or unwilling to challenge publicly the failure of existing political structures to address the seriousness of female unemployment at this time, they did provide for some of their own members in times of economic hardship, albeit in a limited fashion. Funds were

occasionally provided to members whose financial need resulted from ill health and/or unemployment.[91] Funding for such ventures came out of the pockets of members; the aid was granted sporadically, the amount varying on each occasion.

As the 1920s progressed, the club's commitment to working women strengthened. From the outset, some members expressed dissatisfaction with the amount of philanthropic work taken on by the club. In 1923, Nancy Hodges successfully introduced the motion to distance the club from future 'tagging' commitments, believing that, in the majority of cases, such work was sufficiently well taken care of by other organisations in the city. Diminishing the club's community work was a slow process as is evident in the repetition of a similar resolution in 1927, where the motion to put aside philanthropic endeavours in favour of doing "...more for the business women in the city which the club does not reach" was passed.[92] In 1928, an attempt to direct the club's attentions to working women was made when Bowron suggested that "the study of certain laws governing women, perhaps of working women, in the way of hours, etc." would be an appropriate and "beneficial" area of study for club members.[93]

These motions are symptomatic of the growing belief that in order to do as a group what they had been unable to do as individuals to improve the rights of working women, women needed to come together and capitalise on the economic and social potential implicit in attaining the franchise. In

this regard, Lottie Bowron and Nancy Hodges appear to have exerted the most energy in convincing club members to form stronger bonds with other professional working women's organisations.[94] Bowron encouraged contact between the Victoria Kumtuks and other professional working women's clubs. These clubs included the Seattle Business and Professional Women's Club, the Seattle Kumtuks Club, and the Vancouver BPWC. In 1924, members from all three clubs met for the first time at the invitation of the Victoria Club.[95] Several months later, Bowron was one of twelve Canadian women to attend "a very fine convention" for business and professional women in Portland, Oregon.[96]

Initial suggestions that the Canadian clubs affiliate themselves with the National BPWC of the USA were discarded in favour of the creation of either a Canadian federation or a provincial federation of BPWCs.[97] To this end, Hodges and Bowron worked co-operatively with the Vancouver BPWC in promoting the idea of creating a national federation of professional working women across Canada. A constitution was drafted by the two clubs and submitted to interested groups across the country.

The process took five years to complete. In 1929, representatives from interested clubs across Canada (namely Montreal, Hamilton, Toronto, Winnipeg, Vancouver, and Victoria) attended the annual convention of National BPWCs in the USA, on Michigan's Mackinak Island, where the draft constitution was submitted to, and received the approval of,

the American Federation. Delegates returned to Canada with the commitment to secure formal authorisation of the club's proposed constitution and by-laws, and to secure a charter in the name of the Canadian Federation of BPWCs within one year.[98] The emergence of the Canadian Federation in the 1930s is discussed at length in Chapter Two of this thesis.

In the 1920s, very little changed for Canadian working women. As Veronica Strong-Boag notes: "inequality in the workplace did not disappear, it merely modernized its forms."[99] Women workers continued to be ghettoised into low-paying, low-status employment with little hope for advancement. In spite of the Kumtuks' faith that the franchise would give them the political equality they desired, men continued to dominate the legislatures and policy making, and proved reluctant to implement changes that would dramatically improve the social and economic status of working women.

As a group, the Kumtuks' approaches to women and work-related issues were conventional. Membership to the club was open only to women who were white, and by occupation, respectably white collar. The middle-class, Anglo-Celtic background of the Kumtuks influenced their interpretations of legislation such as the Minimum Wage Act, and the Girls' and Women's Protection Act, and left unchallenged the racial stereotypes that pervaded in this period. In spite of these flaws, the contributions made by the Kumtuks cannot be lightly dismissed.

If the Kumtuks were unable to change social policies that discriminated against women on the basis of their gender in the 1920s, they were, however, able to challenge them. The Kumtuks' efforts to secure a more visible and permanent place for business and professional women in the community where they lived challenged dominant ideologies of feminine dependence and domesticity. As an organisation of working women they created a safe place where members gained confidence in public speaking and a political education. Club members were encouraged to vote and to support women in political office. The Kumtuks' gradual identification with women's work-related issues, to the exclusion of other interests, also distinguished the club from earlier women's groups. Whereas many women's organisation in previous decades, for example, had concerned themselves with temperance, such issues were not a priority for the Kumtuks. While the club had remained silent on the broader implications of female unemployment and the rights of married women to waged work in the 1920s, the anti-feminism that accompanied the economic collapse of the 1930s would bring these issues to the fore.

[1]Alison Prentice et al, *Canadian Women. A History* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), 208.

[2]Gillian Weiss, "The Brightest Women of Our Land: Vancouver Clubwomen 1910-1928," *Not Just Pin Money. Selected Essays on the History of Women's Work in British Columbia*, eds. Barbara Latham and Roberta Pazdro (Victoria BC: Camosun College, 1984), 200.

[3]Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890-1935* (Toronto: Maxwell Macmillan Canada, 1994), 287; Margaret Hillyard Little, "Claiming A Unique Place. The Introduction of Mothers Pensions in BC," *BC Studies*, vols. 105-106 (Spring/Summer 1995), 80-102.

[4]Ceta Ramkhalawansingh, "Women During the Great War," *Women at Work, Ontario, 1850-1930*, eds. Jane Acton, Penny Goldsmith and Bonnie Shepard (Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1974), 264.

[5]J. Donald Wilson, "Lottie Bowron and Rural Women Teachers in British Columbia, 1928-1934," *British Columbia Reconsidered. Essays on Women*, eds. Gillian Creese and Veronica Strong-Boag (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1992), 342-343.

[6]Kumtuks Scrapbooks, 1920-1929, PABC, 80-161-2. Written notes by Bowron, 1921. Bowron's hand-written notes of a speech she presented to club members, undated, but estimated to be around 1921.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Hand written notes by Bowron, dated 2 December 1920.

[9]Jennifer Arnott, "Re-emerging Indigenous Structures and the Reassertion of the Integral Role of Women," *In The Presence of Women. Representation in Canadian Governments*, eds. Jane Arscott and Linda Trimble (Toronto: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1997), 76. Bowron's choice of a Chinook word for her club is somewhat ironic. While the Kumtuks held the franchise in special regard in the 1920s, First Nations women did not gain the right to vote until 1960.

[10]Kumtuks Scrapbooks, written notes by Bowron, 1921.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Elizabeth Forbes, *With Enthusiasm and Faith. History of the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs - La Fédération Canadienne des Clubs de Femmes de Carrières Libérales et Commerciales, 1930-1972* (Ontario: The Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women, 1974), 1. Forbes notes that in the early 1920s, clubs were

formed in Calgary, Toronto, Guelph, Owen Sound, Hamilton, Saskatoon, Vancouver, and St. Catharines.

[13]"A Brief History," *What is Rotary*, n.d. http://www.rotary.org (15 January 2001)

[14]Kumtuks' Minutes, 1921-1929, PABC, 80-161-3, Societies Act Declaration, 27 September 1921.

[15]Ibid.

[16]Kumtuks' Scrapbook, 1921.

[17]Kumtuks' Minutes, 9 April 1924.

[18]Kumtuks' Minutes, 20 October 1923; Kumtuks' Minutes, 12 February 1923; Kumtuks' Minutes, 27 March 1923; Kumtuks' Minutes, 10 December 1923; Kumtuks' Minutes, 10 December 1928.

[19]Kumtuks' Minutes, 20 September 1926.

[20]Kumtuks' Minutes, 29 September 1926.

[21]Kumtuks' Minutes, 12 February 1923.

[22]Kumtuks' Minutes, 20 November 1922; Kumtuks' Minutes, 22 November 1923; Kumtuks' Minutes, 5 February 1924; Kumtuks' Minutes, 26 March 1924; Kumtuks' Minutes, 2 May 1924; Kumtuks' Minutes, 26 May 1924; Kumtuks' Minutes, 4 October 1927.

[23]Kumtuks' Minutes, 20 October 1923.

[24]Kumtuks' Minutes, 14 January 1925.

[25]Societies Act Declaration, 27 September 1921.

[26]Kumtuks' Minutes, 4 October 1927.

[27]Ibid.

[28]Tamara Adilman, "A Preliminary Sketch of Chinese Women and Work in British Columbia 1858-1950," *Not Just Pin Money*, 53-71.

[29]Patricia Roy as quoted by Jean Barman in *The West Beyond the West. A History of British Columbia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press: 1991), 148.

[30]Kumtuks' Minutes, 17 November 1924; Kumtuks' Minutes, 19 January 1925, "motion lost, 16 members voted for its removal, 19 against it." Kumtuks' Minutes, 11 January 1926, motion "lost 19 to 11, motion rediscussed, some not understanding it, lost again, 17 to 14."

[31]Kumtuks' Minutes, 29 January 1929. No discussion on this subject is provided.

[32]Kumtuks' Minutes, 24 April 1924.

[33]Ibid.

[34]Of the 172 club members recorded between 1921 and 1929, 36 women were listed as being married upon entry into the club, 134 were single women and 2 had no marital designation.

[35]Veronica Strong-Boag, "Girl of the New Day: Canadian Working Women in the 1920s," *Labour/Le Travail*, vol. 4 (1979), 132. According to the 1921 Census, 7.19 per cent of the labour force were married women.

[36]Societies Act Declaration, 27 September 1921.

[37]Kumtuks' Minutes, 14 May 1928. Mrs. J. L. White formerly Violet Smart accepted associate membership on 6 October 1928. Kumtuks' Minutes, 18 February 1929. Mrs. K. Farqueson formerly K. McGraw became an associate member. Kumtuks' Minutes, 26 March 1923. On at least one occasion, club members were appealed to on the basis of their maternal roles. The speaker in this case advised that "as many of the Kumtuks members were mothers and many more maiden aunts..." they would understand the necessity of taking an active interest in the welfare of individual children at the local orphanage.

[38]Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled*, 3.

[39]Ibid.

[40]Ibid., 21, 51-54.

[41]Mary Vipond, "The Image of Women in Mass Circulating Magazines in the 1920's," *The Neglected Majority*, eds. Susan Mann Trofimenkoff and Alison Prentice (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), 116-124.

[42]Graham Lowe, "Mechanization, Feminization, and Managerial Control in the early Twentieth-Century Canadian Office," *On The Job. Confronting the Labour Process in Canada*, eds. Craig Heron and Robert Storey (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1986), 177-209; Margery W. Davies, *Woman's Place Is At the Typewriter. Office Work and Office Workers, 1870-1930* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982; Ileen DeVault, *Sons and Daughters of Labor. Class and Clerical Work in Turn-of-the-Century Pittsburgh* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

[43]This trend is noted by Veronica Strong-Boag, in *The New Day Recalled, 53*, and by Graham Lowe, "Mechanization, Feminization, and Managerial Control in the early Twentieth-Century Canadian Office," 185, 196, but is expanded upon in more detail by Margery W. Davies in *Woman's Place Is At the Typewriter.*

[44]Lowe, "Mechanization, Feminization, and Managerial Control in the early Twentieth-Century Canadian Office," 196.

[45]Positions of responsibility in other areas included: Investigator for the Minimum Wage Board of British Columbia, Matron of the Children's Aid Home, Mother's Pension Board Investigator, Principal of Beacon Hill School, and Head of Women's Department of the Provincial Labour Bureau.

[46]Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled*, 20-23.

[47]Positions of responsibility in the retail sector included: Manager of Boy's Department of Wilson and Wilson, Manager of United Typewriter Co., Manager of Ladies Ready To Wear, Manager of Spirella Corset Shop, and Manager of Silk Hoseries Ltd.

[48]The list of occupations given is drawn from the Club records. From 1921-1929, most new members were recorded by name and occupation. Of the 174 members listed between 1921 and 1929, only 48 women had their birthplace recorded.

[49]Societies Act Declaration, 27 September 1921.

[50]Patricia Roy, "The Oriental 'Menace' in British Columbia," *Historical Essays on British Columbia*, eds. J. Friesen and H. K. Ralston (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), 243-255; Patricia Roy, "British Columbia's Fear of Asians, 1900-1950," *Histoire sociale/Social History* vol. 13, no. 25 (1980), 161-172; Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Toward Orientals in British Columbia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978). More Asians settled in British Columbia than anywhere else in Canada and their communities maintained a clearly visible presence in the province. The huge influx of other immigrant groups into British Columbia between 1885 and 1914 also helped fuel concerns that the higher fertility rates of the immigrant population were a threat to the racial dominance of the white "British" population.

[51]Smith as quoted by Diane Crossley, "The BC Liberal Party and Women's Reforms, 1916-1928, *In Her Own Right. Selected Essays on Women's History in B.C.*, eds. Barbara Latham and Cathy Kess (Victoria BC: Camosun College, 1980), 244.

[52]Crossley, "The BC Liberal Party," 244.

[53]*Victoria Daily Colonist*, 5 November 1924, 5.

[54]*Vancouver Evening Sun*, 24 November 1924, 1.

[55]Kumtuks' Minutes, 17 November 1924.

[56]*Vancouver Evening Sun*, 22 November 1924, 8; *Vancouver Evening Sun*, 24 November 1924, 1.

[57]*Victoria Daily Colonist,* 28 November 1924, 3.

[58]Kumtuks' Minutes, 17 November 1924.

[59]Ibid.

[60]Ibid.

[61]Gillian Creese, "Sexual Equality and the Minimum Wage in British Columbia," *Journal of Canadian Studies,* vol. 26 (Winter 1991), 122; Margaret McCallum, "Keeping Women in their Place. The Minimum Wage in Canada, 1910-1925," *Canadian Working Class History. Selected Readings,* eds. Laurel Sefton MacDowell and Ian Radforth (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1992), 433-458. Minimum wage legislation was also on the agenda of social reformers. Many social reformers had long voiced concerns that poor working conditions would have a detrimental effect on the reproductive abilities of young women, and thus on the future of the family unit. Emphasis on the reproductive role of women meant that men were not seen to be in need of the same protective legislation as were women. Other reformers emphasised the moral aspects of wage reforms. According to this rhetoric, the inability to earn a living wage forced many women into lives of prostitution. Proponents of this theory reasoned that a minimum female wage would allow young women to lead a chaste and entirely self-supporting lifestyle.

[62]British Columbia, *Annual Report of the Department of Labour,* 1920, "Report of the Minimum Wage Board," F58-59, 74.

[63]Ibid., F71.

[64]Ibid.; McCallum, "Keeping Women in Their Place," 441.

[65]British Columbia, *Annual Report of the Department of Labour, 1924,* "Report of the Minimum Wage Board," G49.

[66]Ibid.

[67]Gillian Creese, "The Politics of Dependence: Women, Work, and Unemployment in the Vancouver Labour Movement Before World War II," British *Columbia Reconsidered,* 377-378; Creese, "Sexual Equality and the Minimum Wage in British Columbia," 122.

[68]British Columbia, *Annual Report of the Department of Labour, 1920,* "Report of the Minimum Wage Board," F74.

[69]*Victoria Daily Times,* 5 November 1922, 26.

[70]Kumtuks' Minutes, 13 November 1922.

[71]Nancy Hodges became president of the VWCC in 1923. The objective of the club was to provide women of social standing with a chance to

express their views on topical issues. The Kumtuks often addressed local women's groups and vice-versa.

[72]*Labour Gazette*, vol. xxii (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1923), 1253.

[73]Ibid.

[74]*Labour Gazette, 1923,* 1253; *Victoria Daily Times,* 5 November 1922, 26. Labour representatives argued that the CMA had ignored the "very purpose of the Act...to prevent the exploitation of cheap female labour at wages insufficient to provide the essentials of a happy life".

[75]Kumtuks' Minutes, 13 November 1922.

[76]British Columbia, *Annual Report of the Department of Labour, 1919,* "Report of the Minimum Wage Board," H60.

[77]In 1927, Mabel Cameron was elected president of the Kumtuks, an office she was to hold for several years.

[78]British Columbia, *Annual Report of the Department of Labour, 1924,* "Report of the Minimum Wage Board," G48.

[79]Creese, "Sexual Equality and the Minimum wage in British Columbia," 135-136.

[80]McCallum, "Keeping Women in their Place," 452.

[81]Josie Bannerman, Kathy Chopik, and Ann Zurbrigg, "Cheap at Half the Price: The History of the Fight for Equal Pay in B.C.," *Not Just Pin Money*, 301. Amending existing legislation was infinitely preferable to the difficulties usually associated with the introduction of new legislation.

[82]Little, "Claiming A Unique Place," 80-102, 105-106.

[83]Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled*, 68.

[84]Prentice et al., *Canadian Women. A History*, 247.

[85]Kumtuks' Minutes, 6 October 1924.

[86]Ibid.

[87]Barbara Riley, "Six Saucepans to One: Domestic Science vs. the Home in British Columbia, 1900-1930," *Not Just Pin Money*, 163.

[88]Genevieve Lesley, "Domestic Service in Canada, 1880-1920," *Women at Work*, 100-104.

[89]Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled*, 70; Creese, "The Politics of Dependence," 372-376.

[90]Strong-Boag, "The Girl of the New Day," 136.

[91]Kumtuks' Minutes, 28 February 1926; Kumtuks' Minutes, 20 July 1928.

[92]Kumtuks' Minutes, 29 March 1927.

[93]Kumtuks' Minutes, 17 January 1928.

[94]Kumtuks' Minutes, 25 August 1923,; Kumtuks' Minutes, 29 March 1927.

[95]Kumtuks' Minutes, 26 May 1924.

[96]Kumtuks' Minutes, 23 July 1924.

[97]Kumtuks' Minutes, 14 July 1923; Kumtuks' Minutes, 10 September 1923; Kumtuks' Minutes, 15 October 1923.

[98]Forbes, *With Enthusiasm and Faith,* 2-4.

[99]Strong-Boag, "The Girl of the New Day," 131.

CHAPTER 2

The Victoria Business and Professional Women's Club, 1930-1939. Emerging Ideas on Women's Work

In the 1930s, Canada's attention focused on the problems of male unemployment and regaining access to world markets. Issues such as the extent of unemployment among working women and its impact were perceived to have little relationship to the broader problems of the Depression and were often ignored. As the economic crisis worsened, the social pressure for women to relinquish employment if it were of the type that could be done by men increased. Against this backdrop, clubwomen who had been Kumtuks demonstrated a strength of commitment to the advancement of working women previously unexpressed by them. The club's formal change of name from the relatively obscure Kumtuks to the Victoria Business and Professional Women's Club (VBPWC) is indicative of this shift. The VBPWC's efforts to defend the right of women to participate in the labour force form much of the discussion in this chapter. Other issues taken up by the VBPWC include the problems of gender discrimination in the administration of unemployment relief, equal pay, and the introduction of a national unemployment insurance scheme. While the primary focus in this chapter is on those activities specific to the Victoria club, the philosophies and activities of the national organisation with which it became affiliated influenced those activities.

Formed in 1930, the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women's Club (CFBPWC) was motivated by two ambitions: to defend club members' right to economic security and to provide a national network of support for working women.[1] Through its provincial bodies the CFBPWC aimed to "promote the interests of business and professional women throughout...Canada...[and] to encourage a spirit of co-operation among business and professional women."[2]

The objectives of the federation included an explicit commitment to improving the working conditions of women by promoting training and advancement within certain employment sectors, and by securing representation on government commissions that had the potential to benefit Canadian working women.[3] The CFBPWC believed its strength lay in the organisation's ability to present a united front in the face of adversity. In 1932, at their Second Annual Convention the federation asserted that:

> The unemployment situation as it affects women is very acute...and threatens to become more so...women should stand banded together in efforts to relieve distress and hardship among our own sex...we are duly conscious of the magnitude of this unemployment problem and alert to the many difficulties to be faced in the planning and administration of any work of an emergency nature.[4]

Individual clubs, such as the VBPWC, were encouraged to assess their community's resources and to respond as they saw fit to the social and political repercussions of unemployment in their own communities. These local

initiatives will be addressed first, while the VBPWC's more general responses to female unemployment will be addressed later in the chapter.

The VBPWC's records reveal significant overlap with the original membership lists of the Kumtuks. Founding club members such as Lottie Bowron, Nancy Hodges, Anna Wigley, and Olive Snyder continued to play a strong role in the club's daily operations. The club's selective admission policies and membership fees remained intact. Unparalleled levels of unemployment, declining wage levels, and job uncertainty meant that membership in the club remained out of the reach of women on low or variable incomes.

The Kumtuks' conceptions of social citizenship and beliefs in the liberatory potential of the political franchise remained an integral part of the VBPWC in the 1930s. In 1933, vice-president Margaret Merrick Hall lauded the efforts of "those pioneer women who handed down to the present generation the birthright which is our badge of free citizenship, our right to record our political decisions without fear or favour." Hall went on to say "we must not...allow this right to fall into disuse. Neither must we through lack of knowledge allow our vote to be exploited."[5]

Hall's statement is in keeping with the club's original tenet that education was essential if women were to achieve their goals of economic and social equity. In the 1920s, the club's commitment to educational programmes

had remained confined to the endorsement of domestic training programmes for girls in the schools, public speaking courses for women, and the study of history.[6] By the 1930s, the club valued education in other spheres to a greater degree than heretofore. The priority given to education is evident in several of the club's local initiatives. These activities included seeking female representation on the Inspectorate of the Public Schools of British Columbia, establishing an annual bursary at the Victoria High School, and encouraging individual members to "fit themselves for office" through the study of political economy.[7] Grooming women to be spokespersons on women's issues was believed to be essential if women were to achieve their goals of economic and social equality. In 1932, Margaret Merrick Hall declared that

> in her opinion any Club had justified or would justify its existence as a [BPWC], even if it had only produced one woman who was capable of taking her stand in world affairs on an equality with men.[8]

The VBPWC upheld the ideal espoused by its national counterpart that it was the educated and informed woman who was best prepared to defend working women's right to paid employment. In 1933, Hall responded to a "writer who claimed that women had a new patriotic duty to step down from the economic struggle and hand their jobs to their nearest male relative." While Hall regarded this kind of statement as a "sign of the times," she contended that it was "enough to show there is an undercurrent of

discrimination against women," and that it was "vital" that clubwomen challenge such assumptions: "We have the franchise and should use it on such occasions."[9] As president of the VBPWC in 1935, she "reiterated the need for organised women to do all in their power to combat the propaganda being waged...against women in the business world." Women, she maintained, were "free born citizens" and as such had the right to "take their place in the business world" alongside men.[10]

In 1937, the VBPWC expressed solidarity with the National club's directive that all members "exert their utmost efforts to increase the number of qualified women in executive capacities and to dispel the fallacious contentions that women are impermanent in business and merely 'pin-money' workers."[11] Embodied in the argument that women worked for pin-money were the dual assumptions that women worked for what Alice Kessler Harris terms a "luxury wage," and that the male wage or the "family wage" as it was most often referred to, was sufficient to provide for a man and his dependants.[12] Working women found themselves at the centre of a very public and highly emotional debate. The hostility expressed towards female employment reflects, in part, the fear that prolonged male unemployment would erode the established gender identities of both sexes. The visibility of the married wage-earning woman challenged the ideology of female economic dependence

and highlighted the inability of the male wage-earner to fulfil his role as the family breadwinner.[13]

As the years progressed and severity of the economic collapse of the 1930s became more apparent, the status of married women in the labour force became more controversial. Nonetheless, throughout the Depression, the CFBPWC continued to maintain that it officially supported the right of married women to work.[14] The CFBPWC's sympathy towards married women may reflect a pragmatic understanding by club members of the vulnerability of all employed women to the anti-feminist attacks that were emerging with increasing frequency in the nation's newspapers and popular press.[15] The certitude, however, with which individual clubs adhered to the position adopted by the federation often wavered as unemployment levels rose and the participation of wage-earning women in the labour force became a more contentious issue.[16]

The VBPWC proved to be equally vulnerable to the vagaries of the economic crisis. In the 1930s, the club's support of the married woman's right to paid employment wavered. In 1930, the VBPWC was quick to protest the resolution issued by the Victoria Chamber of Commerce (VCC) urging employers to

> employ unmarried women who are obliged to earn their own living or work in support of others in the place of married women who are now employed and whose husbands are also working.[17]

The VBPWC took "exception to the resolution with regard to the employment of married women," and appears to have been

willing to argue that the married female wage-earner was entitled to seek employment regardless of the employment status of her husband.[18] As economic conditions in the country rapidly deteriorated, however, the VBPWC found itself supporting arguments that claimed the right to work should be based on economic need. In 1934, for example, the VBPWC chose to endorse the federation's efforts to defend the employment of married women "found to be sole supports."[19] The emphasis on a married woman's right to support her family during times of economic need reinforced notions about female impermanence in the labour market. According to this rhetoric, the employment of married women could only be justified when the family depended upon her income in order to survive.[20]

The VBPWC's latter position may reflect the exigencies of the period. During times of such desperate economic uncertainty, arguments that emphasised employment as an individual right and disregarded traditional gendered assumptions about the primacy of the male breadwinner would have damaged the image of the CFBPWC and its affiliates in the eyes of the general public, thereby hindering the club's ability to make progress on issues affecting working women.[21] By endorsing the right of married women to paid employment, even in such a limited fashion, the VBPWC and the CFBPWC were able to challenge the image of the married "luxury wage" earner.

Hobbs suggests that by using a language that stressed the continued right of women to employment in times of economic necessity, the CFBPWC was making a claim for social justice where wages would be dispensed according to economic need, and not on the basis of gender or marital status. She goes on to suggest that the acceptance of such arguments for access to employment may also have placed single women in a stronger position to demand relief provisions from the state.[22] However, while some women were eventually granted a degree of unemployment assistance, the amounts dispensed were seldom sufficient for survival.[23]

The gendered dimensions of relief distribution can be seen in Vancouver's responses towards unemployed women. The primary beneficiaries of relief programmes in British Columbia were married, Anglo-Celtic males with families to support.[24] In spite of the fact that Vancouver had set aside a limited amount of funds for unemployed, unmarried women by 1933, very few women qualified for city relief assistance of any kind. Unemployment relief was granted only to those individuals judged to be both 'deserving' and destitute. In the case of the single woman, unemployment relief in its barest form was only granted where ill health prevented employment or domestic work was unavailable.[25]

In 1932, the CFBPWC sent a resolution to the federal government "urging [that] any forthcoming plans for emergency work to relieve the unusual unemployment situation [consider] the claims and needs of unemployed

women...in reasonable proportion to those of men."[26] The federation contended that "plans to relieve unemployment...largely overlooked the claims and needs of unemployed women of all classes... [including] the 'white collar class'" and urged that "the matter be given direct consideration."[27] In Victoria, the VBPWC endorsed efforts to have women represented on committees that dealt with the administration of unemployment relief. The VBPWC agreed with the Soroptomist Club that

> women's counsel on unemployment problems and other vital matters pertaining to the government of our Province would be most valuable from a practical point of view [as]...there are approximately the same number of women citizens in British Columbia as there are men.[28]

Internally, the VBPWC asserted that unemployment had not affected its members.[29] The confidence with which such claims were made may in fact have been misleading. Between 1930 and 1938, where information is provided, marriage was often provided as a reason for leaving the club. In most cases, however, no explanation for the termination of club membership was provided. The high turnover in the club's membership in these years was indicative of social change and may suggest that more club members left the VBPWC to seek employment elsewhere than records indicate.[30] Shifts in the club's membership at this time may also reflect the inability of some women to afford the annual dues and expenses associated with membership. Despite the club's assertions to the contrary, it seems clear that unemployment did have an impact on the club's membership, a

notion reinforced by the fact that the club continued to defend women's rights to paid employment.

Unemployed women without familial assistance or the funds to support themselves privately found few resources available to them. Older women who became unemployable through age or illness were especially vulnerable in times of economic crisis. Since 1927, the federal and provincial governments had provided financial relief for some of the aged in British Columbia in the form of government pensions. Pensions were means-tested and only those deemed to be in great need, aged seventy years or older, were considered eligible. Women were believed to be supported in some fashion by family members and their financial needs were assumed to be less than those of male recipients. As a result, the modest amount of money granted to the few successful female annuitants was significantly less than that received by men, and provided its recipients with only the most austere standard of living.[31]

As the Depression years lengthened, the poverty suffered by those women who were unable to support themselves became more apparent. At the annual convention of the CFBPWC in 1932, Victoria delegate Olive Snyder asked those gathered to consider "if there were enough women, between the ages of sixty-five and seventy, unemployable women, to deem it wise to ask the domestic Government to lower the age for old age pensions."[32] Age was not the only criterion required of women attempting to secure pension

Help Society. The VBPWC contributed to the Workroom's maintenance by conducting rummage sales, tea parties, and tag days, and also through the donations of individual clubwomen.[36] In 1935, Anna Wigley noted that "it has been possible to give...work to the women badly in need of it, and to pay wages in cash...for three and one-third years--thus giving to many the courage to go on through these troublesome times."[37]

The VBPWC's responses to the Workroom were guided by a philosophy of self-help. According to this rhetoric, charity "no matter how graciously served" was humiliating for the recipient, and self-respect was possible only if the individual woman was able to earn wages through her own hard work.[38] Olive Snyder reported that

> ...when it was brought to the attention of the women in Victoria that women were not included in any relief schemes...[the] Victoria Club put forth the measure that they had in a great measure stolen from Vancouver Club, that a room be opened and employment be given to women out of work. The idea being that women should be given work in this emergency instead of charity, and that in this way we would be doing something to save their morale.[39]

Administrators of the Workroom were careful to define the work undertaken as employment, not charity. Mrs. A. N. Pease, convenor of the Workroom, maintained that "Thinking women will agree that money earned is better than money given."[40] Applicants for work were described as

> ...either old or infirm, yet not old enough or had not met, the residence qualification to secure old-age pensions. Many of them were friendless and dependent upon their own exertions for support. These women...were not seeking

> charity, but were anxious to secure work and were facing destitution.[41]

The room was designed to provide women with employment through sewing, embroidery, hemming of table linen, darning, and the making of children's clothing. Wages were paid "at the rate of eighty cents per day per woman."[42]

Despite the founders' claim that the Workroom was a working enterprise and not a charity, the distinction was a subtle one. The selection committee reassured the public that "only those in great need received assistance."[43] It is unlikely that the wages received by women in the Workroom made any of them financially secure as the amount of work granted depended upon the administrators' judgement of each individual's degree of need.[44] Nonetheless, the Workroom clearly met other prerequisites. For some women, accepting relief was perceived as an admission of personal failure.[45] The Workroom offered more than just the opportunity to be self-supporting, as a letter from one ex-employee testified:

> I would like them all to know how much it has meant to me. It provided for me at a time when I had nothing and has helped me to find myself and retain my self-respect and I am, and always will be very grateful.[46]

There is also evidence that women "...who, having known the Workroom in their time of need, and who finding themselves in better circumstances" regularly sent small donations towards its upkeep.[47] After 1936, references in the VBPWC's records to the Women's Workroom become much less frequent. It is possible that the death of Anna Wigley, the

Workroom's most enthusiastic supporter in the VBPWC, meant that the progress of the Workroom was no longer prioritised at club meetings. The occasional mention of the necessity to raise funds for the Workroom's maintenance, however, demonstrates a continuing commitment from the club to support the project financially, and suggests that the Workroom continued to play a role in the lives of older women in Victoria into the 1940s.

The VBPWC's involvement in the Workroom can be seen as part of the club's original commitment to community service. The work offered was traditional in form and offered no threat to established gender roles. Nonetheless, by publicly participating in the establishment and maintenance of the Workroom, the VBPWC validated the rights of older women to earn their own income and to live independently.

The vulnerability of older women was matched by that of young single women dependent upon their own income for survival. Faced with a relief system that prioritised the needs of married men with dependants over other workers, single men and women were expected to undertake any employment made available to them regardless of the wage or type of work offered. For the more desperate woman, household service was often the only respectable employment option available to her. Domestic service was often extolled by groups such as the NCW and the Young Women's

Christian Association (YWCA) as a solution to female unemployment and as an alternative to charity.[48]

In the 1920s the Kumtuks had expressed an interest in domestic science that reflected contemporary concerns about the health and nurture of future generations. Campaigns to educate young girls in their responsibilities as prospective homemakers and mothers were partly responsible for the introduction of domestic science programmes in the schools.[49]

In the 1930s, the VBPWC continued to view domestic training programmes as an essential element in preparing many young women for marriage and motherhood. In 1932, club member Olive Snyder maintained that "there was nothing that took more brains than to run a household properly and to cook properly, and to give the family proper food."[50] As the 1930s progressed, however, the VBPWC's interest in domestic work started to shift away from maternal concerns surrounding home and family and gravitated towards issues that directly affected working women. Although club members retained their middle-class biases, sincere efforts were made to ameliorate conditions for domestic servants both in actual terms and in terms of image. In the face of growing hostility towards women who worked for wages outside the home, household service had retained an image of domesticity for women, with the added advantage of placing women in a field of employment uncontested by men. In their evaluation of wages and working conditions

associated with this area of work, the VBPWC attempted to address both the concerns of the working-class servant woman and the interests of the middle-class employer.

The VBPWC accepted the premise that redefining domestic service as an occupation requiring education and certification would help raise the social status of the work involved. To this end, the VBPWC contributed financially to domestic training courses initiated and maintained by the Victoria YWCA throughout the 1930s. In 1932, a resolution was passed by the VBPWC to the effect that individual BPWCs across the country consider ways to establish household training programmes with a view to elevating the status of the domestic worker.[51] Club members referred to "the science of housekeeping," and asserted that educated girls would find the work "a real study."[52] Training programmes appealed to middle-class demands for a more efficient and experienced worker. For those women with stable incomes in the 1930s, the standard of living rose as prices dropped, allowing domestic help to be hired at remarkably low wages and outside of the controls that regulated other types of work.[53]

Domestic workers brought the question of fair wages and working conditions for domestic servants to the fore themselves. In 1934, the Domestic Workers Group (DWG) submitted proposals for the advancement and protection of domestic servants to different women's organisations in Victoria. Little is known about the DWG; however, their

requests resemble those put forth by Vancouver's all-women Domestic Union No. 91 in 1936.[54] In both cases the groups' primary demands comprised a forty-eight hour working week for household workers and the inclusion of domestic workers in the Minimum Wage Act.

While interested in the DWG's proposals in theory, the VBPWC was more receptive to the suggestions of the Victoria YWCA. The VBPWC's willingness to accept recommendations from the YWCA is not surprising. A middle-class organisation, the YWCA had concerned itself with the welfare of working-class women since the 1880s and was presumed by both governments and other organisations to be an authority on matters affecting such women.[55] The YWCA suggested that employment for domestic servants be limited to sixty hours a week. Formal training was recommended "in an effort to attract the best type of girl" into service.[56] The Association also proposed that "some sort of accident and health insurance should be compulsory for domestic workers with the cost being shared equally by the employer and the employee."[57] Providing household workers with an insurance scheme that would alleviate the hardships of unemployment was not addressed. The YWCA may have viewed unemployment insurance as an unnecessary modification since domestic service was one of the few occupations where the demand for workers continued to exceed the available supply.

Establishing what constituted a 'fair wage' for domestic help proved problematic. As potential employers, many clubwomen considered the wage scales suggested by the DWG unreasonable. Committee members noted with some dismay the clause designating "$20.00 per month for a forty-eight hour week for young persons engaged in 'light duties.'" The YWCA based its wage recommendations on the criteria established by the Minimum Wage Board to determine wage scales for other industries. Wage scales were based on hours, the nature of the work done, age, and experience. The "Y" suggested that in return for a sixty-hour week a minimum wage of $15 per month be paid to inexperienced "girls," with higher wages given to experienced "girls."[58] The Y's proposed pay scales were lower than those actually paid by most employers. According to Sara Diamond, in return for a sixty- to eighty-hour week in 1935, domestic servants in British Columbia were paid on average $30 per month if they were experienced and $20 per month if they were inexperienced.[59] On the other hand, the more desperate employee was often compelled to accept only room and board, or as little as $5 a month in return for her labour.[60] The VBPWC, which espoused a "fair wage for efficient service," pronounced the YWCA's proposals as "deserving of the closest consideration, as being a most progressive step in the right direction and in the best interest of the workers."[61]

While the VBPWC endorsed in principle the DWG's motion to have domestic workers protected by the Minimum Wage Act, the clubwomen objected to the conditions of employment put forth by the DWG. Once suitably modified, the committee asserted that the DWG's claims could be presented to the Minimum Wage Board for consideration. The committee believed

> that the bringing of the domestic worker under the jurisdiction of the Minimum Wage Act would protect the fair employer against the unfair employer, protect the underpaid worker, and at the same time raise the whole status of household work.[62]

The social, sexual and economic inequalities embedded in the minimum wage legislation have been noted in the previous chapter. In the 1930s, wage levels established by the board remained predicated on the belief that women's financial needs were less than those of men.[63] In spite of this fact, the VBPWC regarded the legislation as an important step towards economic security for working women. Had the Minimum Wage Board accepted proposals from clubs such as the VBPWC to extend the jurisdiction of the Act to household workers, women in domestic service would have been offered, at least in theory, a degree of legal protection from exploitation. The VBPWC's willingness to endorse the minimum wage also reaffirmed the club's belief that the state had an obligation to protect those unable to protect themselves, in this case female household servants.

To suggest that the VBPWC's interest in domestic workers marked a progressive shift in the club's

understanding of the issues facing working-class women would be misleading. While the club accepted the DWG's premise that domestic servants would be best protected by minimum wage legislation, they refused to endorse changes such as the forty-eight hour week. Nor was any decision reached regarding what constituted a living wage for female domestics. The committee noted only that the "excessive nature" of the DWG's demands "might prove a serious handicap to the establishment of a minimum wage" for women in this field of employment.[64]

Faced with a system of relief that systematically discriminated against women on the basis of gender, and the growing hostility towards women who worked for wages outside the home, from the perspective of the club, domestic service remained what it always had been: a solution to female unemployment and an alternative to charity. Domestic service was also considered a suitable occupation for women. Securely located in the home, servants were spared the criticisms directed towards women who worked for wages in other industries. It is also likely that the club's favourable attitude towards the establishment of training programmes for female domestics reflected middle-class concerns over the quality and availability of servant help. While girls were encouraged to view domestic training as a bridge towards improved wages and working conditions, the primary purpose of such projects was to provide servants for the middle class.

The VBPWC argued for minimum wage reforms in cases, such as domestic service, where the employment of women differed markedly from that of men. In situations where women performed the same work as men, and produced the same results for significantly less remuneration, equal pay became one of the club's goals. In 1933, Margaret Merrick Hall informed club members that, in her opinion, it was

> Obvious why women for equal work should receive equal recognition in the business and professional world. There is a distinct discrimination against women in the industrial and professional world today... Only by exercising the franchise...could women correct this condition.[65]

By the late 1930s, in spite of the virulent opposition still being publicly expressed towards working women, the VBPWC placed itself on the public record as being altogether in favour of the idea that professional women were entitled to economic equality with men. The VBPWC argued that in the case of teachers, women had the right to be paid according to their skill and education. In 1938, the club boldly protested the wage discrimination women teachers faced in Victoria. The VBPWC, in their only recorded official statement on this issue, made a resolution to the Victoria Board of School Trustees that "pledged to oppose discrimination against women in employment and to support the principle of equal pay for equal work" as it was "obvious that the salary schedule recently adopted [by the Trustees had] resulted in marked discrimination against women teachers."[66]

Women teachers had long experienced discrimination with regards to salary and opportunities for advancement. From the middle of the nineteenth century, teaching, especially at the elementary school level, had been considered respectable employment for working women. The work itself, however, was characterised by poor working conditions and low wages. Salaries were either based on the grade level taught or on hierarchies developed by individual school boards. Confined to teaching the lower grade levels and having little opportunity for advancement, women were invariably paid much less than their male colleagues for the same or similar work and responsibility.[67]

The practice of paying women teachers less than men persisted well into the twentieth century. United over the issues of disparate salaries and poor working conditions, women teachers in Ontario formed the Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario (FWTAO) in 1918.[68] Doris French's study of the FWTAO between 1918 and 1968 demonstrates that FWTAO consistently raised the issues of discrimination in wages and advancement during these years.[69]

Figures released by the Dominion Bureau of Statistics in 1938 illustrate large wage differentials between men and women teachers. Teachers' salaries are recorded by province, type of school, and gender. In the province of British Columbia in all publicly-controlled schools there were 4,035 teachers in total. Female teachers constituted

62% (2,521) of this number and male teachers 38% (1,514). Salary levels ranged from $700 per annum to $4000 and over per annum. Fifty per cent of the female teachers (1,269) in the province received salaries in the range of $700 to $1,199 per annum. The percentage of male teachers in the same salary range was 30% (465). The salaries for male teachers covered the whole spectrum of the salary scale with 50% of the male teachers receiving salaries ranging from $1,400 to $4,000 and over. In examining the differences between the salaries for male and female teachers one can see in the upper ranges of salary ($2,700-$4,000 and over) only one woman (0.03%) in the province was paid that high as compared to 210 male teachers (14%).[70]

There is no indication in this report of the qualifications, years of experience, or marital status of the teachers concerned. The data does, nonetheless, clearly illustrate that women, who constituted a higher proportion (62%) of teachers overall in the province, were clustered in the lower wage levels. The higher salary levels of male teachers indicates that men were teaching the higher, and therefore better paid, grade levels and that men were advancing within the profession to positions of higher responsibility more quickly than were women.

The VBPWC's demand for equal pay challenged accepted beliefs about women and work. Women's marginal status as wage-earners meant that they continued to be paid less than men. This position was reinforced by the enduring notions

that women were supported financially by men and that their participation in the labour force would be temporary. Women who argued for equal pay, in Alice Kessler-Harris's view, showed themselves self-confident and willing to redefine themselves as permanent members of the labour force.[71]

The VBPWC's efforts to see women identified as permanent participants in the workforce can be viewed in the club's efforts to see women included as a category in subsequent labour legislation. Advancing the status of working women through the passage of legislation was a course of action clearly favoured by the VBPWC. Directives from the CFBPWC often formed the impetus for many of the local group's activities. The federation's influence may be seen in the club's responses to the federal government's proposed unemployment insurance legislation. (It should be noted that although such legislation was introduced and passed by the House of Commons in 1935, the bill was never implemented. In spite of widespread public support, many provincial leaders resisted federal control over what was perceived as an essential social service. Unemployment legislation would only be successfully introduced into the Commons in 1940 after the outbreak of World War Two.)[72]

From its inception unemployment insurance had been premised on the model of the full-time, long-term male wage-earner. Benefits were based on length of employment and were calculated as a percentage of the wage-earner's

total income. The exclusion of seasonal or part-time employment effectively eliminated most female-centred employment from the Act's coverage.[73] While the proposed "Dominion Unemployment Insurance Bill was seen as a definite step in the right direction" by the VBPWC, it was also viewed as one that was in need of modification.[74] In 1933 the club endorsed the following resolution from the CFBPWC:

> [That because] there are in Canada a large number of women who are entirely dependent upon their own earnings and who may in other cases have others dependent upon them...the [CFBPWC]... heartily endorse the principle of Unemployment Insurance and urges the Dominion Government to...immediately...initiate such a project and that any legislation which may be introduced in respect thereof shall apply equally to men and women.[75]

In 1935, the VBPWC suggested that "a Dominion wide insurance scheme, embracing health, old age and unemployment" would be a significant improvement to any existing or forthcoming legislation.[76] To ensure that women were represented and their issues understood, the club also "urged the appointment of women to the unemployment insurance board."[77]

Although club members did secure places on school boards and on commissions that dealt with women or children, the efforts of the VBPWC to alter legislation that discriminated against women on the basis of gender and marital status were unsuccessful. While single women were eventually granted limited access to unemployment relief, few women actually qualified for assistance of this kind.

Public policy continued to define women as the dependants and responsibility of male family members. The married woman worker continued to be perceived as a threat to male job security. Young single women remained under pressure to take up domestic employment. Older women without private resources were forced to rely on the efforts of local women's organisations or other charities for survival.

In spite of its promise, the minimum wage failed to take into account the needs of women with dependants and provided only a meagre income to female employees. In the 1930s, the Canadian government avoided implementing an unemployment insurance programme that would benefit either sex. Even if unemployment insurance had become a reality during this period, the historically low and intermittent incomes of most working women would have excluded them from qualifying for assistance. Federal unemployment initiatives were clearly designed to benefit the higher income male worker.[78]

In spite of the lack of real progress and obvious class considerations affecting the VBPWC's actions, the significance of groups such as this must not be underestimated. The club sought to improve the status of working women at a time when women's employment was only approved of if it remained within the home. Women who worked for wages outside the home challenged an entrenched ideology of women's economic dependence and threatened the

status of the male breadwinner. The little actual progress in regard to the reform of existing legislation or the implementation of new legislation reflects the relative powerlessness of the VBPWC and women in general at this time, not the ambitions of the club's members.

As a part of a national federation of business and professional women, the VBPWC believed in the strength of a united voice. The club's visions of equality and citizenship, which had emerged in the 1920s, remained intact in the 1930s. If the club's demands for change were cautiously expressed, they were nonetheless consistent: women had a right both to work and to wages that would provide a comfortable standard of living, and women who were unable to work were entitled to the same financial support, however limited, that the state granted to men. The harsh economic climate of the 1930s effectively forestalled any real progress for wage-earning women. The societal reconstruction that accompanied Canada's entry into World War Two, however, would provide the foundation for changes so long demanded by groups such as the VBPWC.

[1]Margaret Hobbs, "Gendering Work and Welfare: Women's Relationship to Wage-Work and Social Policy in Canada During the Great Depression" (Ph.D.: University of Toronto, 1995), 102.

[2]Victoria Business and Professional Women's Club (VBPWC) Papers, 1930-1938, PABC 80-161-3. First Annual Convention of Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs (CFBPWC), Winnipeg Manitoba, 2 July 1930.

[3]*Handbook For Club Members* (Ontario: Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women's Club, 1985), 6.

[4]CFBPWC, Report of the Third Annual Convention, Vancouver, 13-15 July 1932.

[5]VBPWC Scrapbooks, 1930-1969, PABC 80-161-2, unidentified newspaper clipping, 25 October 1933.

[6]The club's history programmes appear to have encompassed the study of women throughout the ages. Presumably, the origins and achievements of the suffrage movement and the value of the franchise for women were also topics of discussion.

[7]VBPWC Minutes, 6 August 1931. In 1931, the club's resolution seeking female representation on the Inspectorate of the Public Schools of British Columbia "enunciated its stand on the principle of favouring equality of opportunity for men and women in the highest positions in the gift of Government and pointed out that there are available in British Columbia women eminently suited both by their ability and scholastic qualifications to fill this position." Letter from the VBPWC to the Victoria School Board, 27 October 1936, PABC 80-161-3. In 1936, as a memorial to club member Anna Bay-Wigley, an annual bursary was established at the Victoria High School. In its letter to the Victoria School Board the club announced its "desire to...be of assistance to a girl entering a business career...by offering an annual scholarship of $50...to girl students completing the three year commercial course..." and who had demonstrated both a commitment to community service and "outstanding [academic] ability who might otherwise not be able to continue courses sufficiently long enough to qualify as responsible office workers." VBPWC Minutes, 17 June 1934; VBPWC Minutes, 28 January 1935.

[8]CFBPWC Annual Convention, 13-15 July 1932.

[9]VBPWC Minutes, Unidentified newspaper clipping, 25 October 1933.

[10]VBPWC Minutes, 28 January 1935.

[11]VBPWC Scrapbook, unidentified newspaper clipping, December 1937.

[12]Alice Kessler-Harris, *A Woman's Wage. Historical Meanings and Social Consequences* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1990), 2.

[13]Margaret Hobbs, "Rethinking Antifeminism in the 1930s: Gender Crisis or Workplace Justice? A Response to Alice Kessler-Harris," *Gender and History,* vol. 5, no. 1 (Spring 1993), 11.

[14]CFBPWC, Report of the Second Annual Convention, Montreal, 2-4 July 1931.

[15]"This Freedom, By a Business Woman," *MacLean's*, 15 July 1931, 7; "A Reply to 'This Freedom,' by A Spinster," *MacLean's*, 15 September 1931, 17; "This Bondage, by A Wife," *MacLean's*, 1 October 1931, 11; "The Jobless White Collar Worker, by One Of Them," *MacLean's,* 1 May 1932, 16.

[16]Hobbs, "Gendering Work and Welfare," 102-103.

[17]VBPWC Minutes, 19 September 1930.

[18]VBPWC Minutes, 22 September 1930.

[19]VBPWC Minutes, 17 June 1934.

[20]Margaret Hobbs, "Equality and Difference: Feminism and the Defence of Women Workers During the Great Depression," *Labour/Le Travail*, vol. 32 (Fall 1993), 201-217.

[21]Hobbs, "Gendering Work and Welfare," 96-98.

[22]Hobbs, "Equality and Difference," 221-223.

[23]Gillian Creese, "The Politics of Dependence: Women, Work, and Unemployment in the Vancouver Labour Movement Before World War II," *British Columbia Reconsidered. Essays on Women,* eds. Gillian Creese and Veronica Strong-Boag (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1992), 378-381.

[24]Ibid., 387.

[25]Ibid., 380. At the end of 1936, only four hundred single women appeared on Vancouver's relief rolls, two-thirds of who were over the age of fifty.

[26]CFBPWC, Annual Convention, 13-15 July 1932.

[27]Ibid.

[28]VBPWC Minutes, 3 October 1933, Soroptomist Club Resolution.

[29]VBPWC Minutes, 9 December 1930; VBPWC Minutes, 5 January 1931; VBPWC Minutes, 11 December 1931.

[30]VBPWC Minutes, 28 January 1935. The amount of detail in the club's records varies. In many cases, the departure of clubwomen is noted without comment. There is sufficient evidence to suggest, however, that members often left to take up employment elsewhere or to marry. A common example of the style in which the club kept track of increases and declines in membership can be seen in the following statement: "Miss Helen Wells...in her comprehensive report noted the increase in

club membership from seventy-two to seventy four, [and that] several members [had] married or left the city..."

[31]Veronica Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled. Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pittman Ltd., 1988), 188-189. Pension benefits amounted to an annual income of $350.

[32]CFBPWC, Annual Convention, 13-15 July 1932.

[33]Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled*, 188-189.

[34]VBPWC Scrapbook, unidentified newspaper clipping, referring to the CFBPWC Fifth Annual Convention, Calgary, 3-6 July 1935.

[35]Ibid.

[36]VBPWC Minutes, 14 September 1931; VBPWC Minutes, 29 January 1935; VBPWC Minutes, 24 June 1940; *Victoria Daily Times*, 23 September 1936.

[37]VBPWC Minutes, 29 January 1935.

[38]"The Jobless White Collar Worker, by One of Them," *MacLean's*, 1 May 1932, 16.

[39]CFBPWC, Annual Convention, 13-15 July 1932.

[40]*Victoria Daily Times*, 19 October 1932, 6.

[41]*Victoria Daily Times*, 11 August 1931, 6.

[42]*Victoria Daily Times*, 19 October 1932, 6.

[43]*Victoria Daily Times*, 19 October 1932, 6. Of the 146 women who applied for assistance in September 1932, 51 women were rejected.

[44]Shifts were limited to four hours per day. In return for 20 cents an hour, the women sewed garments and linens by hand. Some worked two days a week, others three days. At the end of the Women's Workroom 1935 fiscal year, disbursements to women were listed at $10032.20, representing 50,000 hours of work.

[45]"The Jobless White Collar Worker," *MacLean's*, 1 May 1932, 16.

[46]*Victoria Daily Times*, 4 April 1934, 9.

[47]VBPWC Minutes, 29 January 1935. Other contributors included "those civil servants who have sent us part of their pay every month for nearly three years."

[48]Genevieve Lesley, "Domestic Service in Canada, 1880-1920," *Women at Work, 1850-1930*, eds. Jane Acton, Penny Goldsmith and Bonnie Shepard (Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1974), 100-104.

[49]Barbara Riley, "Six Saucepans to One: Domestic Science vs. the Home in British Columbia 1900-1930," *Not Just Pin Money. Selected Essays on*

Women's Work in British Columbia, eds. Barbara Latham and Roberta Pazdro (Victoria BC: Camosun College, 1984), 162.

[50]CFBPWC, Annual Convention, 13-15 July 1932.

[51]Ibid.

[52]*Victoria Daily Times,* 16 July 1932, 11.

[53]Alison Prentice et al, *Canadian Women. A History* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), 235-236.

[54]Pierson and Cohen, "Educating Women for Work," 211-212.

[55]Ibid.

[56]*Victoria Daily Times,* 19 July 1934, 6. The suggestions from the Victoria YWCA were an improvement on those advocated by their National body. The National YWCA advocated a working week of 69 hours for domestic servants--a proposal dismissed by the Victoria YWCA as excessive.

[57]Ibid.

[58]Ibid.

[59]Sara Diamond, "You Can't Scare Me...I'm Stickin' to the Union. Union Women in British Columbia during the Great Depression," *Kinesis,* vol. 9 (June 1979), 16; Margaret McCallum, "Keeping Women in their Place. The Minimum Wage in Canada, 1910-1925," *Canadian Working Class History. Selected Readings,* eds. Laurel Sefton MacDowell and Ian Radforth (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1992), 444. These wage scales were still extremely low. In 1921, the Ontario Minimum Wage Board estimated a saleswoman in a retail store would need a minimum of $12.56 a week to exist modestly.

[60]Creese, "Politics of Dependence," 379; Diamond, "Union Women," 16.

[61]VBPWC "Conventionette" 17 June 1934, in preparation for the CFBPWC Fourth Annual Convention, Lake Louise, 20 July 1934.

[62]VBPWC Scrapbook, *Victoria Daily Times,* undated clipping, June 1934.

[63]McCallum, "Keeping Women in their Place," 433-439; Gillian Creese, "Sexual Equality and the Minimum Wage in British Columbia," *Journal of Canadian Studies,* vol. 26 (Winter 1991), 120-129.

[64]VBPWC Conventionette, 17 June 1934.

[65]VBPWC Minutes, 25 October 1933. Unidentified newspaper clipping.

[66]VBPWC Minutes, 12 December 1938.

[67]Elizabeth Graham, "School Marms and Teaching in Early Ontario," *Women at Work, 1850-1930,* 165-194.

[68]Ibid., 195-196.

[69]Doris French, *High Button Bootstraps. The Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario, 1918-1968* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1968), 46.

[70]"Teachers' Salaries in Eight Provinces," *Dominion Bureau of Statistics*, 1938.

[71]Kessler-Harris, *A Woman's Wage*, 84.

[72]Pierson, "Gender and Unemployment Insurance Debates in Canada, 1934-1940," *Labour/Le Travail*, vol. 25 (Spring 1990), 79.

[73]Ibid.

[74]VBPWC Minutes, 9 January 1933.

[75]Ibid.

[76]VBPWC Minutes, 25 March 1935.

[77]VBPWC Minutes, 27 January 1936.

[78]Pierson, "Gender and Unemployment Insurance," 79.

CHAPTER 3

Victoria Business and Professional Women's Club, 1940-1960. Decades of Progress.

In the early 1940s, the certainty with which one government agency declared that Canada's entry into World War II had "finally brought about the complete emancipation of women" appeared irrefutable.[1] The shortage of male workers between 1939 and 1945 led to an unprecedented demand for women workers.[2] The active recruitment of both single and married women by industry and the Armed Forces allowed many women to bypass established occupational and gender barriers to engage in work traditionally reserved for men.[3] As the war drew to a close, however, Canadian women were once more confronted with a state-endorsed ideology of domesticity. The CFBPWC and its affiliates responded to post-war restrictions on working women forcefully, demanding that women be afforded the same rights to political representation and legislative protection that the law extended to men. The determination of the VBPWC and the CFBPWC to broaden political and economic opportunities open to women between 1940 and 1960 shape the events discussed in this chapter.

By the late 1940s, the local initiatives that characterised the VBPWC's earlier activities diminished. VBPWC members Margaret Hall and Nancy Hodges were instrumental in promoting the idea (both internally and to other clubs) of a system of provincial BPWCs, whereby local clubs would meet within their own province semi-annually and

be represented nationally by an elected provincial president. Such a move, it was claimed, would "strengthen the national movement" by allowing smaller clubs to maintain "closer contact with the National Federation."[4] To this end, a national network of provincial BPWCs was formally established in 1948. In this thesis every effort has been made to separate the activities of the VBPWC from its national and provincial organisations. After 1948, however, this distinction becomes increasingly difficult to maintain.

Leila Rupp and Verta Taylor's characterisation of the leadership of the American national women's groups between 1945 and 1960 as "elite" bears some resonance for Canadian women's organisations.[5] Presidents of the CFBPWC, for example, were often exceptionally well-educated women, from wealthy, politically connected families.[6] At a local level, however, the occupational choices of women in the VBPWC made them more representative of the majority of Canadian working women. The majority of club members continued to work in jobs that, while respectable, were low paid and offered little hope of advancement.

Membership lists for the VBPWC between 1940 and 1960 are incomplete. The data that are available, however, indicate some changes when compared to the occupational profiles of the Kumtuks between 1921 and 1929. In 1948, as in the 1920s, office work continued to employ the largest proportion of club members. The VBPWC membership list for 1948 shows that forty-four (45%) clubwomen held clerical positions.[7] In 1948,

retail work employed twenty (21%) clubwomen, compared to the fifteen (9%) Kumtuks in the 1920s. The percentage of clubwomen employed as teachers (9%) and health professionals (7%) in 1948 remains comparable to the 1920s. Occupations that were absent from the 1920s, but included on the 1948 membership roll were the categories of proprietor (5%), dressmaker, and hairdresser.[8]

The professions which women in the VBPWC were employed in the 1950s had changed little since the 1920s. However, members of the VBPWC were now closer to representing the work experiences of a broader range of Canadian women than they had been in the 1920s. Significant increases in consumerism helped facilitate the expansion of the retail sector in the post-war years.[9] The growth in this sector is reflected in the increased numbers of clubwomen employed in retail work in 1948. The expanding white-collar sector in the post-war years, combined with the increased access to high school education for Canadian women at this time, ensured many women were prepared to take up clerical work on leaving school.[10] These changes made clerical work a much more common occupational choice for women than it had been earlier.

Marital patterns in the VBPWC over this period of time are unclear. It is probable, however, that the number of married women in the VBPWC matched national employment trends and increased over time.[11] For example, between 1921 and 1929, only 37 (22%) of the 172 profiles available for that decade recorded Kumtuks as being married upon membership. In

contrast, the 1948 membership list indicates that of the 97 profiles available for that year, 56 clubwomen were recorded as married.[12]

By the late 1940s, the racial bias that characterised the VBPWC's earlier entry requirements had disappeared. First and foremost, candidates for club membership had to be employed, and demonstrate, if it was applicable, an intention to secure Canadian citizenship. In 1948, provincial president and VBPWC member, Minnie Beveridge, brought up "[t]he matter of racial problems in regard to membership in [BPWCs]," noting that "...in some districts there were nationalities who were not Canadian citizens, but wished to join our [BPWCs]." Beveridge went on to say "...we cannot make good citizens of these other nationalities if we are going to discriminate."[13] The motion was passed stating that "...If [immigrant women] are eligible for Canadian citizenship that they may be given associate membership until they are Canadian citizens."[14]

The issue of admitting New Canadians was raised again at the provincial level in 1949, when it was remarked that "Japanese girls are amongst the finest members." The speaker went on to stress that "...we should show them just what is a democracy and accept them on our level, not discriminate against them. We should do more than take these New Canadians into our clubs if they will come, we should invite them in."[15]

It is clear that the racial composition of some BPWC's within the province changed between 1940 and 1960, and that the VBPWC endorsed these changes. There is no evidence, however, to suggest that the racial composition of the VBPWC itself altered during these years. Changes in the racial membership of BPWCs across the province were noteworthy events. Had Asian or First Nations women been admitted to the VBPWC the occasion would have been recorded. In 1959, for example, the VBPWC approved of the admittance of "a young Indian woman" to the Duncan BPWC, noting that "it is heartening to see such integration and that we might see more of it."[16] A review of names on membership lists available for the VBPWC during the 1940s and 1950s also indicates that club members continued to come from Anglo-Celtic backgrounds.

Between 1939 and 1945, the VBPWC placed a premium on supporting Canada's war effort, and as such, directed much of its energy to patriotic, volunteer activities. Club members raised funds for the Red Cross, sold war bonds, arranged entertainment for members of the Armed Forces, and instigated clothing drives called 'Bundles for Britain.' While these activities did play a significant role in the life of clubwomen at this time, this chapter emphasises instead the club's responses to employment and wage-related issues that emerged during and after the war.

In 1940, the VBPWC readily acknowledged that the contingencies of a wartime economy had benefited working women. In her annual address to club members, VBPWC

President Kate Farquharson observed that "Canadian women are at this time doing their utmost for the war effort and married as well as single women's work is welcome and needed."[17] Farquharson, nonetheless, remained sceptical about the permanence of such conditions:

> It remains to be seen whether disparagement or discrimination in this regard will develop when hostilities cease and our working population returns to a normal basis. It might well become an issue of importance in the future for an organisation such as ours to face.[18]

In spite of the enthusiastic recruitment of women into war-related industries, the VBPWC and its national leaders assumed that traditional attitudes towards working women would reassert themselves in peacetime. The VBPWC expressed misgivings over "the extent to which women might be substituted for men in war industries" once the war had ended, and endorsed CFBPWC proposals that "committees be formed to investigate the possibilities of employment for women after the war."[19] In February 1946, the VBPWC went on record supporting Nancy Hodges' motion before the legislature opposing the lay-off of single women in the work force and replacing them with World War II veterans.[20]

Confident that women had demonstrated their commitment to the war effort through their volunteer activities and employment responsibilities, VBPWC members believed that women had proven themselves to be as competent and as deserving of public recognition as men were. As such, the VBPWC maintained that women had "a right to be represented on reconstruction committees" that were being formed to

investigate problems concomitant with the reintroduction of a peacetime economy.[21]

The most prominent of these advisory boards was the federal government's Committee on Reconstruction, which formally convened in 1941 under the leadership of six prominent Canadian men.[22] Vice President of the CFBPWC, Margaret Wherry, along with other women, successfully lobbied the federal government to establish a subcommittee composed entirely of women to investigate and address problems likely to confront Canadian women. Of paramount importance to the CFBPWC and its affiliates was the impact that the resumption of peacetime working conditions would have on employment opportunities for women. Unfortunately for Wherry and her supporters, lack of interest from the Mackenzie King government and lack of support from the general public both ensured that recommendations from the Subcommittee had little or no impact on future government polices.[23]

As the VBPWC had feared, workplace practices reverted to pre-war conditions soon after the men returned from overseas service. Together, government, business and the media reintroduced long-standing patriarchal assumptions that a woman's place was in the home. The closure of state-supported day-care facilities and a reduction in allowable tax-free income for married women were just two policies that rendered full-time employment an increasingly untenable option for many women.[24] Women who had secured higher-paying jobs during the war were forced to relinquish their positions

to men. Those women who continued to work were often forced to accept lower-paid employment usually found in the service or manufacturing sectors.[25]

As the 1940s progressed, it became increasingly obvious that the war had brought about few shifts in what were considered appropriate roles for women. One federal report on labour conditions, for example, concluded that women should only be encouraged "to enter the labour market when economic activity is at such a level that their employment will not prevent men from obtaining positions."[26] Other government reports reiterated the position that were married women compelled to leave the work force, unemployment among single women would be eliminated.[27] Claims such as these effectively reinforced a domestic paradigm for women. Women were once more pressured either to assume the full-time role of homemaker or to take up work for which men rarely competed, such as household service.[28]

The sexual inequities embedded in the relatively new, federal Unemployment Insurance (UI) Act highlight the fragile place once again occupied by working women in Canadian society. The Canadian government's decision to implement an unemployment bill in 1941 is attributed to two factors: the necessity of averting the social unrest that had characterised the Depression years, and the desire to offer some form of income security to workers in the face of anticipated post-war levels of high unemployment.[29]

An Unemployment Commission was established to oversee and administer the Act. Women were granted limited representation on the employment area of the UI commission. For example, a female advisor on the commission represented women's employment issues. Women were also represented on the National Employment Committee, which supervised the administration of the employment offices under the control of the UI commission. Women did not, however, have representation in the administration and coverage of the insurance itself.[30]

Coverage under the UI programme was based on occupation, length of service, income, and marital status. Applicants for unemployment insurance benefits were also required to convince officials that they were "capable of and available for work, and unable to find employment."[31] The traditionally low-paying, seasonal and/or part-time work assumed by many Canadian women ensured that more women than men would be judged ineligible for unemployment benefits. Women who had once been employed and trained in the higher paying war-industries were also denied financial support if they refused to accept work in the low-paid service sector even if they met the other UI criteria.[32]

Unemployment insurance legislation also discriminated against married women. The belief that the unemployment insurance fund was being drained by an excessive number of claims put forth by married women justified, in the commission's point of view, the introduction of stringent

regulations governing the administration of unemployment benefits for married women. For example, unemployment assistance was denied to women who quit their jobs due to pregnancy or spousal relocation, or who went back to part-time work in order to meet domestic responsibilities. The UI Act also maintained that married women had to prove their commitment to the labour force by finding work for at least 90 days after marriage if she was not employed on the date of her marriage, or in the case of recently married women who had been laid off or left their employment, another job had to be found for 90 days in order to qualify for benefits under the Act. Failure to meet the eligibility requirements in place for married women meant such applicants were disqualified from receiving benefits for two years following marriage.[33]

The VBPWC sponsored few independent initiatives with regard to amending the unemployment insurance legislation. Nevertheless, the club unequivocally supported the position of its national federation on this issue. The CFBPWC argued that the large numbers of employed women in Canada paying UI premiums justified their representation and participation in the administration and implementation of the UI Act.[34] From 1941 onward, the VBPWC endorsed CFBPWC resolutions urging the federal government to include women on the Unemployment Insurance Commission.[35] A list of women qualified to hold public office accompanied each request from the clubs for representation on the commission. Having women involved in

the formulation of public policy was considered a crucial element in improving the political status of Canadian women and ensuring that decision-making processes took into account women's interests.

By the 1950s, the CFBPWC was also demanding that the government repeal clauses in the legislation that discriminated against married women. In 1956, the VBPWC unanimously supported the CFBPWC's resolution to the federal government to rescind Section 161 of the UI Act "it being apparent that the [UI] Committee can take the same action to protect the UI Fund against unjust claims by married women that it takes with other categories of claimants."[36]

To some degree, the efforts of the CFBPWC and its affiliates such as the VBPWC to amend the clauses in the UI act that discriminated against married women and to secure representation on the Commission itself were successful. In 1957, the federal government revoked the ninety-day employment requirement for married women. Subsequent reports assessing unemployment insurance and the position of women in such legislation credit the CFBPWC with playing a vital role in having this section repealed.[37] A sign that the status of Canadian women was gradually improving can also be seen in the decision of the federal government to finally appoint women to the unemployment commission.[38]

The women most likely to benefit from UI legislation were those working in middle-class professions such as teaching. The legislation that was enacted and its

subsequent amendments did not completely bring about the changes sought by the VBPWC and the CFBPWC. While the BPWCs were eventually successful in eliminating clauses that discriminated against married women, prejudicial attitudes towards women remained intact. Canadian women continued to be considered responsible and most suited for domestic responsibilities. Government agencies continued to direct women toward low-paying, intermittent employment that ensured they would not meet the conditions of eligibility in place to secure income assistance.[39]

The UI Act was just one legislative measure designed to ensure the financial dependence of women on male heads of households, reinforcing notions of the male family wage. Between 1945 and 1960, the Canadian government continued to adopt policies that defined a woman's place as in the home and not in the work force. The decision to reintroduce the "marriage bar" into the civil service in the late 1940s, both at federal and provincial levels, reinforced these ideas and emphasised the conception of women as an expendable, reserve pool of labour.

Restrictions governing the entry and retention of female civil servants had been in place since 1910. Female government employees were denied permanent employment status, were expected to resign upon marriage, and had no hope for advancement, as such opportunities were reserved solely for men.[40] As part of a war emergency measure, federal and provincial governments relaxed their hiring policies in the

early 1940s and recruited both married and unmarried women.[41] Shortly after the war, however, standard hiring practices were reinstated in the civil service.[42]

In 1947, the VBPWC sent letters to local MLA's, the CFBPWC, and other BPWCs in British Columbia "protesting the Dominion Government's [intention to] dismiss...married women in its employ as of March 31, 1947."[43] Recipients of the letter were asked "on behalf of all employed women of Greater Victoria...to protest this policy with the utmost vigour."[44] At the annual meeting of BPWCs in British Columbia in 1949, it was noted that employment policies adopted by the federal government were commensurate with those practised by the government of British Columbia.

Earlier that year the provincial Civil Service Commission had announced plans to replace all married women employed in its ranks. In a public statement the Civil Service Commissioner declared:

> We don't want them (married women who are civil servants) to get the idea that they are formally implanted in their jobs. All married women civil servants have been asked to submit to the commission an open dated letter of resignation to be kept on file until the time comes when they can be replaced or their positions done away with.[45]

In concert with its policy of dismissing married women from its employ, advertisements for vacancies in the federal and provincial Civil Service were directed at "men only" or "single women."[46]

The president of BPWCs in British Columbia, Hilda Cryderman, advised delegates at the meeting to "...live up to

our aims and objectives as [BPWCs and] do something to protect our married women who will be affected by such policies."[47] VBPWC member Madge Hall urged individual clubs to "send letters of protest" to government officials, emphasising how important it was that club members "keep [the issues] before the eyes of the public."[48] In the next few years the VBPWC would assert again that it was "not in accord with the policy of dismissing married women" from the civil service, and would advise members to persevere in protesting this practice by sending letters to "MLA's all over the country," in the hope that some of them would publicly challenge such employment policies.[49]

It is difficult to ascertain the extent of women's influence on policy making at this time. The concerted lobbying efforts by women's groups such as the CFBPWC, however, are credited with playing leading roles in forcing certain changes to official government policy. The most notable successes of these organisations may be seen in the decision of the federal civil service to rescind its marriage-bar in 1955 and the appointment of a woman to the federal Civil Service Commission in 1958.[50]

The late 1950s saw an expansion of employment opportunities for women in the clerical and service sector, and a significant shift in union support for issues that affected wage-earning women.[51] In spite of the social pressures to stay at home, the numbers of married women entering the paid labour force steadily rose after 1941. In

1941, married women made up approximately 13 per cent of the total female work force. By 1951, this number had increased to 30 per cent and in 1961, the number had increased to approximately 49 per cent of the total female labour force.[52]

The increased labour participation rates of married women in Canada during this period have been attributed to more lenient societal attitudes toward working women with school-age children, early marriages, family planning, and the higher education levels of women in general. An increase in consumer demand for modern homes and household equipment also created pressure for families to generate additional income. For many married women, however, waged employment remained what it always had been: a financial necessity. This is especially true of the immigrant workforce, which had increased dramatically during the post-war years. Many Italian families, for example, regarded the earnings brought home by working wives as essential. In many cases the extra money ensured the family's economic survival in times of seasonal male unemployment.[53]

The VBPWC's efforts to improve the status of Canadian women centred on achieving female representation in all levels of government. From their inception as Kumtuks in the 1920s, club members had stalwartly maintained that the status of women could only be improved through electoral representation and by appointments to public office. Women politicians, it was argued, best represented women's interests.[54] Clubwomen were encouraged to vote for electoral

candidates on the basis of their gender, rather than party affiliation. VBPWC vice-president Marguerite Maclaughlin, for example, discounted the notion that the CFBPWC advocated "petticoat government," but was, nonetheless, clear in her assertion that "women should be represented in civic affairs," and that female electoral candidates deserved the support (vote) of other women.[55] VBPWC clubwoman Norma Smith was even more forthright. At a public forum hosted by the VBPWC for candidates in an upcoming civic election, Smith "urged the audience and all women to exercise their vote and place 'more skirts around the council table.'"[56]

A cursory examination of issues brought before the house by women MLA's in British Columbia shows that the faith the VBPWC placed in female politicians to represent women's interests was not misplaced. Female politicians were strong voices in support of legislation that would benefit women, such as wage equity, married women's property rights, and maternity benefits.[57] Systemic barriers to women's advancement within Canada's political parties, however, remained firmly in place. For example, of the four women who were appointed to Cabinet positions in British Columbia between 1945 and 1969, only one (Tilly Rolston) held a portfolio. The number of women who gained seats in the BC legislature between 1920 and 1960 also reflected only a very small proportion of female candidates seeking election.[58]

As did many public interest groups, the VBPWC hoped for a better and more democratic world after World War II.[59] For the

VBPWC, this more democratic society included the rights to run for public office and to obtain employment and wages that reflected one's abilities and qualifications, not one's gender or marital status. The extent of the club's commitment to the issues of race and national origin, however, remains open to question.[60] The overt discrimination of the 1920s was gone. The clear assumption in the 1950s, however, was that immigrants were to assimilate as quickly as possible into Canadian life.

Assimilation was seen in terms of learning the English language and adopting Canadian values. Members of the VBPWC encouraged "those who have the ability and training to do so, [to] conduct classes in various phases of education, to assist [immigrants] in taking their place easily in our Canadian way of life, culturally and socially."[61] The VBPWC worked with the Citizenship Council and the Community Welfare Council in Victoria "to arrange for English lessons for new Canadians."[62] By the 1950s, the focus of the VBPWC was on the rights of the individual. The VBPWC clearly believed that immigrants who were willing to assimilate should not face discrimination in employment on the basis of race, marital status, or gender.

The VBPWC's response to the hiring policy of the local Saanich City Council demonstrates the club's understanding of individual rights on a local level. In 1952, the VBPWC claimed that it was "the right of all women to be gainfully employed regardless of race, colour, creed or marital status" and specifically congratulated the Council's "recent decision

to make further appointments of women on merit only."[63] These themes received further expression in 1953, when the VBPWC sent letters to the Prime Minister and members of parliament requesting that either existing legislation be amended "or [that] new legislation be enacted to include the word 'sex' in clauses prohibiting discrimination from employment on the basis of race, creed, colour, ancestry and origin."[64]

By the 1940s, members of the VBPWC were articulating ideas about women's work that had received only cautious expression from them in previous years. The sense of pride and accomplishment that accompanied doing a job well and assuming roles formerly reserved for men are especially evident in the rhetoric that developed around wage issues. VBPWC member and Liberal MLA, Nancy Hodges, maintained that women's proven effectiveness as workers during the war had served to undermine assumptions that waged employment was a male prerogative and that families depended upon the male family wage in order to survive. She described as "ridiculous, the belief that men were entitled to higher wages because they were the chief family supporters." "Statistics," Hodges averred, "showed that the majority of women supported families or contributed to the upkeep of a family."[65] Club president Edith Parsell declared that wartime conditions had provided working women with the "opportunity ...to establish themselves as equal workers with men in any sphere in which they qualif[ied]."[66]

However, while such conditions had allowed women to work in fields traditionally reserved for men, gendered wage-patterns ensured that women were paid considerably less than their male counterparts had been. As Nancy Hodges noted, while the "...war did a great thing for women in proving that they could take over jobs formerly only held by men...they did not get the same salaries, despite the fact they were able to do the job as well as men."[67] In the case of volunteers in the Armed Forces, for example, women received 90 cents a day while men received $1.30. The National Council of Women (NCW) achieved some success when it protested the inequalities in benefits and wages paid to servicewomen. In 1943 the federal government raised the basic wage of servicewomen to 80 per cent of the male wage for the same rank.[68]

Protests levied against other industries that paid women significantly lower wages than their male counterparts, however, were rarely as successful. In British Columbia, women such as Nancy Hodges, Tilly Rolston, and Laura Jamieson brought the wage inequities facing women engaged in war work before the legislature on many occasions, but to no avail.[69] Nancy Hodges maintained that "the payment of lower wages to women was not only a condition common to British Columbia and the civil service, but international in scope," noting also that she had "met with little success in the [BC] legislature during the war to obtain higher pay for women who had taken over the jobs of men, as well as extra responsibilities."[70]

As Alice Kessler-Harris demonstrates in her study of post-war American working women, women felt that the contingencies of the wartime economy had helped to dismantle traditional rationalisations of wage differentials between the sexes. Women's arguments for equal pay were unequivocally linked to issues of justice and fairness that were concomitant with a democratic society.[71] In spite of a steady increase in labour force participation by female workers during and after World War II, women continued to earn significantly less money than men.

Government reports show little growth in the average weekly wage paid to women compared to men's weekly wages between 1920 and 1955. In 1920, the average weekly wage for women in British Columbia was $17.36, just 55 per cent of the average male wage, while in 1955, women were earning on average $38.04 per week, or 53 per cent of the average male wage.[72] Further examples of the discrimination faced by working women can be seen in the wage differentials paid to male and female teachers. A comparison of salary levels compiled by the Dominion Bureau of Statistics in 1958 illustrates that while women had made some progress in terms of advancement within the profession, women teachers in general were still being paid much less than their male colleagues.[73]

By the 1950s, women teachers throughout Canada had become vocal supporters of equal pay legislation.[74] In British Columbia in the 1940s and 1950s, teachers exerted an

active interest in the equal pay initiatives that emerged from both local and provincial BPWCs. In Victoria, long-time VBPWC member, and former teacher, Isla Tuck, addressed the club on equal pay issues.[75] In 1951, the VBPWC agreed to send "a letter of encouragement and inspiration to women teachers who are waging war in an effort to get their salaries equal to men teachers in Vancouver..."[76] In 1952, provincial BPWC president, Nancy Jerym, included teachers in the delegation of women that met with Premier W.A.C. Bennett to discuss the implementation of equal pay legislation in the British Columbia.[77] In 1955, Hilda Cryderman was elected provincial BPWC president. Cryderman had several years of experience as head of the province's on-going committee convened to assess and suggest amendments to equal pay legislation already in effect by this time. She was also the "first woman to be elected as president of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation."[78]

The contributions made by trades unions in the area of equal pay are well documented. The principle of equal pay for equal work was adopted by the Toronto Trades and Labour Council in 1882, by the Canadian Trades and Labour Congress in 1915, and later by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1919. The ILO would ratify its support of the principle of equal pay again in 1951.[79] At times, unions have not been fully supportive of "equal pay for equal work". Union rhetoric often emphasised the potential erosion of higher wages for men because of the potential influx of low-

paid women workers. As Nancy Hodges noted in 1949, the Canadian Trades and Labour Congress was in favour of equal pay for equal work for women "not for compassionate reasons...but because...the present wage system may lower the wage standard."[80] More frequently, unions directed their attention to securing a higher paying, male family wage, an idea that benefited male wage-earners, while contributing to an ideology of economic dependence for women.[81]

The contradictions and vagaries of union support in the area of equal pay in the 1950s are most clearly demonstrated in Shirley Tillotson's study of equal pay legislation in Ontario.[82] Tillotson notes that in the majority of cases, union support for equal pay meant supporting the concept of equal pay in principle only. Statements of support from unions were often carefully worded and unenforceable.[83]

By the 1950s, Canada's major political parties were willing to adopt, at least in principle, the issue of equal pay for women. As Tillotson shows, however, party support for equal pay legislation in Canada was often strategic. By adopting such a platform, parties such as the Canadian Co-operative Federation (CCF) and the Conservative Party hoped to gain the support of the female voter.[84]

The pressure to secure equal pay legislation in Canada emerged most forcefully from women's organisations such as the CFBPWC.[85] Essentially led by Margaret Hyndman, the Ontario BPWC president, the CFBPWC's campaign for equal pay legislation in Canada resulted in the enactment of the 1951

Female Employees Fair Remuneration Act by the Ontario government.[86] Encouraged by the successful passage of equal pay bills in the Ontario and Saskatchewan legislatures, BPWCs in British Columbia intensified their own campaigns for similar legislation.[87]

As with suggestions for unemployment insurance amendments, demands for wage parity were seldom initiated by the VBPWC itself; the club was nevertheless clear on its support for resolutions on the matter issued by its provincial and national leaders. At their provincial conference in 1951, the BPWCs in British Columbia outlined their objectives:

> Whereas...many women in business, professions and occupations do not receive as much remuneration as men in similar positions, and whereas everyone, without discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work, and whereas there is no legislation in British Columbia insuring equal pay for equal work, let...the [BPWCs] make representation to the proper authorities asking for legislation granting equal pay for equal work regardless of sex and further to follow the request with an Act duly formed and complete.[88]

Letters were sent soliciting the support of local and federal politicians.[89] According to provincial president Nancy Jerym, the "deluge of letters and wires pouring into Victoria" in support of equal pay legislation "was most impressive and gratifying."[90] Initially introduced as a CCF bill, the legislation was not passed. Laura Jamieson, Vancouver BPWC clubwoman and CCF member, reported that "the CCF and the Liberals wanted it ...But Social Credit would not include it."[91]

Undeterred, the BPWCs continued to maintain a visible profile in lobbying for the legislation. Nancy Jerym met with Premier W.A.C. Bennett and presented him with a brief on the EPEW legislation, and also "interviewed members of his Cabinet and many of the MLA's on this matter."[92] Jerym reported to delegates at the second provincial conference in 1953 that "the Government was much impressed by the representation made by the [BPWC members via] letters and telephone," and that the Social Credit government in British Columbia was in the process of presenting its own "Bill... before the house."[93] The VBPWC assumed the responsibility for ensuring that "the House Galleries be packed with women" for the final reading of the proposed legislation. The meeting concluded with letters being sent to Nancy Hodges, Tilly Rolston, and Laura Jamieson, "expressing our appreciation for the part they have played and interest and support given in bringing the equal pay Bill before the House."[94]

Social Credit's equal pay legislation passed in the British Columbia Legislature on October 14, 1953.[95] The Act prohibited an employer from "paying a female employee at a rate of pay less than the rate of pay paid to a male employee employed...for the same work done in the same establishment," but allowed a "difference in the rate of pay between a female and a male employee based on any factor other than sex..."[96]

The VBPWC, in association with other BPWCs in British Columbia, made strengthening provisions in the legislation an on-going priority in the following years. Nancy Hodges had

recognised the limitations of Social Credit's equal pay bill before it passed, but had advised club members to "accept the Equal Pay Bill as it now stands."[97] Securing amendments to existing legislation was considered more attainable and less expensive than formulating entirely new legislation.

While the misgivings of individual club members are mostly absent from the official record, they might have echoed those expressed by other equal pay supporters. One CCF member, for example, complained "that the Bill was too loosely drawn and left too many loopholes for unscrupulous employers."[98] Liberal MP, Bruce Brown, commented that the "British Columbia's women [had] been let down pretty badly" in the final interpretation of the bill by the Social Credit government.[99] Liberal Party leader, Art Laing, concurred, noting that "The phrase 'same work' will make the bill utterly useless. It will have no effect at all."[100]

At their provincial BPWC meeting in 1955, BPWCs in British Columbia agreed to evaluate and protest inequities embedded in the current Act. One delegate at the meeting, Mrs. M. Campbell, targeted the latitude in job classification allowed to employers under the legislation. Campbell felt that the legislation "would be more effective if it were 'The Rate for the Job' as it was in Britain."[101] Campbell went on to suggest that legislation on its own was "not sufficient." "People," she said, "must be educated" not to accept gender as a basis for wage discrimination.[102]

Job evaluations were often gender-specific as employers incorporated historical conceptions of the value of work and skill into their job ratings. Differences in job content directly reflected differences in wage scales. Reasons cited by employers as justification for paying women less than men included, but were not limited to, the belief that a woman's family responsibilities weakened her commitment to the labour force, and that female job segregation effectively eliminated any meaningful comparison with men's jobs.[103]

Delegates at the provincial conference in 1955 concluded their discussion on equal pay by recommending that a committee investigate the level of support for equal pay from organised labour, and if forthcoming, request their assistance in securing amendments to the existing legislation.[104] It is unclear what sort of relationships existed between the unions and the BPWC provincially, or between the VBPWC and local trade union councils. It is evident, however, that the custom of drawing on the club's own membership and other middle-class women to evaluate wages and labour standards were undergoing a gradual shift. By the 1950s, BPWCs were willing to view organised labour as an ally in the fight to secure a more equitable society.

It is reasonable to assume that in the case of equal pay legislation, as in other instances, the VBPWC and its provincial leaders were guided by the actions of the CFBPWC. At the CFBPWC's national convention in 1956, Margaret Hyndman had the support of delegates when she proposed that "the word

'equivalent' meaning 'work of equal value'" be used to replace references in equal pay legislation to "identical or substantially identical" work.[105] Equal pay for equal work depended on evaluating jobs that were identical in content; equal value, on the other hand, expanded this definition, depending on comparisons among jobs that were dissimilar in content, but that required similar levels of "skill, effort, and responsibility."[106]

The passage of equal pay laws in the 1950s had little impact on the lives of most wage-earning women. The legislation guaranteed wage equality only to those engaged in the 'same' work as men. Segregation in the workplace and distinctions in job content ensured that unwilling employers could easily circumvent the legislation. In its original form, equal pay legislation could guarantee wage equality only in certain professional occupational categories such as teaching. The CFBPWC and the VBPWC sought to amend the wording of the legislation in such a way as to provide wage parity to a broader base of working women. By adopting a language of rights that emphasised equal opportunity in the workplace and equal wages for men and women who performed similar work, the VBPWC challenged traditional ideologies that had defined entitlement to work and wages in terms of marital status and gender. In spite of its weaknesses, the passage of equal pay legislation did affirm the VBPWC's mandate that working women be accepted as permanent participants in the wage-earning work force. The club firmly

believed that equal pay legislation validated the argument that women workers were as competent and as responsible as men were believed to be, and that as such, were entitled to the same rights and wages expected by men. Equal pay laws formally embodied, at least in principle, the notion that women could engage in the same work as men did, and that in doing so, they were entitled to the same wages.

The VBPWC's methods for securing changes that would improve the status of working women were conventional. The club believed wholeheartedly that government and public policy would be transformed as more women attained positions of influence in governing bodies. To achieve these goals, clubwomen were encouraged to take an interest in how public policies would impact women. To remedy inequities in existing or new legislation, club members were asked to elect women for public office. Objections to hiring practices or social programmes that discriminated against women were carefully expressed in the form of resolutions.

While it is difficult to know just how much attention was paid to the club's precisely worded objections, the sheer number of adopted resolutions documents the club's persistence in these areas. Through public forums, the club debated issues that affected women.[107] In doing so, they drew public attention to policies that discriminated against women on the basis of gender and marital status. The VBPWC was also quick to remind the public that not all women were provided for financially by men.

Any assessment of the progress of the VBPWC must take into account the exigencies of the period. Between 1940 and 1960, the Canadian government continued to adopt policies that defined a woman's place as in the home and not the work force, that ensured the financial dependence of married women on male heads of households, and that reinforced notions of the male family wage. Against this backdrop, the VBPWC continued to argue that Canadian women had the right to engage in broader political and economic spheres than had heretofore been made available to them, and to challenge traditional ideologies that had defined entitlement to work in terms of marital status and gender.

[1]Ruth Roach Pierson, "Canadian Women and the Second World War," *Historical Papers,* vol. 37 (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1983), vol. 37, 19.

[2]Ruth Roach Pierson, *"They're still Women After All." The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986), 61. The numbers of women in the labour force increased from about 638,000 in 1939 to an estimated 1,077,00 by 1944.

[3]Pierson, *"They're still Women After All,"* 130; Carole Paula Thornton, "Women of the Victoria Shipyards 1942-1945: An Oral History" (University of Victoria: Masters Thesis, 1998). In Victoria, for example, women worked in both the Yarrows and Victoria Machinery Depot shipyards.

[4]Elizabeth Forbes, *With Enthusiasm and Faith. History of the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs - La Fédération Canadienne des Clubs de Femmes de Carrières Libérales et Commerciales, 1930-1972* (Ontario: The Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women, 1974), 117. VBPWC members Margaret Hall and Nancy Hodges were instrumental in promoting the idea to other clubs.

[5]Leila Rupp and Verta Taylor, *Survival in the Doldrums. The American Women's Rights Movement, 1945 to the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[6]Forbes, *With Enthusiasm and Faith,* 126-135.

[7]Between 1921 and 1929, fifty-four (31%) Kumtuks were employed in clerical work.

[8]Club records don't indicate whether ownership belonged solely to the woman named as proprietor, or if the ownership was shared dually with her spouse or other family members.

[9]Veronica Strong-Boag, "Canada's Wage-earning Wives and the Construction of the Middle-Class, 1945-1960," *Journal of Canadian Studies* vol. 29, no. 3 (Fall 1994), 5-25.

[10]Department of Labour, *Women at Work in Canada. A Fact Book on the Female Labour Force, 1964* (Ottawa: Queens Printer, 1965), 28-29. In the 1950s, clerical and retail work employed the majority of working women in Canada, followed by service occupations.

[11]Ibid., 19. The increased participation rates of married women in the labour force after 1941 is especially notable. In 1941, married women made up approximately 13 per cent of the total female work force. By 1951, this number had increased to 30 per cent. In 1961, married women were calculated to be approximately 49 per cent of the total female labour force.

[12]VBPWC records indicate that thirty-nine women were listed as Miss and six women were not recorded by any title in 1948.

[13]Business and Professional Women's Club's of British Columbia and the Yukon, 1948-1969 (hereafter Provincial Club Records), Minutes of the First Provincial Board Meeting, 10 October 1948.

[14]Provincial Club Records, 10 October 1948; VBPWC Minutes, 14 October 1948. The same issue was addressed by the VBPWC a few days later. To this end, a resolution was passed "recommending that eligible [immigrant] women...be urged to take steps to become Canadian citizens."

[15]Provincial Club Records, Minutes of the Second Provincial Board Meeting, 3-5 September 1949. VBPWC Minutes, 11 February 1946. The VBPWC went on "record supporting the motion and that all Japanese Canadians should become Canadian citizens. The motion was "passed 11 to 9," and a "letter sent to Society of Friends saying [the] motion [was] supported by a small majority."

[16]VBPWC Minutes, 8 June 1959.

[17]VBPWC Minutes, President's Report 1939-1940.

[18]Ibid.

[19]VBPWC Scrapbook, *Victoria Daily Times*, 5 May 1941; VBPWC Minutes, 8 February 1943.

[20]VBPWC Minute, 11 February 1946; Connie Carter and Eileen Daoust, "From Home to House: Women in the BC Legislature, "*Not Just Pin Money. Selected Essays on the History of Women's Work in British Columbia* (Victoria BC: Camosun College, 1984), 394. Hodges introduced her motion before the legislature in November 1945.

[21]"Nationally Organized Societies in Federation," *Abridged Report of the National Council of Women of Canada, 1943,* 153. PABC, ADD MSS 2818, Box 3. At the CFBPWC's annual convention later that year, BPWCs in British Columbia were congratulated for being "the most 'up-and-doing' of the provinces..., as they have been able to persuade their Government to appoint three women on their Provincial Reconstruction Committee."

[22]Gail Cuthbert Brandt, "'Pigeoned-Holed and Forgotten': The Work of the Subcommittee on the Post-War Problems of Women, 1943," *Histoire sociale—Social History* vol. XV, no. 29 (May 1982), 241. Areas of investigation were: agricultural policy, conservation and the development of natural resources, housing and community planning, and post-war employment. The committee was chaired by Dr. James, Principal of McGill University and convened by Ian Mackenzie, Minister of Pensions and Health. The committee's original board members included: Hon. D. Mackenzie, Chief Commissioner, Board of Grain Commissioners for Canada; J. McLean, President Canadian Packers Ltd.; Dr. E. Montpetit, Secretary-General, Université de Montréal; T. Moore, President Trades and Labour

Congress of Canada; and Dr. R. Wallace, Principal, Queen's University. Dr. Leonard Marsh, former Director of Social Research at McGill University, was appointed Research Adviser.

[23]Cuthbert Brant, "'Pigeoned-Holed and Forgotten,'" 239-259. The final report of the Subcommittee contained several proposals for improving the status of Canadian women. They included the following: "equality of remuneration, improved working conditions, opportunity for advancement, freedom of choice for married women [seeking employment outside the home], improved coverage for women in social security programmes, and better protection under labour codes."

[24]Pierson, *"They're Still Women After All,"* 48-49, 55. On 1 January 1947, the tax exemption for married women was reduced from $600 to $250.

[25]Anne Porter, "Women and Income Security in the Post-War Period: The Case of Unemployment Insurance, 1945-1962," *Labour/Le Travail* vol. 31 (Spring 1993), 116.

[26]Department of Labour, *Canadian Labour Market* (June 1946), 23, as quoted by Porter, "Women and Income Security," 115.

[27]Cuthbert Brant, "Pigeoned-Holed and Forgotten," 250, 253.

[28]Porter, "Women and Income Security," 114-115.

[29]Ruth Roach Pierson, "Gender and the Unemployment Insurance Debates in Canada, 1934-1940," *Labour/Le Travail* vol. 25 (Spring 1990), 79.

[30]Porter, "Women and Income Security, 135.

[31]Ibid., 127-128.

[32]Ibid., 115-117.

[33]Ibid., 126-127, 129.

[34]Forbes, *With Enthusiasm and Faith,* 57.

[35]VBPWC Records, 26 October 1942; 14 March 1949; 8 June 1956; Porter, "Women and Income Security," 137; Forbes, *With Enthusiasm and Faith,* 57, 59, 60, 64-65, 90.

[36]VBPWC Records, 10 December 1956.

[37]Porter, "Women and Income Security," 137. Two of the examples cited are: Canada, Committee of Inquiry into Unemployment Insurance (Gill Committee), Report 38; and Josie Svanhuit, Submission to the Committee of Inquiry into Unemployment Insurance, 1961.

[38]Alison Prentice et al., *Canadian Women. A History* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1988), 332. The authors note that this happened before

the 1960s, but not when. VBPWC records make no mention of this issue after 1955.

[39]Porter, "Women and Income Security," 138-139.

[40]Prentice et al., *Canadian Women,* 224.

[41]VBPWC Scrapbook, *Victoria Daily Times,* 5 July 1941.

[42]British Columbia, "Civil Service Act, 1945," *Revised Statutes, 1948,* c. 11, s. 79. In British Columbia, the Civil Service Act maintained that "any person who has served in His Majesty's Forces in the Great War of 1914 to 1918 or in the present war...shall...be entitled to preferential selection" in the Civil Service.

[43]VBPWC Minutes, 18 February 1947

[44]Ibid.

[45]VBPWC Scrapbook, *Victoria Daily* Times, 8 August 1949.

[46]Nationally Organized Societies in Federation," *Abridged Report of the National Council of Women of Canada, 1949,* 128; Provincial Club Records, 3-5 September 1949.

[47]Provincial Club Records, 3-5 September 1949.

[48]Ibid.

[49]VBPWC Minutes, 6 October 1951; VBPWC Minutes, 12 May 1952.

[50]Prentice et al., *Canadian Women,* 332, 306; Forbes, *With Enthusiasm and Faith,* 68.

[51]Department of Labour, *Women at Work in Canada,* 28-29; Porter, "Women and Income Security," 143; Shirley Tillotson "Human Rights Law as a Prism: Women's Organizations, Unions, and Ontario's Female Employees Fair Remuneration Act, 1951," *Canadian Historical Review,* vol. 72, no. 4 (December 1991), 532-557.

[52]Department of Labour, *Women at Work in Canada,* 21.

[53]Department of Labour, *Women at Work in Canada,* 19; Veronica Strong-Boag, "Canada's Wage-earning Wives and the Construction of the Middle-Class, 1945-1960," *Journal of Canadian Studies* vol. 29, no. 3 (Fall 1994), 5-25; Franca Iacovetta, "From Contadina to Worker: Southern Italian Immigrant Working Women in Toronto, 1947-1962," *Rethinking Canada. The Promise of Women's History,* eds. Veronica Strong-Boag and Anita Clair Fellman (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd., 1991), 376-395. Iacovetta notes that in 1961, "almost 11 per cent of over a million

working women in Canada were European-born, of whom Italian women comprised over 17 per cent."

[54]VBPWC Minutes, 15 November 1954.

[55]Ibid.

[56]VBPWC Scrapbook, *Victoria Daily Colonist,* 1 December 1954.

[57]Carter and Daoust, "From Home to House," 389-405.

[58]Linda Erickson, "Parties, Ideology, and Feminist Action: Women and Political Representation in British Columbia Politics," *In the Presence of Women. Representation in Canadian Governments*, eds. Jane Arscott and Linda Trimble (Toronto: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1997), 113. Between 1920 and 1937, for example, only 4 per cent of the 800 candidates who ran for election in British Columbia were women. Although the proportion of women in the BC legislature increased to 10 per cent in 1941, this level of representation would not be achieved again until 1972.

[59]See Shirley Tillotson, "Class and Community in Canadian Welfare Work, 1933-1960," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 32, no. 1 (Spring 1997), 63-92; Shirley Tillotson, "Citizen Participation in the Welfare State. An Experiment, 1945-57,' *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. LXXV, no. 4 (1994), 511-542.

[60]VBPWC Minutes, 10 October 1953; VBPWC Scrapbook, *Victoria Daily Colonist*, undated clipping, February 1954. The VBPWC recognised that immigration was changing the cultural map of Canadian life: "Folk festivals, representations of all nations are becoming an integral part of the life of every community and our clubs take their part in assisting with these." Immigrants were welcomed by the VBPWC and invited to "share with us their cultures and skills." The VBPWC presumed, nonetheless, that immigrants in the 1950s would integrate willingly into Canadian culture.

[61]VBPWC Minutes, 10 October 1953.

[62]VBPWC Scrapbook, *Victoria Daily Colonist*, undated clipping, May 1954.

[63]VBPWC Minutes, 12 May 1952.

[64]VBPWC Minutes, 9 February 1953.

[65]VBPWC Scrapbook, unidentified clipping, 30 March 1949.

[66]VBPWC Minutes, President's Report, 1943-1944.

[67]VBPWC Scrapbook, unidentified clipping, 30 March 1949.

[68]Pierson, *"They're still Women After All,"* 114, 116.

[69]*Vancouver Province*, 13 March 1943, 9; *Vancouver Sun*, 26 September 1944, 7; *Victoria Colonist*, 13 February 1945, 7; *Victoria Daily Times*, 15 November 1945, 6; VBPWC Scrapbook, unidentified clipping, 30 March 1949.

[70]VBPWC Scrapbook, unidentified clipping, 30 March 1949.

[71]Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out To Work. A History of America's Wage-earning Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 91.

[72]Josie Bannerman, Kathy Chopik, and Ann Zurbrigg, "Cheap at Half the Price: The History of the Fight for Equal Pay in B.C.," *Not Just Pin Money*, 309. Statistics compiled from the Minimum Wage Reports of British Columbia and from the Annual Reports of the Department of Labour (B.C.). In 1920, men were on average earning $27.97 per week. In 1955, male workers in British Columbia earned on average $70.47 per week.

[73]*Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1958*, "Classification of Elementary Teachers and Principals in Public Schools According to Annual Salary, 1957-1958." Teachers' salaries are listed by area, type of school and gender. There were 6,891 teachers in British Columbia in total. Female teachers constituted 70% (4,833) of the teachers in the province and male teachers 30% (2,058). The lowest salary level was $1,925 and went up to $9,525 and over per annum. Fifty per cent of the female teachers (2,402) in the province received salaries in the range of $1,925 per annum to $3,624 per annum. The percentage of male teachers in the same salary range was 36% (739). Fifty per cent of the male teachers (1,043) received salaries ranging from $1,925 to $4,224. In the upper ranges of salary ($4,925-$9,525 and over) only 477 women (10%) in the province were paid that highly compared to 656 male teachers (32%).

[74]Doris French, *High Button Bootstraps. The Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario, 1918-1968* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1968), 121-141; Mlle Laure Gaudrealt, "Situation Du Personnel Enseignant Dans Les Mileux Ruraux," translated in *Addresses and Proceedings of the Canadian Conference on Education, Ottawa, February 16-20, 1958*, eds. George G. Croskery and Gerald Nason (Ottawa: Mutual Press, 1958), 496.

[75]VBPWC Minutes, 18 October 1944; *The Fernwood News*, December 1999, 8. Isla Tuck joined the Kumtuks in 1926. It is possible that she raised the topic of equal pay on more than one occasion. In many cases, the minutes of the VBPWC only note that the subject was raised, not who initiated the discussion. Tuck was both a teacher and the principal at the Spring Ridge Elementary School in Fernwood for forty years. Spring Ridge was an elementary school from 1887 until 1943.

[76]VBPWC Minutes, 6 October 1951.

[77]Provincial Club Records, 2 May 1953.

[78]Provincial Club Records, 8 October 1955.

[79]Bannerman, Chopik, and Zurbrigg, "Cheap at Half the Price," 302.

[80]VBPWC Scrapbook, unidentified clipping, 30 March 1949.

[81]Julie White, *Sisters and Solidarity. Women and Unions in Canada* (Toronto: Thompson Publishing, Inc., 1993), 36-43.

[82]Tillotson "Human Rights Law as a Prism," 532-557.

[83]Ibid., 539-540.

[84]Ibid., 540, 542.

[85]N. Griffiths, *A Splendid Vision: Centennial History of the National Council of Women of Canada, 1893-1993* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1993), 260-261. The NCW were also strong supporters of equal pay legislation.

[86]Forbes, *With Enthusiasm and Faith*, 75.

[87]VBPWC Minutes, 8 June 1953. Hyndman's success provided other clubs with the inspiration and guidelines to conduct their own campaigns.

[88]Provincial Club Records, 8 October 1951.

[89]VBPWC Minutes, 9 February 1953; VBPWC Minutes, 4 March 1953. Of those politicians written to, only two replies have been recorded. The Solicitor General, R. Campney, advised the BPWC that "close consideration would be given to the issue," and Hon. George Pearkes assured the VBPWC of his "support and assistance."

[90]VBPWC Minutes, 2 May 1953.

[91]Ibid.

[92]Provincial Club Records, 10-12 October 1953. President's Report.

[93]Ibid.

[94]Provincial Club Records, 10-12 October 1953.

[95]Victoria Daily Colonist, 15 October 1953; "Equal Pay Act, 1953," British Columbia, *Statutes*, c. 6, s. 3.

[96]Ibid.

[97]Provincial Club Records, 10-12 October 1953.

[98]VBPWC Scrapbook, unidentified clipping, 15 October, 1953.

[99]*Victoria Daily Colonist*, 15 October 1953, 6.

[100]Ibid.

[101]Provincial Club Records, 30 January 1955.

[102]Ibid.

[103]Alice Kessler-Harris, *A Woman's Wage. Historical Meanings and Social Consequences* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1990), 98-99.

[104]Provincial Club Records, 30 January 1955.

[105]Forbes, *With Enthusiasm and Faith*, 77-78.

[106]Bannerman, Chopik, and Zurbrigg, "Cheap at Half the Price," 308.

[107]VBPWC Minutes, 26 October 1942; VBPWC Minutes, 28 December 1942; VBPWC Minutes, 8 February 1943; VBPWC Minutes, 9 February 1945.

CONCLUSION

This thesis presents a focused examination of one group of business and professional women and their responses to issues that affected working women such as entitlement to work, wages, and the impact of unemployment over a forty-year period. This study shows how the Kumtuks and later the VBPWC dealt with gender discrimination in the workplace and in government social policies at both the provincial and federal levels. As a result, other issues taken up by the VBPWC between 1921 and 1960 such as the club's interest in the United Nations, and in peace issues remain open for investigation.

The records of the VBPWC provide an insight into the concerns of a group of women who saw the necessity of securing for themselves both a permanent and visible position within their own community. These were also women who struggled with difficulties in asserting themselves as fundamentally different from philanthropic, reform-oriented associations such as the LCW and the YWCA, and the necessity of working with them in the community. The responses of the VBPWC, for example, particularly in the 1930s, to issues concerning older women, domestic service, and related wage issues, seldom deviated from the approaches taken by other middle class women's

organisations. Service to the community remained a fundamental part of the daily activities of the VBPWC. As the years progressed, however, the club shifted its focus to issues that directly affected working women.

The VBPWC's responses to the women and men who lived, worked, and sought work within their own communities were often flawed and inappropriate by today's standards. In the 1920s and 1930s, for example, race and class played an important part in the way this group of Anglo-Celtic, professional working women perceived economic and social injustice. These limitations are especially evident in the Kumtuks' interest in specific labour legislation such as the Girls' and Women's Protection Act. Not only were Asian women barred from club membership, Asian men were regarded as a potential threat to the earning ability of white working-class women.

In the 1930s, the VBPWC addressed the conditions and wages faced by domestic servants primarily from the perspective of the employer, not the worker herself. Between 1940 and 1960, however, distinctions based on race and class had diminished. By the late 1940s, both provincial BPWC and VBPWC records indicate that Asian women were being welcomed as potential members to BPWCs throughout the province, and that a more inclusive

membership policy was in the process of being adopted towards immigrant women in general.

As a club of working women, the VBPWC challenged entrenched beliefs regarding the social position of women. From the club's inception, married women had played an active role within the club. In the 1930s, the rights of married women as wage-earners were taken up by the VBPWC, although with some caution. In their defence of women workers, the VBPWC initially made arguments based on the working woman's inherent right to work, later adopting the more conservative argument based on the ideas of sole-supports and economic need. In the post-war years, the VBPWC argued more forcefully that women were entitled to obtain employment and wages that reflected their abilities and qualifications, not their gender or marital status. If the issues the club advanced, such as equal pay laws, initially benefited women engaged in professional occupations, the changes the club demanded to such legislation promised wage and employment equality to working women in general.

While many of the demands made by the VBPWC were not realised within the time frame of this study, their demands for change were, nonetheless, progressive. Although the wording of the 1953 Equal Pay Act was amended in the 1969

Human Rights Act, to include the proviso that women could not be paid less than men who were employed doing "the same work or substantially the same work done in the same establishment," the legislation continued to be easily circumvented.[1] In 1973, the Human Rights Act maintained for the first time that "the concept of skill, effort, and responsibility...subject to such factors...as seniority systems, merit systems, and systems that measure earnings by quantity or quality of production, be used to determine what is similar or substantially similar work."[2] Legislation prohibiting discrimination in connection with conditions of employment, or in advertisements for employment, on the basis of sex and marital status, appeared for the first time in the same Act.[3]

The work done by the VBPWC and its affiliates would inspire a later generation of women to work for further legislative reforms. One example will serve as a case in point. In 1966, the CFBPWC convened a Committee for the Equality of Women (CEW) using the Declaration of Human Rights as its guide. The CEW petitioned the federal government to investigate amongst other things, "discriminatory laws, outdated legislation, educational opportunities, taxation, automation, [and] immigration."[4] Responding to pressure from the CFBPWC and other women's

organisations, Prime Minister Pearson empanelled a federal Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada. The CFBPWC President, Louise Card, declared that

> This is what we have been striving for and working towards since we wrote our aims and objectives 37 years ago...The establishment of this Commission, however, does not represent the end of our work--it merely indicates the beginning.[5]

After the publication of the Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in 1971, the VBPWC invited all major women's organisations in Victoria to join them to discuss the Report's recommendations. The still active Victoria Status of Women's Action Group emerged from this meeting.[6]

The years between 1921 and 1960 were not decades of stagnation for women's organisations. As the Kumtuks and subsequent activism of the VBPWC illustrate, the promise of equality that the franchise offered and potential the vote had to secure improvements that would benefit Canadian women in general had a lasting impact on the lives of many women. In spite of the harsh realities of daily life for working women between 1920 and 1960, these years were characterised by continuing activity and significant changes for Canadian women in general. The VBPWC, both as a single entity and as a member of a larger association of women (the provincial BPWC and the CFBPWC), played an important role in raising public awareness about the

unequal place occupied by women in Canadian society. In doing so, the VBPWC helped lay the organisational groundwork for future demands by women for extended social and political rights, and challenged the dominant cultural image of women that had defined women, first and foremost, in terms of marital status and motherhood. The club's willingness to raise issues such as equal access to unemployment insurance, employment opportunities, and pay equity, assumed then and continues to assume, importance as more women enter and remain in the workforce.

[1]"Human Rights Act, 1969," British Columbia, *Statutes*, c. 10, s. 6-7.

[2]"Human Rights Code of British Columbia Act, 1973," British Columbia, *Statutes*, c. 119, s. 7.

[3]Ibid., c. 119, s. 6.

[4]Elizabeth Forbes, *With Enthusiasm and Faith. History of the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs - La Fédération Canadienne des Clubs de Femmes de Carrières Libérales et Commerciales, 1930-1972* (Ontario: The Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women, 1974), 100.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid., 24.

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