

## **EXPERIENCING PATRIARCHY**

EXPERIENCING PATRIARCHY:  
WOMEN, WORK AND TRADE UNIONISM AT EATON'S

BY

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A Thesis  
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies  
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy  
McMaster University

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (1991)  
(Sociology)

MCMASTER UNIVERSITY  
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE:     Experiencing Patriarchy: Women, Work and Trade  
          Unionism at Eaton's.

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NUMBER OF PAGES: 345

## **ABSTRACT**

This research tested the applicability of Sylvia Walby's theoretical model of patriarchy to a case study of women working and unionizing at the T.Eaton Co. The focus was on the two time periods 1947-1952 and 1984-86 when a unionization drive was underway at Eaton's. In depth interviewing was conducted with over ninety participants in the events. Support was found for the aspects of Walby's model that pertain to patriarchal relations within paid work. In addition, forms of women's resistance and empowerment were examined specifically in relation to the 1984 unionization events. It was found that women's political action contains components that traditional politics do not explain. Overall, the findings of this case study strongly support Walby's position that gender inequality in society as a whole cannot be understood without the concept of patriarchy (1990).



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should first like to acknowledge with the deepest respect my supervisor Peta Tancred. Through the long process of "experiencing patriarchy" Peta championed both me and my work and for this I will be forever grateful.

I should also like to acknowledge the intellectual and emotional support I received from my supervisory committee. In particular, Meg Luxton taught me to listen to women and to hold sacred the experiences and perceptions as of their lives as the true story; Robert Storey challenged my analysis by presenting the men's story; Jane Synge provided a constant supportive presence.

Many people contributed to the completion of this thesis through their ideas and encouragement and to all of them I offer my thanks. Special thanks go to Judy Grant, David MacGregor and Jane Vock who read and commented on parts of this work. I would also like to express my appreciation to RWDSU, in particular, Donna Johanson, Eileen Tallman Sufrin and Ernie Arnold and all the women and men at Eaton's who shared their story.

I am grateful to Labour Canada and the Labour Studies Programme at McMaster University for their financial assistance.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Since the 1960's, the number of women joining unions has skyrocketed to surpass the rate of increase for men (White, 1980). It is true that most of these women are predominantly white collar workers but the historical reality is that women generally had limited involvement as union members. When this project was originally conceived, we set out to examine why so many women were now joining unions and what the factors were that were facilitating their ability to unionize. Additionally, we intended to explore what factors had inhibited women's membership in trade unions in the past, and to what extent these factors were continuing to present a barrier to women's full participation.

When an organizing drive began at T. Eaton's department stores in January of 1984, it afforded a unique opportunity to research the above concerns. First, Eaton's department stores included over eighty per cent female workers. Second, the T. Eaton company was privately owned and represented a sector of the labour market where few women workers were currently unionized. Third, in the 1940's

there had been a five-year-long organizing drive that did not attain certification and would facilitate an historical comparison with present day events.

Prevailing explanations for women's low levels of unionization generally focus, according to Julie White, on some aspect of attitudinal "blame". On the one hand, male trade unionists' "discriminatory attitudes" towards women workers were to blame and on the other, women were at "fault" for not wanting to organize themselves or make a commitment to unions (Ibid.,29). White's survey of the status of women in unions concluded that, "...attitudes of either women or unions, or both, are of questionable importance in the overall rate of unionization among women" (Ibid.,50).

Proponents of the new studies in women's labour history suggest that the unique focus on "women unionizing, or in unions", contributed to improbable perceptions in the same way that many of women's significant contributions to the development of the labour movement as a whole, as wives of union members for example, had in the past been neglected due to this narrow approach (Sangster,1981). The need for a broad approach to the study of women and trade unions was reinforced by the editors of the anthology entitled Union Sisters, which comprised the "...first attempt to record and

analyze the experiences of women in unions in Canada" (Briskin and Yanz, 1983:iv).<sup>1</sup> They concluded that an examination of the wider social, political and economic context which defines women's oppressive work experience, relative to men's, revealed a decisive gap in the literature (Ibid.).

It is the aim of this thesis to contribute to the developing literature on women and unions by analysing the events at Eaton's from a structural feminist theoretical perspective that will explain the larger question of gender inequality in society as a whole. Within this feminist literature a major debate has been waged over whether capitalism or patriarchy is the source of women's oppression, with a sub-debate over the use and/or misuse of the concept of patriarchy in this context (Barrett, 1980; Eisenstein, ed., 1979; Sargent, ed., 1981).<sup>2</sup>

The continuation of these feminist debates can be attributed, in part, to the ongoing dialogue, struggle and

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<sup>1</sup>Many of the articles in this anthology first appeared in a special issue of Resources for Feminist Research (RFR) on women in trade unions (July, 1981).

<sup>2</sup>These references are meant to provide an access route to this large body of literature and are in no way meant to be a comprehensive listing. They represent some of the most important works. For more recent surveys of this debate see Walby (1986; 1990).

ultimate revitalization that have been occurring within all schools of feminisms by way of the substantive critiques of women of colour, which cross-cut all perspectives (e.g., Hooks, 1982, 1984; Joseph, 1981). However, the debates apparently escalated to a point where an impasse was reached in the development of feminist theory. Many theorists were calling for an analysis of "capitalism without patriarchy" to resolve them from this impasse (Van Allan, 1984; Ehrenreich, 1984).

Given the paucity of research on patriarchy, relative to capitalism, it seemed that one way to escape the impasse would be to move toward "patriarchy - without capitalism." Overall, Canadian theorists have contributed substantively to these ongoing debates, primarily defining the theoretical terrain in the conceptual terms of class and gender or socialism and feminism (see e.g., Fox, ed., 1980; Hamilton and Barrett, 1986).<sup>3</sup> The concept of patriarchy has rarely been used to inform Canadian research, and when it has been utilized, it was generally in a

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<sup>3</sup>The citations listed are meant to provide access to this body of literature, as opposed to being inclusive. Some of the important early contributions came from Benston, (1969); Morton (1972); and Secombe (1974). More recently, we see a continuation of this tradition in the tenth anniversary issue of Studies in Political Economy 30 (1989).

descriptive rather than theoretical or analytical form.<sup>4</sup> More recently, some Canadian researchers have argued that the specific debates concerning a theory of patriarchy be taken on for the sake of the development of feminist theory (i.e., Fox, 1988).

This study was therefore designed to explore the possibilities of patriarchy as an analytical and methodological framework for understanding gender inequality. Theoretically, the most promising work conceptualizing patriarchy, at the time that this thesis was begun, had been presented by Heidi Hartmann (1981). She argued that, "The material base upon which patriarchy rests lies most fundamentally in men's control over women's labour power" (Ibid., 15). We went into the field with this understanding of patriarchy as a loose working hypothesis and with the expectation that the methodological approach would lead us in further theoretical directions.

The methodological approach sprang from the pursuit of a distinct feminist methodology. One assumption that is congruent this aim is that the research process begins from the "standpoint of women" (Smith, 1974, 1977, 1979, 1981;

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<sup>4</sup>Angela Miles (1983) makes this point in relation to the anthology, Hidden in the Household edited by Bonnie Fox (1980) cited above, but it is still valid generally for the more recent Canadian literature cited.

Rose,1983; Hartsock,1983b). In other words, we begin from women's perceptions and experiences of the world and then examine how this consciousness fits in with the structures and ideologies that shape and determine their lives.

Technically, the research methodology involved a case study approach to the unionization events at Eaton's, which included in-depth, open-ended interviewing of the various participants. The first set of events took place in the 1940's. A five-year long organizing drive was undertaken by the Retail Wholesale Department Store Union and was unsuccessful in attaining certification. The second set of events, as noted above, began with an organizing drive in January of 1984 ending in a matter of months with six stores in Southwestern Ontario certified. Following this, the workers went out on strike on November 30,1984 for five and a half months. One year later the workers voted to decertify the union.

One of the most important findings of this study was that the initial questions I had formulated on women's trade union behaviour were neither valid nor applicable in the context of women unionizing at Eaton's. For example, one assumption was that trade unions represented a strategy for improving women's working conditions. Hence, the trend toward more women joining unions meant, at best, that the

degree of female oppression experienced in paid work was lessening. At worst, it was a trend toward changes in gender relations. Both were seemingly positive outcomes. In addition, the women organizing at Eaton's in the 1980's, relative to the 1940's, had laws legislating against discrimination on the basis of sex, age and marital status, for example, lending credence to the assumption, that at least in an historical, comparative sense, the degree of gender inequality appeared to be decreasing.

The study of Eaton's does not support the assumption of gains being made toward women's emancipation at work or in trade unions. Instead, it was found that women were facing less inequality at Eaton's in 1984, than in the 1940's; it had, however, taken on a more pervasive, oppressive form. It was also found that the women at Eaton's did not initially embrace unionization as a means to improve their working conditions but rather as a backlash against their employers' breach of paternalism. In other words, the women at Eaton's did not envision the union as a vehicle for their liberation. Moreover, their subsequent experiences of the union proved that it was, in fact, as much a site of patriarchal relations as their work organization.

These results underscore the fact that women's experiences of the world are significantly different from

those of men, requiring new modes of research, new questions and new understandings that are not based on male models, to explain their behaviour. In conducting research from "the standpoint of women" one experiences the "ground shifting beneath one's feet" to paraphrase Dorothy Smith's often repeated quote (1979)<sup>5</sup>.

In what follows, it will be argued that gender inequality at work or in unions cannot be understood without the concept of patriarchy. This thesis details the experience of patriarchy as recounted by the women at Eaton's. This account includes not only how the women came to understand and know patriarchy, but also how they enabled themselves to fight this oppression.

Chapter two reviews the feminist theoretical debates relating to patriarchy. It will be argued that the recent theory of patriarchy proposed by Sylvia Walby (1986,1990) provides a cogent model for understanding the women's experiences at Eaton's. Chapter three argues for a distinct feminist methodology and presents the methodological approach used in this study as a contribution toward this

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<sup>5</sup>While Smith uses this phrase also in relation to patriarchy (1979:53) it is in her discussion of capitalism that it is elucidated. She states, "It is important to preserve a sense of capitalism as an essentially dynamic process continually transforming the 'ground' on which we stand so that we are always looking at a continually changing historical process" (Ibid.,6).



goal. Chapters four, five and six detail the historical social construction of the patriarchal division of labour at Eaton's. These chapters support Walby's arguments of the changing form of patriarchy, as distinct from different degrees of patriarchy; the independence of patriarchal relations from those of capitalism; and the identification of the importance of the workplace relations in determining women's employment status (Ibid.).

Chapter seven concerns the unionization events at Eaton's in the 1980's. Evidence is provided for the extension of the workplace patriarchal relations into the union structure. However, the primary focus in this chapter is on exploring women's resistance and empowerment in terms of an expanded and redefined political sphere encompassing the experiences of women. Here we see the changes in women's consciousness as the structures are revealed that limit and determine their lives. The concluding chapter draws together the major findings of this research project, in particular, in terms of the theoretical arguments put forth by Walby.

## CHAPTER TWO

### EXPLORING THE EXPLANATORY POWER OF "PATRIARCHY"

The centrality of the term patriarchy in the feminist debates over sources of gender inequality warrants further exploration into patriarchy as an explanatory construct. This project was launched by radical feminists Kate Millet (1970) and Shulamith Firestone (1970) in the early days of the second wave of the women's movement, culminating in the work by Heidi Hartmann in the late 1970's. Hartmann's articulation of patriarchy as a separate system from material capitalism, in men's control over women's labour power, became the locus of debate in socialist feminist theory for the next decade (1979;1981).

In the course of debate, the validity of the concept of patriarchy, both in its analytical and definitional usage, was quite thoroughly and convincingly called into question. The most trenchant critique was of the racism and ethnocentrism that were evident in patriarchy and in the analyses comprising the debate as a whole. The feminist theoretical agenda turned to delineating the differences among women as opposed to the commonalities of oppression that were suggested by the overarching concept of

patriarchy. Understandably, theoretical efforts to develop the concept of patriarchy were notably lean in the 1980's.

Recently, Sylvia Walby (1986,1990) has argued "that the concept of 'patriarchy' is indispensable for an analysis of gender inequality..." (1990:1) and has proposed a new way of theorizing patriarchy. Walby's work appears to stand alone in this aim. It comes at a time when new feminist research based in discourse theory and "postmodernism", is rejecting unified theories and seeking instead to "fragment" and "deconstruct" our concepts and generalized understandings of women's oppression (e.g., Nicholson,(ed) 1990; Flax,1990).

Walby's work responds to those who have queried whether the move to postmodern theories indicates that socialist feminism can no longer yield insights and directions (e.g.,Eisenstein,1990). I would agree that there is some truth in this although the choice is not an either/or one, nor must there be a move to abandon the socialist project. The problem as I see it has been in the reluctance of socialist feminists to theorize patriarchy as a discrete or "unique" system. Walby's work advances in this direction, except that she delineates her theoretical model of patriarchy according to the model of capitalism. Therefore, the weakness in her proposed theory of patriarchy

rests, for me, as specified by Bradley (1990:59-63), in her articulation of the (domestic) mode of production.

The purpose of this chapter is to make a case for patriarchy as a "unique" explanatory concept, essential for understanding gender inequality. My concern is predominantly with the Canadian literature and the substantive area of paid employment as these are the subject and content of this thesis.<sup>1</sup>

#### **MAKING A CASE FOR THE CONCEPT OF "PATRIARCHY"**

Walby's work suggests two very controversial ideas for socialist feminist analyses. First, she argues "that the concept of 'patriarchy' is indispensable for an analysis of gender inequality..." and must be theorized as a separate system from capitalism (1990:1). Second, she disputes the traditional understanding of the importance of domestic labour in shaping women's paid employment (Ibid.,56). The reason that these two ideas are so contentious lies in the general character of the historical development of feminist

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<sup>1</sup>For readers who are interested in more complete surveys, in particular, of the American and British literature, see Walby (1986,1990); and Bradley (1989).

theory. In reviewing this development<sup>2</sup>, I will make a case for further exploration into the concept of patriarchy as central to an understanding of gender inequality.

Overall, a considerable amount of literature was generated around issues relating to the connection between women's domestic and waged labour in the attempt to explain gender inequality.<sup>3</sup> A connecting thread in this research had been the identification of women's domestic labour as fundamental to an understanding of women's oppression in capitalist societies. On the one hand, the theoretical development has been within the confines of Marxism. On the other hand, the specific formulation of socialist feminism has been strongly influenced by the radical feminist tradition. It is within this latter tradition that the concept of patriarchy, as a means to explain women's oppression, was first introduced.

#### INTRODUCING "PATRIARCHY"

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<sup>2</sup>Parts of this section on the review of the historical development of feminist theory appear elsewhere (cf., Aylward, 1983; Aylward and Grant, 1986). I would like to acknowledge Judy Grant, in particular, for the section on Race and Ethnicity (cf., Aylward and Grant, 1986).

<sup>3</sup>References to this body of literature will be detailed below in the context of the specific debates.

It was the work of Kate Millett (1971), falling within what was subsequently to be categorized as 'the radical feminist tradition', that "represents one of the first serious theoretical attempts to come to grips with the specific nature of women's oppression" by exploring the concept of patriarchy (Beechy, 1978:68)<sup>4</sup>. For Millett, patriarchy referred to men dominating women, both as individuals and as a group. In this way, Millett emphasized that the personal is political. As summarized by Beechey, "For Millet, patriarchy refers to a society which is organized according to two sets of principles: (i) that male shall dominate female; and (ii) older male shall dominate younger male. These principles govern all patriarchal societies..."(Ibid). The sexual politics of patriarchy was seen to enable men to have personal and collective power over women. This relation was assumed by Millett to have existed cross-culturally and transhistorically (Millet, 1970).

For this reason, Millett's use of the term patriarchy has been charged with being universalistic and ahistorical. It is argued that she neglects the different forms of women's oppression in concrete periods of history and cross-culturally, resulting in a lack of in-depth

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<sup>4</sup>This concept had been used by sociologist Max Weber (1947) to describe a form of male-dominated household.

analysis in her study. In other words, she does not explain the origins or perpetuation of the forms of women's oppression (cf., McDonough and Harrison, 1978; Eisenstein, 1979; Barrett, 1980; Hartmann, 1981).

The universalism evident in Millett's analysis was to pervade most subsequent radical analyses. This facet of patriarchy attracted particular criticism from women of colour (e.g., Hooks, 1982; 1984; Joseph and Lewis, 1981; Dill, 1983; Simons, 1979; Smith, 1980). Moreover, in positing analytical primacy of sex over class, Millett was unable to account for class differences. And, finally, because Millett rejected biological determinism in her explanation of power differentials, Eisenstein argues she was left with no theory for the base she was claiming for patriarchy (1979:16-7).

In an attempt to move beyond Millett's limited approach to patriarchy, Shulamith Firestone (1970) grounded her argument in a theory of biological determinism. She contended that patriarchy was rooted in the male control of women's reproductive capacities. In order for women to be released from their oppression, they must "seize" the means of reproduction by using technology to produce artificial childbearing. This she argued would eliminate the need for family and the social role of motherhood (Ibid., 10-11).

Firestone said she was launching a materialist theory of history (Ibid.). However, like Millett who replaced class with sex, she departed from the socialist tradition by arguing that the material base of patriarchy is rooted in biology and not economics (Ibid.). As in the case of Millet's work, Firestone's analysis was subject to charges of universalism and ahistoricism (see Sokoloff, 1980:157-59). Moreover, Eisenstein argued that it was unlikely that technology, which is controlled by the "male ruling class", will be used to liberate women from their biology (1979:20). For Hartmann the concern was with Firestone's "...overemphasis on biology and reproduction. What we need to understand is how sex (a biological fact) becomes gender (a social phenomenon)" (1981:12).

Despite these important criticisms, Firestone's analysis has been extremely influential insofar as it contains crucial elements of radical feminist ideology that have remained central to feminist theory. It was her emphasis on women's reproductive functions and the part played by marriage and the family in the oppression of women, and the identification of this oppression with the ideological association of women with the private sphere that were to be her legacy (see Sokoloff, 1980:158-9).



Firestone's ideas contributed not only to future radical feminist analysis, but were also integral to the later theoretical developments that attempted to synthesize a theorization of patriarchy with class analysis. This tradition of "dual systems" theory will be discussed in detail later. First, however, we turn to a summary of the earlier feminist tradition, informed by Marxism and feminism, that provided the base for dual systems theory.

#### **MARXIST FEMINISM**

In the late 1960's and early 1970's feminist researchers were concerned with the general question of how to reconstruct Marxist theory to take into account feminist insights. The radical feminist identification of areas outside the structure of production that maintain women's subordination led Marxist-feminists to attempt to delineate the economic role of the household in capitalist society. Canadian theorists played an important part in the international debates on this question (see e.g., Barrett and Hamilton, 1986).

Theorists identified domestic labour as the cornerstone of women's oppression, providing an analysis, in Marxist terms, of the nature of this unpaid work within the family household. Referred to as the "domestic labour

debate", this discussion revolved around whether women's work in the home was productive or unproductive labour by utilizing the Marxist analytical categories of use and exchange value and the value of labour power (Dalla Costa, 1973; Gardiner, 1976; Morton, 1971; Seccombe, 1974; Benston, 1969)<sup>5</sup>.

The domestic labour debate was later criticized for its emphasis on Marxism rather than feminism. It was argued, "...that this perspective failed to generate an understanding of women's oppression "as women", and "by men" (Hamilton and Barrett, 1986:11). Overall, an enormous body of literature was produced. The debate remained for the most part at the level of abstract theory and tended toward economism and functionalism, revealing the difficulty of attempting to fit women's oppression into Marxist categories (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1983; Molyneux, 1979). Nevertheless, the contribution of this debate was the recognition that what women did in the home was "real work", that it was the other side of wage labour, and an integral part of the capitalist mode of production.

In the later 1970's, the concern was with rectifying the imbalance of the domestic labour debate which

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<sup>5</sup>This debate is discussed in detail in Aylward (1983).

focused solely on domestic labour to the exclusion of women's paid work. Drawing on Marx's concept of the "reserve army of labour", Marxist-feminists described the limitations placed on women by their role in the family that prevented them from participating fully in wage labour. Unlike the domestic labour debate which generally stayed at the level of abstract theory, the reserve army thesis is essentially historical.

Theorists drew on the specific historical conditions of their own countries and the "reserve army debate" was waged in their own journals with very little interaction or commentary from outside (Beechey, 1977; Brugel, 1979).<sup>6</sup> The argument that women have formed a reserve army of labour "... emphasizes women's permanent connection to the production process. It provides a link between their labour force participation and their work in the home" (Connelly, 1978:6). Here again the analyses rely on a strict interpretation of the Marxist category of the reserve army leading to similar criticisms that are levelled at the domestic labour debate (Beechey, 1977; Milkman, 1976; Humpries, 1977a).

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<sup>6</sup>Canadian contributions include Connelly (1978); Fox (1981).

This thesis is important in identifying women's use as a reserve army in a different relation than men. It is also useful in describing women's paid work at specific historical junctures. However, as an overall explanation for women's oppression, it remains limited because of its inability to treat both wage and domestic labour in a dialectic way and its reliance on Marxist analytical tools to explain women's situation. Predictably, then, the next theoretical developments attempted to explain wage and domestic labour as one relation by restoring gender to the centre of the debate.

#### DUAL SYSTEMS THEORY

Within this attempt to analyze women's oppression using Marxist and radical feminist tools two broadly defined approaches can be discerned: (1) dual systems, and (2) class and gender or integrated approach. The dual systems theorists argue that the situation of women can be best understood as conditioned by two distinct systems of social relations, capitalism and patriarchy. The integrated approach sees only one system of class relations in which gender must be assimilated.

According to Iris Young (1980), one of the very first discussions presented as dual systems theory was the work of Linda Phelps (1975). Phelps claims that "we must talk of two distinct systems of social relations, patriarchy and capitalism" (Young,1980:172).

If sexism is a social relationship in which males have authority over females, 'patriarchy' is a term which describes the whole system of interaction which arises from that basic relationship, just as capitalism is a system built on the relationship between the capitalist and the worker. Patriarchal and capitalist social relationships are two markedly different ways that human beings have interacted with each other and have built social, political and economic institutions (Phelp,1975:38-9 cited in Young,Ibid.).

For Phelps these two systems were "distinct" because they have their own type of authority relations (1975:39). The two systems were seen to "contradict" as well as "reinforce" each other (Ibid.).

Eisenstein used the term "...capitalist patriarchy, to emphasize the mutually reinforcing dialectical relationship between capitalist class structure and hierarchical sexual structuring"(1979:5). Her argument goes further than Phelps by underscoring the power relations between these two systems first brought to feminist attention by Millet (1970). It was Eisenstein's contention that patriarchy and capitalism were "integral" to each other

as "...specific elements of each system are necessitated by the other" (1979:28).

These first statements on dual systems theory set off a new round of debates within feminist theorizing and not all in the same direction. As Young points out, "Those who subscribe to a dual systems approach to understanding women's oppression differ significantly in the categories they use and their particular formulations of the dual systems account" (1980:173). Furthermore, Young (Ibid.) notes that in designating the two relations of capitalism and patriarchy Jane Flax for example, utilized the terms "mode of production" and "mode of reproduction" (1976:55). Gayle Rubin offered the term 'sex/gender system' (1975:159) arguing that it "...involves more than the "relations of procreation" [e.g., Jaggar,1983], reproduction in the biological sense" (Rubin,1975:167). She defined the sex/gender system as "...a set of arrangements by which the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by human, social intervention ..." (Ibid.,165). Others theorists like Ann Ferguson and Nancy Folbre (1981) referred to "...sex/affective production: childbearing, childrearing, and the provision of nurturance, affection and sexual satisfaction" (Ibid.,314).

Young argues that dual systems theorists agree to the separateness of 'marxist' relations of production from a system of male dominance but they differ in two main ways in how this latter structure is to be understood (1980:174). For example, she argues that Mitchell (1977) is an example of the approach that sees patriarchy as an ideological system and capitalism as a material one (1980:174). This position therefore "...inappropriately dehistoricizes and universalizes women's oppression" (Ibid.,175). A further critique by Young was that it leaves Marxist theory unchanged (Ibid.,174).

A second prominent version is identified by Young (1980) by referring to the specification of Rosalind Petchesky who sees this approach in terms of a "model of separate spheres" (1979:376). Patriarchy is seen as a distinct system of production (or reproduction) that is "relatively independent" of the Marxist system of the relations of production. Petchesky states that it is misleading to think of there being two distinct spheres:

"Production" and "reproduction", work and the family, far from being separate territories like the moon and the sun or the kitchen and the shop, are really intimately related modes that reverberate upon one another and frequently occur in the same social, physical and even psychic spaces...(1979:376).

The same point is made by others, notably Joan Kelly (1979) and Batya Weinbaum and Amy Bridges (1979) who have argued that the alleged separation of the domestic and affective sphere from the economic sphere is ultimately illusory.

Both Christine Delphy (1976) and Hartmann (1981) would admit to the difficulty of isolating structures specific to patriarchy. In spite of this, however, their pioneering efforts to establish a material basis for a separate system of patriarchy represented an important theoretical advance. Delphy posits the "domestic mode of production" as separate from, but similar to, the capitalist mode of production. In the domestic mode of production, men benefit from and control the labour of women. It is here, in what she terms the patriarchal relations of production, that the material basis of women's oppression lies, not in the capitalist mode of production (1976,1981). According to Barrett and McIntosh, "The difficulty here, however, is that the category of patriarchy is assigned analytic independence vis-'a-vis the capitalist mode of production, but we are not led to a systematic consideration of the relations between them" (1980:14).

Hartmann endeavors to complete this equation when she defines patriarchy. She states,



We can usefully define patriarchy as a set of social relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enables them to dominate women... The material base upon which patriarchy rests lies most fundamentally in men's control over women's labour power (1981:14-15).

The difference between her argument and Delphy's is that men's control of women's labour power occurs in other places in addition to the household. To illustrate this position, Hartmann examines the effects of industrialization on the relationships between men and women. She asserts that men collectively struggled for protective legislation for women and for a family wage <sup>7</sup> as a means to control women's labour both within and outside the family (1979,1981). It is important to note, however, that the family wage was achieved in only a small number of families (May,1982). In making this claim of an "alliance of men", Hartmann posits a "partnership of patriarchy and capital" (1981:19).

Criticisms levelled at Hartmann's account have not been able to effectively negate her "alliance of men" (cf., Sargent,1981). However, in terms of her main problematic, her critics argue that she is unable to expose the logic of the patriarchal mode, explaining it only in terms of the

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<sup>7</sup>The family, or "living" wage, was a wage paid to a man that was to be sufficient to keep himself and his dependent wife and children.

unity of male interests. Therefore, the economic system prevails as the material base of patriarchy (Young,1981;Vogel,1981).

### CLASS AND GENDER

Throughout the 1980's, socialist feminists in Canada and elsewhere continued the debate on the sources of women's oppression by examining the theoretical and political relationship between "class and gender" (Seccombe, 1986; Barrett, 1980; Barrett and McIntosh, 1980; Humphries; 1977a,1977b; Fox, 1980; Connelly, 1982; Hartmann, 1979,1981; McIntosh, 1978). Barrett (1980) and Humphries (1977a,1977b), are major representatives of those pursuing an understanding of women's oppression by way of marxist theory.

In a critique of dual systems theory, Barrett contends that theorists have attempted to compensate with a flawed concept of patriarchy for the insufficiency of marxism to understand women's oppression (1980:119). Barrett seeks to solve the problems of previous analyses by positing a theory of gender ideology that mediates between capital and labour. Barrett argues,

The family-household system of contemporary capitalism constitutes not only the central site of the oppression of women but an important

organizing principle of the relations of production of the social formation as a whole... The family-household constitutes both the ideological ground on which gender difference and women's oppression are constructed, and the material relations in which men and women are differentially engaged in wage labour and the class structure (1980:211)

It is her contention that the "familial ideology" that posited women's primary connection to home and family permeated the working class which accounts for the historical struggle by them for the family wage (Ibid.,218-9).

Jane Humphries presented an penetrating analysis of the family wage ideology by arguing that the "family wage" was a reform won by the working class (1977a,b). Barrett agrees that working class men fought for the family-household system because it was in their short-term interest, but disproves Humphries' theory by showing that the family/household system has in the long run been politically divisive for the working class; that is, there is no evidence to suggest that women's domestic labour raises the standard of living of the working class and further the family has proven to be oppressive for women (1980:61-69). Barrett concludes that the establishment of the family/household system "can be traced to a struggle of male interests over female interests" (Barrett,1980:219).

Her critics argue that the development of women's oppression under capitalism appears in her analysis to be solely ideological (see e.g., Brenner and Ramas, 1984). Barrett criticizes Hartmann, for example, for holding to a rigid duality of structures, yet she reinforces duality by her lack of material aspects of women's oppression. As summarized by Brenner and Ramas, "...the problems we have identified in Barrett's interpretation can all be traced to one major lacuna in her analysis - the absence of a material basis for the historical development and reproduction of the family-household system, the sexual division of labour, and women's oppression in capitalism" (1984:47). Furthermore, Kum Kum Bhavnani and Margaret Coulson argue that Barrett's analysis has been seriously marred by failing to consider ethnicity and race (1986).

#### **THEORETICAL IMPASSE?**

In both historical and abstract theory accounts, within dual systems and class and gender approaches, researchers were predominantly interested in the relationship between class and gender in the development of the family wage. In the United States, the attempt to define patriarchy as a means to conceptualize women's oppression, and its positional importance relative to

capitalism, was integral to the debate (Sargent,1981)<sup>8</sup> but appears to have been less important in the Canadian accounts (Connelly and MacDonald,1983; Hamilton, 1981; 1982; Curtis,1982; Fox,1980)<sup>9</sup>.

As far as I have been able to determine, in all of the Canadian literature up to this point, the word patriarchy was sometimes used to describe male domination but no attempt was made to use this term analytically or theoretically.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, none of the Canadian literature directly addressed, or engaged in debate with, the pathbreaking work by Heidi Hartmann (1979;1981) on patriarchy, in relation to the family wage.<sup>11</sup> Rebuttals to the thesis of the "alliance of men" in supporting the family wage system, so crucial in Hartmann's thesis, do appear in the literature (cf. Curtis,1980). However, the dialogue is with the work of Jane Humphries (1977a, 1977b)

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<sup>8</sup>There was also a strong critique by women of color of evident racism and ethnocentrism in these analyses which will be discussed in more detail below.

<sup>9</sup>For a critique of the economism in some of the Canadian literature see Miles(1983).

<sup>10</sup>Miles made this point in relation to the anthology, Hidden in the Household edited by Fox (1980). Indeed, it is relevant to all the Canadian literature cited above.

<sup>11</sup>The only exception I have found is in Meg Luxton's work, More than a Labour of Love (1980). Hartmann's work will be discussed below.

who posits the other polar position to Hartmann, with primacy given to class analysis.

The disagreements over the attempts to synthesize/integrate/separate class and gender or alternatively, capitalism and patriarchy, integral to all streams of socialist feminist analyses, escalated to a point where it was suggested that we had reached an "impasse" in the development of feminist theory.<sup>12</sup> In what was seen as an attempt to revitalize feminist theory, Canadian researchers began, for example, to address issues of the biological component of sexual differences and aspects of motherhood in relation to the family wage system (Maroney, 1985; Armstrong and Armstrong, 1983).

While some Canadian theorists began embracing these issues predominantly of concern to radical feminists, others were calling for an analysis of "capitalism without patriarchy" to move out of the supposed impasse (Van Allen, 1984; Ehrenreich, 1984). As Fox commented, "Surely, radical feminists and Marxist-feminists seem to be converging towards that collective understanding - the former recognizing the importance of the capitalist context and the latter realizing the significance to women of issues

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<sup>12</sup>See Van Allen (1984) and Ehrenreich (1984) for an overview.

of sexuality and other aspects of intimate male-female relations" (1986:180-1). The dialogue within this context (Connelly,1983; Armstrong and Armstrong,1984; Brenner and Ramas,1984; Barrett,1984; Lewis,1985)<sup>13</sup> seemed to be moving the emphasis away from a primarily Marxist dialogue (Hamilton and Barrett,1986:20).

At this point it is important to recognize two areas of seeming agreement. First, there appeared to be consensus (at least among white feminists) that the private sphere of the home and women's primary responsibility for domestic labour within it played a key role in shaping women's paid employment. Second, patriarchy was at best an unhelpful term, and at worst a flawed concept, and totally invalid as a separate system (Barrett,1980; Rowbotham,1981). In spite of this assessment Hartmann's attempt to theorize a material base for patriarchy sparked over a decade of debate.

In retrospect, rather than an apparent impasse in the debates, the 1980's were a time of revitalization or regrouping within the women's movement. The rapidly growing, substantive critique by women of color forced feminist theorists, in all streams of thought, to rethink and reformulate their present positions. It is important not to

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<sup>13</sup>For further comment on this literature see Fox (1986).

underestimate the impact of this critique on the development of feminist theory.

### RACE AND ETHNICITY

In the United States and Britain, the critique by women of color provides corrective empirical research and presents a challenge to feminist theory and praxis with revolutionary implications. Most of the literature deals with Black women, although other racial-ethnic minorities have begun to criticize the racism and ethnocentrism of feminism and social science (e.g., Ahmed, 1982; Witherow, 1977; Zinn, 1982).

Black feminists have emphasized the interaction of the tripartite oppression of race, class and gender in examinations of work under late capitalism (Dill, 1979; Glenn, 1985; Jones, 1984) and slavery (Davis, 1981; Jones, 1982; Lebsack, 1982) and in personal accounts (e.g. Eichelberger, 1977; Fisher, 1977; Reagon, 1982). They have engaged in debate with white feminists (Apuzzo and Powell, 1977; Joseph and Lewis, 1981), indicating that the white women's movement and its analysis is fundamentally racist (Dill, 1983; Joseph, 1981; Lewis, 1977; Simons, 1979;



Smith,1980). They have begun to develop Black feminist theory (Hooks,1981;1984) and praxis (Combahee River Collective,1982). Recently reviews and critiques of Black feminist perspectives have begun to be generated internally (Hooks,1984; White,1984).

Evelyn Nakano Glenn has suggested three areas of Marxist-feminist theorizing that must be reworked in order to take into account the effects of interacting race and gender: the separation between private and public spheres; the primacy of gender conflict as a feature of the family; and the gender based assignment of reproductive labour (1985:67-72). The work experience of women of colour indicates that the private and public realms have not been separate and bounded spheres for all classes and racial and ethnic groups. Wage work and family work can interact in many ways. Contrary to the white middle-class experience, women's role in production could take precedence over domestic roles.

According to Joseph (1981) much of the white women's failure to recognize the specificity of Black women's oppression is based in feminism's blindness to history. The histories of sexual politics in the household and at paid work are divergent for Blacks and whites (see e.g. Dill, 1979; Jones,1982). White feminism's focus on oppression

within the family and separatist or anti-male biases have not been consistent with the experiences of Black women. Under slavery, the household represented a source of resistance (Davis,1981) and the home has retained the image of a refuge given the extreme exploitation of Black women in paid work. While gender conflict does exist among racial ethnic groups, racist and capitalist oppression can lead to the perception of the home as a centre of resistance.

Black women activists, including the lesbian Combahee River Collective (1982) include men in their movements as they must also struggle with racism (Palmer,1983). Furthermore, because of low wages paid to both genders, men and women are mutually dependent. The experiences of racial ethnic women also lead to the insight that there is a racial as well as a sexual division of reproductive labour. Women of color have been used by whites as domestic servants, and form the bulk of workers in more menial occupations in the service sector.

The tendency in feminist analysis has been to make generalizations from white, middle-class experiences without questioning how widely applicable they are. This has impeded the growth of an inclusive women's movement and retarded the analysis of racism and class relationships. The feminist assertion that all women are oppressed, Hooks (1984) argues,

implies that factors such as class, race, religion and sexual preference are secondary sources of oppression. Instead, she argues, they determine the extent to which sexism will oppress individual women: "Sexism as a system of domination is institutionalized but it has never determined in an absolute way the fate of all women in this society" (Ibid.,5).

Analysis based in the experiences of women of color presents a challenge to white women to recognize their racism. Nakano Glenn states that the relationship between white women and racial ethnic women is dialectical and that the histories of these groups are intertwined:

White women have gained advantages from the exploitation of racial ethnic women, and the definition of white womanhood has to a large extent been cast in opposition to the definition of racial ethnic women. Marxist - feminist theory and the internal colonialism model both recognize white men as the dominant exploiting group; however it is equally important to emphasize the involvement of white women in the exploitation of racial people and the ways in which racial ethnic men have benefitted from the even greater exploitation of racial ethnic women (1985:105).

The racist relations between white and Black women in the United States is so profound that Joseph (1981) speculates that greater solidarity exists between whites than between white and Black women. White feminists are beginning to recognize their racism, but an all-inclusive feminism is not

immediately forthcoming. The feminist analysis of women of color remains a perspective which is not easily subsumed under other theoretical divisions.

### FEMINIST POLITICAL ECONOMY

I believe that the critique by women of color has challenged feminist theorizing and praxis, and this in turn has lead to revitalization within the movement as seen in such new traditions as "feminist political economy"; "postmodern theories" and the attempt by Walby to theorize patriarchy (1990).

The primacy of class analysis, as recently represented in the call for a "feminist political economy" (Maroney and Luxton, 1987), is still recognized in explanations for gender inequality at work in Canada. The re-assertion of the need for a "...study of society as an integrated whole" (Ibid.,27), in the time of moves toward fragmentation, is welcome. However, Canadian researchers of women's work are still reluctant to fully embrace the concept of patriarchy, and continue to apply Marxist concepts to analyse women's position in our society (cf., Marchak,1987; Livingstone and Luxton,1989). This is not, as

we have seen by the historical review of feminist theory, an unproductive project. The problem, as I see it, is in the dearth of studies of women's work, investigating other promising avenues of research.

One such avenue is that of patriarchy. As noted earlier, the concept of patriarchy entered into feminist dialogues as a means of identifying men's oppression of women that could not be defined or understood strictly within economic terms. As recently summarized by Fox(1988), the literature attempting to theorize patriarchy basically envisioned it as male dominance that was characteristic of society or as an autonomous system. Theorists of Canadian Women's work sometimes referred to patriarchal relations to describe gendered oppression, but overall they have resisted conceptualizing this term. Their explanations for male dominance can be located, according to Fox, within the perspective of those viewing patriarchy as a characteristic of society. Armstrong and Armstrong, for example state:

While acknowledging that subordination of women predates capitalism, we find that the term patriarchy tends to conceal more than it reveals about the many forms of this subordination. More light can be shed on the subordination of women by understanding it as inherent to the capitalist mode (1986:211).

As this quote shows, there has been a real resistance to exploring the properties of patriarchy, despite identifying

that it has "many forms". There is no doubt that the conceptualizations of patriarchy have been problematic, and many theorists, in addition to Armstrong and Armstrong, have questioned the utility of the term (i.e., Beechey, 1979; Barrett, 1980). However, this concept has persisted and has become important to the social sciences in spite of the critiques.

The reluctance to embrace this concept is related first to the difficulties of invoking an ahistoric analysis and thereby leaving the analysis open to criticisms of ethnocentrism and racism. This speaks to post-modernist concerns about overarching concepts that do not account for the diversity of women's experiences. Second, patriarchy is unacknowledged due to the innate male desire to have power over women. This argument was very evident in the first statements on patriarchy by Firestone (1974) and Millet (1970).

In the most recent literature that directly refers to the concept of patriarchy, we see a return of previous concerns that have plagued this concept. In a further contribution to the family wage debate, Wally Secombe discussed the patriarchal construction of the living wage. Although not wanting to enter into the debates over the concept of patriarchy, he states:

...I should say in passing that I find the term an important one, and potentially very useful, providing we avoid using it in a suprahistorical fashion - as some sort of universal drive for male rule - nor consign the term to the place of a descriptive synonym of male dominance, in whatever form it may be found. My own inclination is to specify and delimit the term somewhat, making it bear some explanatory weight, so that its precise use in a discourse may furnish some analytical leverage beyond the labelling and assimilation of all phenomena of male dominance (1986:59).

Secombe chooses to refer only to "domestic patriarchy" leaving aside the term's applicability to other areas of social life. He defines domestic patriarchy as "... systems of male headship in family households" (Ibid.). Thus, the tradition of using the term descriptively is continued. More importantly, concomitant with this type of usage of patriarchy is the rejection of the notion of any "universal drive for male rule".

This concern is also central to Fox's contribution, entitled "Conceptualizing Patriarchy" (1988). Fox examines the different meanings that feminists have given to the concept of patriarchy and critiques them, "...for their reductionism, especially their crude understanding of social structure and their assumption of an innate male desire for power" (Ibid.,163). She argues that both social structure and ideology/subjectivity must be considered when explaining

women's oppression and that theorists have only concerned themselves with the former level of reality. Moreover, for "analytical depth", patriarchy must refer to,

...the integrated process of generational reproduction, the reproduction of individuals in their daily lives through housework and motherwork, and the production of gender identity and ideology (Ibid.,164).

Walby's convincing argument against the need for a generational component when discussing patriarchy (1990:20) will be discussed later. What is of importance here is the equation, as with Seccombe's account, of patriarchy with assumptions of "innate male desire for power". It would seem that to theorize patriarchy at the level of the social structure rather than "gender subjectivity" would in fact address this biologically based concern of an inherent male drive to oppress women.

#### **TOWARD AN EXPLORATION OF THE EXPLANATORY POWER OF PATRIARCHY**

It is my contention that Walby's (1990) theoretical model of patriarchy has the potential to overcome many of the concerns raised in this review. Given the history of the reluctance to theorize patriarchy, and the criticisms raised against the term, her work invokes controversy in and of itself. What she does in addition is to posit a



contentious assertion that contradicts what has been taken as a given, in terms of understanding women's inequality at work. I am referring specifically to her argument that women's paid work has been more important in shaping women's domestic labour than traditionally assumed. Moreover, her perspective of "dual systems" that argues for an analytical separateness of patriarchy has also been seen as controversial (see i.e., Bradley, 1989).

### **Defining patriarchy**

Walby defines "...patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (1990:20). It is the use of the social structure that Walby sees as particularly important and I would agree. First, this must be considered in relation to the practice proposed by Millet (1970) and more recently by Fox (1988) of including a generational component in definitions. Walby suggests that this incorrectly assumes that some men's dominance over other men is essential to an understanding of women's subordination (1990:20).

Second, her definition, with the focus on social structures, overcomes the concern with the "innate (or biological) desire of men to control women" that has apparently plagued earlier work (Millet, 1970;

Firestone,1974). Indeed, this has been a concern for theorists and a rationale for seeing patriarchy as a flawed concept. Such a concern seems less significant in terms of later analyses, such as Hartmann's (1981), which have been criticized for this. In any event, Walby's definition circumvents any confusion on this point.

Finally, by avoiding a "gendered subjectivity" approach, it allows for the fact that not all men dominate and not all women are subordinate. In addition, it seems to me it also takes into account the fact that some (e.g., white) women dominate other women (e.g., of color). Her definition therefore can account for the diversity of relations between women and between women and men. This can be seen more explicitly in Walby's delineation of the structures of patriarchy. Here it is possible to counter the prevailing charges of imprecision, ahistoricism and universalism.

### **Conceptualizing patriarchy**

At the most abstract level, gendered relations are essentially constituted, according to Walby, by a system of patriarchal relations in articulation with capitalism and racism (cited from Walby,1990:20). At a less abstract level,

she identifies six structures: the patriarchal mode of production; patriarchal relations in paid work; the state; male violence; sexuality; and cultural institutions. Further, on a more surface level, are a set of patriarchal practices (Ibid.). In sum, Walby presents a complex system of patriarchy by which patriarchal relations, in the six identified structural bases, at any given time, contradict, conflict or are harmonious with each other together with racism and capitalism. It is the specification of more than one base that is argued by Walby to overcome difficulties with historical change and cultural variation (Ibid.).

#### **The patriarchal mode of production**

What becomes problematic in Walby's model is the identification of the (structure) patriarchal mode of production as analytically independent from capitalism. In the patriarchal mode of production the basis lies in "...personalized relations between individuals" (1986:54) by which the husband extracts surplus labour from the wife's labour power. Walby foresaw difficulties with this argument herself and contended that she was not suggesting "...that the patriarchal mode of production had any autonomous laws of development...

This does not discredit the concept of patriarchal mode of production since the central element in this is not its laws of motion, but rather that of extraction of surplus. It is the highly distinctive method of extraction of surplus within patriarchy (which plays a key role in the determination of other gender relations) which is the basis of the claim that there is a patriarchal mode of production (1990:55).

The nature of the patriarchal mode will be determined, according to Walby, by virtue of its articulation with the other mode (s?) of production. Harriet Bradley has responded to Walby's disclaimer by stating:

...the attempt to characterise patriarchy as both a domestic mode of production and a set of structures external to it seems to me theoretically dubious. If patriarchy really is a mode of production, all those elements must surely be included within it (1989:55)?

I agree with Bradley's criticism here. This attempt by Walby is confusing, in particular as there is no parallel attempt to do this with racism. One might also query whether patriarchy, capitalism and racism could all be articulated at the same time. Her model assumes this, but she only speaks predominantly of patriarchy and capitalism. Moreover, what is the basis for the system of racism? Why does she delineate only the basis of the patriarchal mode?

A further problem with Walby's patriarchal mode of production is that even though she does not claim that it has "laws of motion" it is still fashioned after or at least attempting to be a system congruent with capitalism. Along this line of argument, Bradley has suggested that the concept of patriarchy is "inevitably flawed" due to the greater power of the Marxist analysis of capitalism (Ibid.). I do not believe that this explanatory power of class analysis is superior, so much as the attempt to "mimic" this kind of analysis weakens an analysis that might rather be based on women's unique experiences of patriarchy.

Bradley arrives at the same conclusion by way of an insightful analysis of the sociological notion of 'system' which she views as the source of difficulties that have plagued conceptualization of patriarchy. She suggests that, "...the way ahead is a form of structural theory that abandons the notion of system or at least operates with a severely modified version of it" (Ibid.,62). Bradley is basically advocating the use of system to characterize interrelated sets of relationships that contradict, conflict or are harmonious as opposed to the static and grand theorizing of the functionalist use of system. "Each set of relations can be theorised in isolation, though a complete understanding of each will not be gained unless their interaction with the others, both at any given time and

through their history, is also taken into account" (Ibid.,63).

In other words, this is Walby's model minus the patriarchal system "laws of motion". Referring to Walby, Bradley remarks, "What she is actually doing is right! What she claims to be doing is misguided" (Ibid.). In other words, Walby's model of patriarchy is not negated by her claims of providing the basis of a patriarchal mode of production. According to Bradley (Ibid.), a model empirical example of how a structural theory of gender should proceed is Walby's (1986) account of patriarchal relations in paid work (Ibid.).

#### **Patriarchal relations in paid work**

It is in this empirical account that Walby presents her contentious assertion that women's paid work has been more influential in shaping women's domestic labour under capitalism than previously assumed (Ibid.). Her work intersects with the literature on "Gender and the Labour process" (cf., Cockburn,1983,1985,1986; Heron and Storey,1986; Westwood,1984; Wacjeman,1983; Pollert,1981; Game and Pringle,1983:1986) which extended the "labour process debate" to argue that gender is socially constructed

in the workplace. In other words, the production of gender is built into the labour process.

As Walby states, "Patterns produced at one historical moment build on previous patterns and the sexual division of labour at any one time is the result of the accumulation of these rounds of restructuring gender relations"(1986:243). Bradley (1989), in her historical study of men's and women's work, concurs. She found that "Segregation and sex-typing...predate capitalist industry...The employment of women in jobs designated as "women's work" was a key part of the development of a degraded capitalist labour process "(Ibid:227). At issue of course is that the paid workplace is not a separate or isolated structure, and this is one reason why gender inequality cannot be understood without a conceptualization of patriarchy.

#### **From private to public patriarchy**

To show that gender inequality in all areas of social life cannot be understood without the concept of patriarchy, Walby provided evidence in relation to domestic labour by delineating the forms and degrees of patriarchy. The two major forms of patriarchy are private and public:

Private patriarchy is based upon household production as the main site of women's oppression. Public patriarchy is based principally in public sites such as employment and the state. The household does not cease to be a patriarchal structure in the public form, but it is no longer the chief site. In private patriarchy the expropriation of women's labour takes place primarily by individual patriarchs within the household, while in the public form it is a more collective appropriation. In private patriarchy the principle patriarchal strategy is exclusionary; in the public it is segregationist and subordinating (1990:24).

Each of these forms can be found to different degrees at different times. Walby has convincingly shown that public patriarchy has been dominant in capitalist society. Feminist politics, she contends, played a major role in moving from the earlier form of private patriarchy. As such, women are not passive victims of oppressive structures, and struggle is central to the analysis as well as historical change. The problem is that in response to the challenge of the first wave of feminism, patriarchy changed in form, "incorporating some of the hard-won changes into new traps for women" (1990:201). In sum, Walby's historical account reveals the work sphere as more crucial in maintaining male dominance in society than was previously believed.

## CONCLUSION



This chapter set out to make a case for further exploration into the explanatory power of patriarchy, and as an essential concept for understanding women's oppression. For several decades now, this term has come under intense scrutiny. The criticisms have been fair and valid. In spite of this, we have not been able to drop this concept and it has persisted to become a major term of male dominance in most disciplines. Why? The reason is simple, gender inequality exists and is pervasive in every area of social life. Given the diversity of culture, history, race, class and women's everyday life experiences, we require a form of analysis that can account for all of this diversity without losing the substantive meaning. In other words, while in all disciplines there is a move away from grand theorizing, we do not want the other extreme of mere empiricism either.

Our attempts to fit gender into Marxism and Marxist categories have failed because gender is not reducible to class. It is a different product. Even those who have been attempting to theorize patriarchy as a separate system have still modelled their analyses after capitalist analysis. Walby has presented a theory of patriarchy with the potential to provide us with a model applicable to every area of social life for understanding gender inequality.

This thesis tests the applicability of part of her model by examining patriarchal relations in paid work through a case study of Eaton's during two historical time periods. It attempts to follow the prescription outlined by Bradley of "...investigating the way different sets of relations (gender,class, "race" (my inclusion)<sup>14</sup> interact within a particular historical context and how they develop together"(1989:68). Moreover, in the attempt to move away from a "systems approach", the focus is on the experiences of patriarchy.

This chapter has basically taken as a given that we need to develop concepts and theories as opposed to fragmenting or deconstructing them as would be argued by the new feminist "postmodernists". It is my contention that the latter leads to mere empiricism as opposed to having any explanatory weight. This will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter which examines the pursuit of a distinctive feminist methodology, as well as outlining the methodology of this present study.

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<sup>14</sup>Bradley's work does not refer to race.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### RESEARCHING EATON'S, FOR, BY AND WITH WOMEN

In an attempt to reconstruct a sociology for women rather than about women<sup>1</sup>, or to ask feminist questions on feminist terms, we are ultimately challenging present scientific discourse. The question posed by feminist critics of science is whether it is possible to utilize for "emancipatory ends", methodologies that are so deeply entrenched in patriarchal thought and practice (Harding, 1986:29). According to Harding, some feminists argue that the scientific enterprise is "redeemable" and "reformable", while others are "skeptical" that we can retain any aspect of the present scientific method, or its epistemology (Ibid.). Instead, these latter theorists argue for a distinctive feminist methodology.

I contend that the conceptualization of gender as an analytical category, which has been the basis for the more formidable attacks, has not been, as yet, developed to a point where we can claim a distinctive feminist methodology. That

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<sup>1</sup>This is based on the formulation by Smith (1977).

is, relative to feminist theory, feminist scholarship has not provided us with pragmatic or empirical maps on how to go about constructing a feminist methodology. Most of the research that has been done in this area remains on the abstract epistemological level.<sup>2</sup> However, I do support the pursuit of this project and think that the work being done is misguided only insofar as it negates the utility of other projects, and implies that certain methodological tools or techniques are inherently faulty and therefore unchangeable, and not valid for feminist scholarship.<sup>3</sup>

What we can do now is "methodology as feminists".<sup>4</sup> In other words, research that is conceptualized on the basis of feminist values. It has been argued recently in relation to feminist critiques of science that, "Where knowledge and

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<sup>2</sup>A few notable exceptions can be found in the anthologies by Bowles and Duelli Klein (1983) and Roberts (1981).

<sup>3</sup>Some writers have gone as far as to suggest the elimination of the use of quantitative techniques. They contend that the qualitative data is more consistent with feminist values (Reinhart cited in Jayarantne, 1983). While I argue that qualitative methodology is more consistent with feminist values, I do not agree with the call to eradicate quantitative techniques from feminist studies on this basis. Qualitative measures are not without their own androcentric biases (Coyner, 1983). The assumption is that these measures are inherently faulty rather than socially constructed which goes against the tenets of feminist scholarship. I contend that it is not our techniques that are faulty but the incorrect conceptualizations that shape them.

<sup>4</sup>This phrase is fashioned from Longino's (1987) "doing science as feminists" cited in Wylie (1990:380).

inquiry are concerned, a consensus seems to be emerging that women cannot be presumed to possess a distinctive set of cognitive capacities (suppressed in traditional science) which will underwrite a privileged epistemic standpoint or yield a uniquely feminist mode of research practice" (Wylie, 1989:380). The authors suggest that the distinct feminist methodology pursuit is giving way to simply exploring research possibilities as feminists. It would seem to me that this is how we will develop a distinctive feminist methodology. It is not necessarily an either/or situation.

This chapter takes the following course. First, I will review the issues raised by feminist critics and identify the problems I see in and for feminist thinking in formulating the research process. Second, the method used in this study will be outlined in detail.

#### **DOING METHODOLOGY AS FEMINISTS**

Feminism, like all scholarship, should entail a dialectical relationship between theory and methodology, including the tools or techniques utilized. What is distinct, however, is that it takes gender as a fundamental organizing category for social behaviour (Harding, 1986:57). This is

premised on the belief that women's perceptions and experiences of the world are different from those of men, and that it is the white upper middle class male perspective that has dominated fields of formally legitimated knowledge. Moreover, gender inequality is viewed as socially constructed, as opposed to being inherent, and can therefore be eradicated. Based on these premises there appears to be a consensus among feminist scholars that the scientific enterprise has been conceptualized from a male point of view, negating gender differences and thereby inhibiting feminist scholarship, though the seriousness of the charges vary widely.<sup>5</sup>

#### THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD

According to Benston, within the scientific enterprise we can identify "...a core of assumptions that seems to characterize what is now meant by science and to be common to

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<sup>5</sup>Evidence of this consensus can be found in the anthology by Kanter and Millman (1975). Basically feminist critics have correctly argued that research techniques have been developed by men for men (Ibid.). They have shown that women's perspective has been ignored (Mies, 1983), distorted (Acker, 1973; Spender, 1981), controlled for (Eichler, 1980), or simply omitted, (Acker and Van Houten, 1974). More serious charges have addressed the basic assumptions of the scientific enterprise as sexist. (see e.g., articles by Vickers and Benston in Finn and Miles, 1982).

much of present scientific practice (1982:53). The criticisms raised against the "methodological cannons of science" or "dogmas of empiricism" come from recent developments in the history and philosophy of science itself, most notably from the work of Thomas Kuhn and followers (Ibid.; Sydie, 1987). The debates surrounding, for example, objectivity versus subjectivity and qualitative versus quantitative methodology are not new. What feminists have brought to this debate is the recognition of gender distinctions as integral to all bodies of knowledge.

Evelyn Fox Keller points out that the joining of feminist thought to this body of literature brings new insights to the scientific enterprise (1981:117). At the same time, however, it reinforces the "intellectual danger" that "...resides in viewing science as pure social product: science then dissolves into ideology, and objectivity loses all intrinsic meaning. In the resulting cultural relativism, an emancipatory function of science is negated and the arbitration of truth recedes into the political domain" (Ibid.). In other words, a measure of objectivity is still imperative to our research. It is important to note, however, and here Fox Keller would agree, Sandra Harding's statement that, "Objectivity is not maximized through value-neutrality...it is participatory values - antiracism, anticlassism, antisexism - that decrease the distortions and

mystifications in our culture's explanations and understandings" (1986:249). If it were simply the case of stating our biases, then the call for a distinctive feminist methodology would be unnecessary. The problem could be identified as "bad science" and easily corrected; this is the position taken by feminist empiricists.

#### FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGY

Harding (1986) has labelled the two major contending perspectives within feminist epistemology as "feminist empiricists" and "feminist standpoint" theorists. A third category presenting a challenge to both is referred to by her as the "post modernist feminist challenge". As Walby has pointed out, the great strength in Harding's critical review of these positions is in her focus on the broader issues of the conceptualization process rather than on the right or wrong of particular techniques (1990:18). Such a focus permits a closer connection and convergence with the advances being made within feminist theory, rather than reducing methodology to simple investigation practices.



### **Feminist empiricists**

The feminist empiricist's project has been more corrective than theoretical relative to all other feminist epistemologies. The aim has been primarily to reveal the androcentric and sexist assumptions that guide sociological inquiry (Kanter and Millman, 1975). In identifying what has been left out or overlooked in relation to women's experiences and understandings of the social world, Harding suggests important questions have arisen as to whether social scientists can be value neutral or objective when conducting research (1986:91).

The findings by these early feminist empiricists remain crucial. The limitation of their work lies in their focus on individual gender in terms of inequitable representation in various areas of social life. Methodologically, this has been translated to "adding women on" to existing research enterprises to correct male bias. The feeling is that stricter adherence to the methodological canons of science will result in a good or better methodology.

The problem with this approach is that it fails to recognize the pervasiveness of the structures of domination.

It leaves intact the conditions leading to androcentrism that feminist empiricists themselves have underscored (Smith,1974).<sup>6</sup> In addition, their related equation of women with qualitative techniques and men with quantitative techniques (Bernard,1973; Kanter and Millman,1975) reinforces the very gender divisions that we are attempting to eliminate. This paradox results because gender is not conceptualized as integral to the scientific enterprise. In response to the inconsistencies in this approach the feminist standpoint projects developed.

### **Feminist standpoint**

According to Harding, "The feminist standpoint epistemologies are grounded in those shared characteristics of women as a social group and of men as a social group that created feminist empiricism's internal incoherence" (1986:162). These theorists propose a distinctive feminist methodology that is based in a theory of gendered activity and social experience stemming from the "standpoint of women"

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<sup>6</sup>Dorothy Smith, for example, points out: "...it is not enough to supplement an established sociology by addressing ourselves to what has been left out, overlooked, or by making sociological issues of the relevances of the world. That merely extends the authority of the existing sociological procedures and makes of women's sociology an addendum. We cannot rest at that because it does not account for the separation between the two worlds and it does not account for or analyse the relation between them" (1974:7).

(see e.g. Smith, 1974;1977;1979;1981; Rose,1983; Hartsock, 1983b). Similar to the feminist empiricists, they do not suggest that we disregard the scientific method, but rather aim to restructure the "methodological canons of science".

This body of literature is informed by the two theoretical schools of Marxism and feminism. The key to this particular feminist method is a theory of labour. In chapter two, we addressed this perspective in detail, outlining how we are still at the stage of dealing with the dualism of capitalism and patriarchy as relatively autonomous systems of domination. Movement out of this dualism has been hindered by the problematic conceptualization of patriarchy as a means to explain gender relations. The feminist standpoint epistemological research programmes may be seen as an attempt to deal with these conceptual difficulties by providing a methodological blueprint that can account for gendered distinctions.

As Harding has outlined (1986:136-162) these theorists working in the Marxist tradition assert that men's dominating position in social life results in distorted and partial visions, whereas women's subjugated position allows for less distortion. Feminism, on the other hand, provides the theory and practice by which the perspective of women can be transformed into a standpoint. In calling for a science for

women rather than about women, Harding cites Rose, for example, who states "that the origins of a feminist epistemology for a successor science are to be found in the conceptions of the knower, the processes of knowing, and the world to be known..." (Ibid.,146) in women's activities. In other words, we derive our understanding from women's lived experience and thereby get hold of the labour process of women's work as distinct from and dominant over men's. The major criticism of this perspective revolves around the idea of the desire to form an "alternative hegemony" (see e.g., Harding,1986;Rose,1986:180).

### **The Post Modernist Feminist Challenge**

The post modernist feminists, such as Jane Flax (1986) and Donna Harraway (1985), react to the proposal by standpoint theorists to develop a feminist hegemony as they do to any form of structural principle. As Rose states, "Instead of an alternative hegemony they seek a plurality of discourses in which the very construction of gender is at issue. This view offers the most radical alternative to the existing hegemonic construction of epistemology, since it does so by leaving to one side the issue of the political power of a masculinist science" (1986:180). In other words, they are calling for a rejection of the entire scientific enterprise as we now know

it. It is this project, I would argue, that is the focus of feminist standpoint epistemologies.

### **TOWARD FEMINIST METHODOLOGY**

It seems to me that the feminist standpoint method provides the means to "do methodology as feminists" by detailing women's experiences of patriarchy. But this project cannot accomplish this task alone, as the challenge of post modernist thinking reveals. Some of the questions raised by Harding (1986) are instructive here. She asks "...are women, or even feminists, a 'group' in the sense required by the standpoint epistemologies? ...can there be a feminist epistemological standpoint when so many women are embracing 'fractured identities' as Black women, Asian women, Native American women, working class women, lesbian women" (Ibid.,163)?

Harding (Ibid.,164) states that she is convinced by the work of post modernists (i.e., Harraway,1981;1985), with their focus on 'fractured identities' and their assertion that women's politics are very diverse despite the experiences they may share. Standpoint theorists do not address these

facts. Standpoint epistemologies, based on a notion of universalism, are unable to assimilate the issues raised by postmodernism, even though the logic of their own premises should, according to Harding (1986:191), lead them in that direction.

However, post modernists do not have the answer. They do not see unity or stability in the use of concepts such as race as a "standpoint". Even the validity of the concept of "woman" is questioned (see e.g., Segal, 1987). Walby argues that the "fractured identities" position is "misguided" stating that "it goes too far". "That the result is a denial of significant structuring of power and leads to mere empiricism" (1990:2). Keller also contends that the relativist position can "go too far" negating the revolutionary emancipatory power of feminism.

A further question asked of standpoint theorists by Harding relates to the issue of whether or not women's distinct perceptions and experiences of the world are shaped and created by male domination (1986:163). Harding asserts that standpoint projects neglect historical variation and changes thus permitting the post modernist project which challenges all forms of domination to develop. Rose notes that "Harding suggests that the possibility of a successor science arises with the development of historically 'new

people'. These derive from 'the conflict between the forms of producing persons (gendered persons) and the resistance by increasing numbers of women and by some men to living out mutilated lives within such sexual politics" (1986:180). <sup>7</sup>

Fee (1983:22) echoes the point made by Harding and Rose, that a fully feminist science is not achievable until society itself has been transformed by the feminist project. As Harding states,

'Something out there' is changing social relations between races, classes and cultures as well as between genders...at a pace that outstrips our theorizing. Thus the present situation for feminist analysis is not simple the one Kuhn identifies as preparadigm stage of inquiry. The social relations that is our object of study, which create and recreate us as agents of knowledge and within which our analytical categories are formed and tested, are themselves in exuberant transformation...It would be historically premature and delusionary for feminism to arrive at a "master theory"...Feminist analytical categories 'should' be unstable at this moment of history (1986:244).

Harding's recognition of the instability of contemporary social life, resulting in the variety of problems from which our discourses are mediated, is convincing. Moreover, I understand how a "master theory" is seen, under these conditions, as problematic. Heron and Storey (1986) make a similar point regarding a theory of the labour process. They

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<sup>7</sup>Rose (1986) is citing Harding from an unpublished paper.

remind us that the outcome of labour struggles can never be predicted: "With so much at stake, workers and their employers are simply too stubborn and too resourceful to conform to any overly tidy theory" (Ibid.,33). However, they do contend that it is possible "...to discern general tendencies in the actions of capitalists and workers that surpass the particularities of individual workplaces" (Ibid.,32).

Walby would agree with the above comments because she contends that her theoretical model of patriarchy is dynamic and able to deal with change. However, she has argued that Harding's survey missed one epistemological perspective - that of realism (1990:19). According to Walby, "The realist approach maintains that there are deep structures, which can be discovered with systematic enquiry" (Ibid.). Walby goes on to say that "These structures are not necessarily visible or immediately knowable" (Ibid.). This is a bit weak, from a sociological perspective, and a somewhat unnecessary argument for further supporting her project of developing (as opposed to fragmenting) concepts while criticizing Harding. Overall, Walby is critical of Harding for not adhering to a position. She states, "A weakness in Harding's work is her ambivalence to the point of abandoning that aspect of the project of science which is to create universalistically authoritative knowledge on the basis of systematic enquiry" (Ibid.,18-9). It seems to me that the postmodernist project and feminist



theory, in general, have shown us that there is more than one truth.

In summary, it is a waste of our collective skills to be caught up in deciding whether to correct bad science or to reject the entire scientific enterprise. The structure of scientific knowledge and the operation of bias are much more complex than either of these responses suggest. Furthermore, this review has shown that the continuation of this debate solely at the epistemological level may be somewhat unrealistic. We need to be testing feminist theoretical models, "doing methodology as feminists", and, in particular, detailing our methods for others' perusal, to bring new insights to the science question in feminism. The following discussion contributes to this aim by outlining the methodological approach utilized in this study.

#### **A FEMINIST METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO RESEARCHING WOMEN, WORK AND TRADE UNIONISM AT EATON'S**

In order to "do methodology as feminists", I began the research process from the standpoint of the women at Eaton's by conducting extensive, indepth, unstructured interviews with the women employees. In so doing, I did not begin with an assumption that since they were all women and employees of Eaton's the women's experiences would be the

same. Instead, my theoretical standpoint was that their class, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, general life circumstances, and position in the life cycle were intricately, and imperatively, intertwined, and that this would result in considerable variation and diversity among the interviewees. This was found to be the case, with one qualification in terms of race. Less than one percent of the research subjects were women of color; this accurately represented the percentage working in the Eaton's stores under study before the strike.<sup>8</sup>

In conducting the interviews, I was first interested in talking to the women and hearing what they had to say about how they perceived and experienced their working lives, family lives and the unionization events.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, I wanted to know how what they had to say - their personal consciousness - fit in with the theoretical formulations of patriarchal structures and ideologies that are argued, in an abstract and material way, to limit and determine women's lives.

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<sup>8</sup>I have no statistics on this fact. The remarks of employees as well as my own observations supported the percentage figure. It is important to note, however, that women and men of colour were hired by Eaton's as a result of the strike action.

<sup>9</sup>The interview schedule is listed in the Appendix.

My first approach of "qualitatively" interviewing the women is argued by many to be more in keeping with a feminist methodology. More specifically, "letting the women speak for themselves" is seen as being less distorting and presenting more of the truth of the situation. And, relative to quantitative methodology, I would agree. However, I believe the "purist" aspect of this position has been formulated more in reaction to the use of "malestream" quantitative methods as opposed to the cognency of qualitative methods. We tend to conflate the methodological conceptualization process with methodological techniques, leading to an underuse of many of the techniques at our disposal. Some techniques used in quantitative data collection can be conceptualized from a feminist point of view. As such, these techniques may be utilized for feminist research.

Similarly, Walby (1990) contends that there are limits to basing explanations solely on the words of the women interviewees -- certainly in terms of using this as the "only" approach. One difficulty with Walby's position with regard to the qualitative, interviewing processes as a whole, however, lies in her suggestion that what the women have to say may be more another's (patriarchy's) truth and therefore may be less valid than what systematic enquiry and theoretical developments may divulge. She states:

The limits of this approach to feminist

methodology are the limits of the views of the women interviewed. Concepts and notions about structures outside their experience are ruled out. I think this is very problematic, since it is not clear why women's everyday experiences should be less contaminated by patriarchal notions than are theories. All knowledge is mediated via ideas and concepts, and those available are necessarily affected by patriarchal relations. Systematic enquiry and theoretical development are more likely to elucidate the nature of patriarchal relations (1990:18).

Walby raises some important points here, similar to those noted above by Fee(1983) and Harding(1986) about the reality of women's voices being spoken in a patriarchal mould. However, the question remains: If all of enquiry is developed within a patriarchal mode, including theory and all forms of systematic inquiry, would not women's everyday experiences be equally or more valid as the data pertaining to "knowable" and "visible" structures for forming our explanations? Again, why must it be either or? This appears to be a static conception of women and women's struggles which, by all accounts, Walby would not agree to in general.

This research study of the women at Eaton's did find that the "words of the women" were essential to an understanding of the formulations of patriarchy in a way not credited by Walby. As noted in the introduction, the research process changed the focus of the study from examining women in unions to testing a theoretical model of patriarchy for understanding gender inequalities in society as a whole. It

was the words of the women that moved the project into this broader focus.

Additionally, the theoretical model of patriarchy provided by Walby elucidated the women's words in a way that would not be credited by those who dismiss meta-theories as distortion (cf., Oakley, 1981). A very vivid example of this occurred when I was attempting to understand why the women at Eaton's consistently told me that they would not accept the same job on a commissioned basis earning at least ten thousand dollars a year more than they currently made.<sup>10</sup> This was only later understood through further systematic enquiry and the application of theory.<sup>11</sup>

In summary, the research methodology conducted for this study of Eaton's complements the work of Walby. Her work has addressed a wide, often international, range of issues and problems. Her theoretical model proposes to accommodate this grand scope. Methodologically, her approach

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<sup>10</sup>This is elaborated on in chapter four.

<sup>11</sup>For further vivid examples of this point see the literature on the Sears Case in which the Equal Opportunities Commission took Sears to court for, among other things, discriminating against women by not allowing them into commissioned jobs. Sear's argued, and the women agreed, that they did not want to be in the commissioned positions. It is important to note that these jobs were not only male dominated but also were paid over double what the women were earning (see e.g., Milkman, 1986).

"...is realist, in the sense that it is engaged in an identification of the underlying structures of social life"(1990:19). Her sources of data are secondary and primary published data. The following study, which by contrast is micro sociological in scope, begins from the standpoint of the women's experiences of patriarchy; it thus contributes to a "filling in" of the structures delineated by Walby. Moreover, in keeping with the aims of feminism, this research was conducted in order to find ways and means of improving the lives of the women at Eaton's and elsewhere.

#### **THE CASE STUDY APPROACH**

The case study approach was chosen because the overriding intention of this study was to conduct exploratory research, as opposed to the testing of hypotheses. This kind of approach enabled the use of a variety of research techniques, and gave the author more freedom to explore areas that might offer insight to the issues, even if they were not seen as part of the original question. In other words, it allowed the researcher to be guided by the features of the subject being studied.

Very little research had been done on women and unions and the prevailing explanations for women's low levels of unionization were unsettling. They either blamed the women or blamed the union men without examining the wider social context for these relations. Trade unions, at a time when we were being bombarded with bad news about inequities for women in paid work, offered a strategy to improve the conditions of work for women. A case study approach of a union would allow an intensive study of every aspect of the union and might provide insight into women's experiences of unions and the possibilities of this venue for eradicating many gender inequities.

In the following the methodology of this investigation is outlined. Sources of data included: newspapers; union records; government documents; and archival material, in addition to the interviews. However, a chronological narrative form is used in the following as it elucidates the significant changes that were made during the research process as well as bringing in some sense of the women as people, as opposed to research objects.

#### THE CASE OF EATON'S

The choice of Eaton's for a case study was first based on the simple fact that an organizing drive began at the store, in January of 1984, just as I was looking for a union to study. First, the Eaton's department stores comprised over eighty per cent female workers. Second, the T. Eaton company was privately owned and represented a sector of the labour market where few women workers were currently unionized. Third, in the 1940's there had been a five-year-long organizing drive that did not attain certification that would allow an historical comparison with present day events. The unionization events at Eaton's clearly represented a unique opportunity to explore all my research concerns.

### **The Events**

Both the past and the recent attempts to unionize the workers at Eaton's were seen as a significant development in the history of the labour movement. In the early attempt, from 1948 to 1952, the Retail, Wholesale, Department Store Union (RWDSU) conducted an organizing drive that failed to attain a majority certification vote. In 1984, with the same union, this time only initiated by workers, 14 bargaining units at six stores in Southwestern Ontario were certified within six months. They subsequently endured a six-month-long strike for



a first contract, and a year later, eleven of the bargaining units were decertified.

Initially, my intent was to compare and contrast the two time periods under study. This gave way to providing a more historical development approach. This is not to say that there were not many similarities with the two drives, but rather it reflected my new research focus. Rather than outlining similarities or differences it became more important to chart the struggle for change over time.

### **THE RESEARCH PROCESS**

My direct involvement began when the strike was called on November 30, 1984. I participated on the picket lines in Hamilton and in Toronto and distributed literature, but for the most part played a covert role observing the events. The overall aims guiding the research were to discover why so many women were now joining unions and what were the factors that were facilitating their unionization. Additionally, I wanted to know what factors had inhibited women's membership in trade unions in the past, and to what extent these continued to present barriers to women's full participation.

A personal history of union activism placed the author within a pro-union position and I maintained this identification and alliance throughout the research process. In January of 1985, I attended the Ontario Working Women's (OWW) conference as a delegate from my own union. It was here that I began my overt activities researching the case of Eaton's. I was introduced to two of the women staff members of RWDSU, and one of them remained my major contact throughout the research process and later during the writing of this work. This woman was the only woman who remained on staff in the Toronto offices after the strike.

In the next year, I met and talked with union officials, observed the events of the strike, and talked with the women and men on the picket lines. At all times they were informed of exactly what I was doing and why, and my own position vis-a-vis unions. RWDSU provided me with immeasurable support and co-operation and facilitated an introduction and unqualified access to the Eaton's workers. From January 1986 to May 1986, I conducted a pre-test of the interviews for the 1984-87 events and formally interviewed participants in the 1948-52 drive.

### **Sample Subjects**

My interest was predominantly with the union activists. As mentioned, I was identified by the Eaton's workers as a union supporter. While this created some mistrust among the anti-union workers of the 1984 events, it did not pose a problem for this study, and in the end worked in my favour. The women were in a very volatile position, not knowing who to trust, feeling betrayed by, for example, the press, their customers, not to mention Eaton's. Stating my biases of being feminist and pro-union from the start seemed to instill confidence and I think, in part, accounts for the women's generosity in talking with me in a very uninhibited manner. The situation for the workers of the early drive was somewhat different and is discussed later.

My central concern was to study the experiences and perceptions of those women who could be defined as union activists -- in other words, those actively working for the union. I defined a union activist as one who was actively involved either in the organizing drive, the strike, or as a member of the unit executive of RWDSU. Hence, those voting in support of the union were considered pro-union but not activists. A few anomalies did occur where pro-union activists in the 1984-87 drive later became anti-union activists or anti-RWDSU, the specific union representing them. This will be discussed in more detail in later chapters. It is important

to note that in all cases these people did remain active and provided a rare insight into the barriers against women's full participation in unions.

### Researching the 1948-52 events

In May of 1985, I interviewed the organizer, Eileen Tallman Sufrin in Vancouver, British Columbia, where she currently resides. Along with a candid and lengthy interview which she allowed me to tape, she provided me with a wealth of sources of information. First, she informed me of the material relating to the organizing drive that was on file in the Public Archives of Canada. In the Ottawa archives, I discovered files from the organizing committee of the Canadian Congress of Labour (CCL), personal files of the organizers and files from the various unions that financially supported the drive.<sup>12</sup> The almost weekly newsletter entitled, Unionize, put out by the organizing committee of RWDSU and the transcripts from radio interviews with Eaton's workers, was also available. These documents provided valuable information on working conditions at Eaton's as well as the personal experiences and perceptions of the workers themselves.

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<sup>12</sup>These documents are found in the special collections listed in the bibliography under archival material. For those who may be interested, there was also one volume of personal files by Eileen Tallman Sufrin that are restricted.

Secondly, Tallman gave me the names of key individuals in Toronto whom I could contact for information. From them, I obtained a list of over 100 activists who were still alive and living in the Toronto area. These past Eaton workers had all attended a re-union of RWDSU 1000 in Toronto in 1982. I believe that this re-union attested to the strong attachment these workers had for each other, as a result of struggling for five long years to obtain union status. I think this also aids in explaining my subsequent decision not to interview the workers from this time period.

My original plan was to interview approximately 30 people from this list of 100 workers. In the end, I interviewed, in depth, five people during the early months of 1985, when the Eaton's workers were in the midst of their six-month-long strike for a first contract. These respondents included the two major RWDSU organizers, Lynn Williams and Eileen Tallman Sufrin, and three other Eaton's workers (two men and one women) who were active in the organizing. I revised my research plan because I had accumulated a wealth of archival data that contained the information I needed and Tallman Sufrin had published a book on the Eaton Drive (1984), which provided additional details on the structure and nature of the labour process at Eaton's and details of the union drive.

The interviews I did conduct tended to be very painful for some of the participants. They were witnessing the struggle of the present Eaton's workers involved in a long strike and it elicited unhappy memories of what they had endured. Not only did their drive last for five long years, their loss was due to a very close vote. After receiving many refusals to be interviewed for this reason, I felt it was unnecessary to put these former Eaton's workers through the interview process given the wealth of data I had already collected. The people I did interview all allowed me to tape our discussion, and they gave a rare introspective look at the period from 1948-52 that enabled confirmation of the archival data. Moreover, they served as one avenue of introduction to the union officials involved in the 1984 struggle.

#### **Researching the 1984-87 events**

Through my major contact woman, met at the OWW conference, RWDSU provided me with immeasurable support and co-operation, and facilitated an introduction to the Eaton's workers. From January 1986 to May 1986, I conducted a pre-test of the interviews for the 1984-87 events and formally interviewed the participants in the 1948-52 drive. The formal

interviews for the 1984-87 events took place during the spring and summer of 1986. Chronologically, this time period was before and during the public hearings to decertify the union.

Initially, I planned to interview women and men from two large and two small stores that were currently unionized. This was based on the fact that the organizational, and union literature seemed to suggest significant differences between large and small stores in various ways. This was not being borne out by the research process. I moved from an organizationally based understanding of Eaton's, to an examination of the labour process, as being integral to the gender inequities I was observing and hearing about from the respondents. As such, I decided to interview at all six stores that were certified and one store that failed to get enough votes for certification, for comparison purposes.

Seventy men and women workers were interviewed from the six unionized and one nonunionized Eaton's stores. Eighty percent of the respondents were women and twenty percent were men, reflecting the gender breakdown in the stores. The interviews ranged from one to six hours, with the majority being over two hours. Almost all of the interviews with the women were conducted in their homes, sitting around in their kitchens, and only two men from the 1948 organizing drive were interviewed in their homes. All the men from the 1984

unionization events were interviewed in restaurants or in the offices at the Labour Board or in the mall area, where applicable, by the men's choice. I also interviewed eight members of the RWDSU executive, all of whom were male, and two women RWDSU organizers.

From the beginning of this project, I was in constant contact with the workers and the union officials. I attended the majority of the decertification hearings which enabled socializing before, during, and after the day's meetings, as well as attending the social event on the day of the decertification vote. I also attended subsequent Christmas parties. I received numerous letters and cards from the workers during the years updating me on the events and situations occurring in their specific stores, or providing me with information previously unmentioned. The workers also provided me with an abundance of literature put out by the company and the anti-union supporters, as well as pictures and mementoes of the strike. I also received from the workers and union officials interaction and help with the clarification of details and events during the initial writing of this report.

Finally, from the union I received copies of all the newspaper reports over the course of the events, along with copies of their collective agreements, and bylaws. Basically,



the union provided me with whatever I asked for. Along with providing basically unrestricted access to documents, they provided immeasurable support in presenting me to the respondents as a credible person whom they should feel free to speak to.

### **The interviews**

I interviewed both men and women workers at all six stores in Southwestern Ontario that had been certified by RWDSU. For comparison purposes I also interviewed at one other store that lost the certification vote by a small margin. The number of workers interviewed at each store, as well as the nature of those interviewed, was dictated by the research process itself. I began with an initial list, provided by RWDSU, of those on the organizing committee, the unit executive, and the executive board of Local 1000 of RWDSU. In addition, over the year I had been noting the names of people at each store who were continually mentioned as key activists. At the start of each interview, I asked the respondents who they felt were the most active in the unionization events at their store. The respondents then chosen to be interviewed came out of the combined process of the participants' perceptions and my observations.

This procedure was extremely effective because it became clear that only a minority of workers were active from the beginning of the organizing drive through to the end of the decertification hearings. Many people became active or went from being active to inactive during the course of events. For example, many people who were not active during the organizing drive became active during the strike, or later by serving on the executive committee of the union, or when the decertification drive began. Others who were actively involved in organizing or the strike did not later participate in the union executive or the fight to save the union from decertification.

By continually asking the participants for names of the key activists, I was able to devise a list that included those workers who have been active at some point during the unionization events. The indepth interviewing of these people elicited answers to the questions guiding this research. Specifically, what were the reasons that the respondents became active at a particular time, and, once active, what facilitated or prevented their continued participation? It is important to note that at each store a few persons stood out above the rest as the key activists and, regardless of the size of the store, the number of activists varied and the majority were women.

In general, I interviewed workers one store at a time, beginning with the person, or persons, identified as the key activist. Once contacted, this person(s) invariably contacted RWDSU as to my credibility. Once again, the union support of my research and their willingness to field questions from the workers facilitated easy access to all participants. Once this key respondent(s) was interviewed and she gave the "green light" to the rest of the store, I had no difficulties with other respondents agreeing to be interviewed.

There is no doubt that if these key informants had not given their consent I would not have gained access to other respondents, regardless of whether the union gave their support. In any event, I encouraged all respondents to find out who I was, what my intentions were, and what to expect during the interview, by calling other respondents and RWDSU prior to my visit. By the time the interviews took place most respondents had met me several times throughout the year, or knew of me.

All of the interviews were taped and the respondents signed a tape release form granting them, and the store they worked at, anonymity. The interview was structured to take the respondent through the events in chronological order, although all the questions were open-ended. New questions were added

to the schedule as the research process proceeded according to new informations received or when certain areas seemed to be particularly important for most respondents.

The individuals interviewed were asked first about their personal, family, union, and waged work background. We then talked in depth about the work that they did at Eaton's and the unionization events. Emphasis was placed on their personal experiences and perceptions, the interrelatedness of their family life with paid work, and the union, and their changing feminist and class consciousness by virtue of the struggle they were engaged in.

### **The Research Experience**

Overall, I encountered no access problems and very little resistance by the participants. This was largely due to the support of the union. I had felt that this unrestricted support by the union might prevent any criticism of the union by the participants or lead to some prompting of "correct" answers. However, for the most part, I do not feel this was the case. My visibility and participation in the events as they were unfolding, the socializing we shared, and my connection to the university seemed to break down many

potential barriers and inspired a measure of confidence.

In addition, the continual interaction with the respondents at various stages of the research reinforced my feeling with regards of the validity and reliability of the data gathered during the interviews. Some people who initially refused to be interviewed later granted me an interview after having spent some time with me at various events. The refusals, which were rare, appeared to be primarily due to the timing. They were in the middle of the decertification hearings, and like respondents from the 1948-52 drive, felt it would be a painful experience to talk about it all. Many respondents were simply burnt-out and could not fit in the time to speak to me.

I did approach the anti-union activist group, who initially agreed to be interviewed together after the decertification hearings were over, but later refused on the basis that they felt I could not be objective because I supported the union. This did not affect the study because I was was interested in those who did want to join the union. Moreover, I did have the opportunity to observe this group over the course of the events and to hear their testimony in the decertification hearings and news accounts.

In general, all the respondents were initially very cautious. The different interpretations printed by the media, rumours of company and union spies, concerns about acting within the letter of the law, and a desire to keep their jobs, contributed to a very volatile situation. In the majority of cases, the interviews were very emotional, highly charged with energy, as the respondents recounted their experiences, feelings, and perceptions of the events.

### CONCLUSION

The measure of my success in gaining an "insiders view" to the women's lives can be attributed to the characteristics of "doing methodology as feminists". The participants were treated as subjects, rather than objects, of the study. They were a part of the choosing of the sample. They made decisions about closure or access. I began by seeing their experiences and perceptions as the most important part of the study, and at the same time delineated my feminist values for them. This, in part, was possible in terms of the use of an exploratory case study approach, but most importantly, one that was informed by feminist values.

As noted above, I guaranteed the women and the men anonymity. I found it very difficult to find ways to ensure that the speakers in the following chapters could not be identified -- in particular because I found during the research process that such identifiers as the department or store worked in, or the size of store were insignificant to the analysis. However, to present this data invariably enabled these high profile women to be identified. The reasons for this will become clear in the following chapters. For the moment, let me say, for example, that the women moved around from department to department so often that to be associated with a particular department said very little about the women and her skills, per se. However, giving one's age, one's store, or present department would immediately identify the women.

Given all of this, the respondents are referred to only by a name I have assigned to them. It is unfortunate that this detracts from the meaning in the following discussions. However, I made every effort to include quotes from respondents at every store for each point unless they were identical. In these instances one quote was considered sufficient.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PUBLIC PATRIARCHY, PRIVATE CAPITAL

Walby's model of patriarchy (1990) addresses the differences between patriarchy's forms and degrees. Walby states that, "Degrees of patriarchy refers to the intensity of oppression on a specified dimension, for instance the size of the wages gap between men and women. Forms of patriarchy refers to the overall type of patriarchy, as defined by the specific relations between the different patriarchal structures" (Ibid:174). In this chapter, we are going to concern ourselves primarily with providing evidence for this century's form of public patriarchy which Walby argues gradually replaced the earlier more privately based patriarchy. Chapter five deals more specifically with Walby's formulation of the degrees of patriarchy.

In what follows the public form of patriarchy will be identified by outlining the history of the Eaton's firm and management practices of control of the labour process. Walby has contended that paid employment and the state are the chief sites of public patriarchy and are characterised by a collective mode of expropriation of women's labour power and



by a patriarchal strategy of segregation and subordination (Ibid.,24). Eaton's, being privately and family owned, is an exemplary model of public patriarchy in paid employment. What we see in the historical development of the Eaton firm and management practices of control is the continual intersection of patriarchy and capitalism. The major crises, ie., the late 1940's and 1980's unionization events, occurred when these two systems of capitalism and patriarchy were particularly conflicting.

#### **MANAGEMENT PRACTICES OF CONTROL**

The analyses of management practices of control put forth by analysts such as Braverman (1974) and Edwards (1979) are not readily applicable to the historical development of the Eaton empire. First, these theorists have emphasized the capital, but not the gender, dynamic involved in management practices. Second, and relatedly, their major focus, for the most part, has been on the manufacturing sector where men predominate as employees. In terms of retailing, Braverman states that, "...the 'skills' of store operations have long since been disassembled and in all decisive respects vested in management..." (1974:371), while Edwards locates retail selling with a form of simple control system. (1979:179).

Susan Porter Benson's 1986 study of the retail industry in American department stores from 1890-1940 illustrates a further contradictory image. Benson asserts, "Whatever the successes of self-service since World War II, at least until then department-store managers wanted to enhance rather than dismantle skill, trying to root out practices of simple control and to forge a system of bureaucratic control which would produce a loyal salesperson" (1986:126). Taxonomies of management practice derived primarily from manufacturing do not account, according to Benson, for the "greater variability" and "more complicated social reality of the service industries" (Ibid.,288).

In the analyses of management practices of control at Eaton's, it is apparent that consistent with Edwards (1979), and contradictory to Benson's (1986) and Braverman's (1975) conclusions, throughout the history of the firm simple forms of control prevailed. Edwards states that the system of simple control "...tended to be informal and unstructured. The personal power and authority of the capitalist constituted the primary mechanism for control" (1979:25). During the crisis of control at Eaton's in the 1940's, management simply instituted a modified form of simple control, or hierarchical control, as denoted by Edwards (Ibid.,31). In this form of control, the situation of simple control was re-created, but

under the auspices of the manager, in the individual departments within the expanded firm. In the 1980's, the forms of simple control conflicted with the overall bureaucratization that was occurring within the Eaton's empire which contributed to the unionization events of the period.

By mitigating the importance of the gender dynamic in control systems, and hence the overall structure of patriarchy, Edwards is unable to provide a satisfactory explanation for the continuing systems of simple control in retail selling. He essentially "adds women on" to a "secondary" category within a "dual segmentation" labour market that comprises other (male) unskilled workers. In other words, in his model the segregation of the labour market is not based on gender but on levels of skill and other working conditions; and therefore he is unable to explain how and why women are differentially directed, relative to men, by labour process control systems. As Tancred-Sheriff has argued:

...the net control of the labour process is effected in a variety of ways, both subtle and overt. For example, a patriarchal control element, linked to gender inequality in the societal context permeates organizational reality and is translated into a very subtle form of internalized control (1983:21).

While Edwards does offer an historical analysis addressing worker resistance and changes in the occupational structure and labour processes, within the context of developing capitalist relations, as Tancred-Sheriff underscores, he

neglects developing patriarchal relations. As such, an analysis of gender inequality in society as a whole affecting the workplace is a critical omission.

It is argued in this chapter that simple forms of control, based predominantly on paternalistic dominance, which is an aspect of patriarchy (Lerner, 1986), are more effective than bureaucratic forms in controlling the working behaviour of women and more specifically, in maintaining a gendered division of labour. The bureaucratic relations being instituted at Eaton's, due to the empires' continued expansion in the 1980's, was in tantamount conflict with the relations of patriarchy that precipitated the historical struggle.

#### **ENTREPRENEURIAL FIRM AND SIMPLE CONTROL**

The history of the T. Eaton Company is firmly rooted within the context of developing capitalist and patriarchal relations. Canada was changing rapidly with the growth of cities and increased work in the public sphere creating a need for goods and services formerly made in the home. Women worked in the store from the very beginning and their historically low pay contributed to Eaton's having grown from a single

store founded by Timothy Eaton in 1860 to the one hundred and ten stores owned by the Eaton family in the 1980's.<sup>1</sup>

During Timothy Eaton's lifetime, he helped retailing into a new era by instituting new sales techniques that he claimed were based on bringing justice and equality to the industry (see e.g., Stephenson, 1969; Nasmith, 1923; Scribe. T. Eaton Co., 1919). In fact, the increasing size of his store and variety of goods made many earlier procedures ineffective. The change that Timothy Eaton introduced replaced the charge system with practices based on cash only. The custom of one price only, wiped out the system of "barter, haggling and credit" (Stephenson, 1969:22). Later, the slogan of "satisfaction guaranteed or money returned" was adopted (Ibid., 26). It remains a policy to this day (Ibid., see also Sufrin, 1982:24).

The new retail practices at Eaton's addressed the concerns over growing competition but also were clearly designed to appeal to the "new urban bourgeoisie". The working

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<sup>1</sup>Stephenson notes that in the 1860's, "A male clerk earned four or five dollars a week to start, rising perhaps to ten dollars after five years. Females normally started at no pay, but received two dollars and fifty cents per week if they proved themselves over a six-month probation period" (1969:14).

class,<sup>2</sup> generally bought through the "Eaton's catalogue" or the "wish book" as it was often called. As Bryant states,

In a fragmented country where vast numbers of people had no access to modern products, this was the only way to shop. ... In the early years of the century, the Eaton's catalogue was an important part of the culture, an indispensable text that was used not only to shop but to learn English. For the working-class woman, who had little or no excess money after attending to her family's basic necessities, the products in the catalogue were, for the most part, unattainable, and served as a constant reminder of the family's poverty (1977:100).

Timothy Eaton's public image, however, was one of paternalism; as Sufrin notes "Timothy Eaton was noted for acts of kindness and generosity to individuals" (1982:26). Furthermore, Stararowicz argues that his knowledge of and involvement with his employees was said to be extensive (1972:6-7). Certainly having everything located in one store made it possible for him to be involved personally in all aspects of production. He was therefore able to control the workforce using harsh discipline with promotions to command personal loyalty, as we will see below.

Timothy Eaton's form of simple control was differentiated by gender. His testimony at the Royal

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<sup>2</sup>The 'official history' of Eaton's written by Eaton's themselves (Eaton's Quarterly, 1869-1969) or Eaton's supporters, such as Stephenson (1969), claim that the store was accessible to the working class just by virtue of the open store policy and the Eaton's catalogue which reached out to this segment of the population.

Commission on Labour and Capital (RCLC) (1889) provided rare insight into these simple but effective and profitable modes of gendered capitalist control. The Commissioners, concerned about the exploitation of child and female labour in industry, questioned Timothy Eaton on the use of such labour. To begin, he was questioned on child labour.

By Mr. Heakes:

Q. Do you have very many people offering themselves as assistants, wishing to learn?

A. Sometimes there are more than others. That largely depends on circumstances. We very often have applications from persons whose home life is upset by accident or death of the father or support of the family (RCLC, 1889 cited in Kealy, 1973:89).

Mr. Heakes did not pursue this line of questioning, seemingly satisfied that the use of child labour was warranted under the circumstances. Timothy Eaton's response both affirmed his benevolence and allowed him to continue to exploit child labour. As importantly, it indicated the means by which he could enforce loyalty on the part of the worker.<sup>3</sup>

For women, loyalty was enforced by appealing to the status of an Eaton's employee.

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<sup>3</sup>Stories were passed down in the decades to come in which "loyal Eatonians" would recount times when Timothy Eaton, or another member of the family, helped them out during bad times as a basis for their unqualified support of the firm. For example, they would receive help with the down payment of their home, or simply the fact that they kept their jobs during the Depression.

By Mr. Heakes:

Do you think there are a greater number of people applying for positions now as saleswomen than would be wanted by the demand.

A. I do not think so. We have a great deal of difficulty in getting the class of persons suitable to our business (Ibid.,89).

In spite of this apparent difficulty, almost fifty percent of Eaton's workers were female (Ibid.) - numbers which the Commissioners did not think excessive. They could also point to the benevolence of Eaton's in offering women new opportunities to improve themselves by working in a clean and respectable environment. Moreover, as a requisite for the job, working-class women were required to emulate the dress and manners of the middle and upper classes. Thus, retailing did represent a step up in status from domestic and factory work - a situation which seemed to appeal to these women while simultaneously generating a loyalty based on their perceived privileged employment status.

Women, however, did not enjoy the concomitant working conditions associated with the relatively higher status of their employment. More so than men, they were subjected to Timothy Eaton's system of harsh discipline, favoritism, arbitrary authority and low wages. For example, fines were



levied against women returning five minutes late from dinner. If they were tardy more than twice the women were, in Timothy Eaton's words, "chastised" (RCLC,1989 cited in Kealey,1973:89). Women were also required to stand for ten hours a day or face removal from their jobs (Ibid.,90).

Chastisement and threats of job loss were not discussed in relation to men working at Eaton's. Moreover, the hearing revealed that men and women received different wage rates. For example, Timothy Eaton stated that twelve-year-old message girls and boys received one dollar and fifty cents and two dollars a week, respectively. A boy of fifteen started at about three dollars per week and the average salary at age seventeen would run from four to five dollars. Young girls remained at one dollar and fifty cents until they could show "what (was) in them" (Ibid.,88-89). The "average" salesman received ten to twelve dollars a week, while the "first class" saleswoman received from six to eight dollars (Ibid.).

Patriarchal control was most visible in the system of promotions and wage increases. For males, according to Timothy Eaton's testimony, "If capable of taking charge of a department he would get a rise quickly" Ibid.,88). In the case of women, he stated "When they get accustomed to the departments they get an increase of wages...some of the girls

pick it up in a month and others will be longer" (Ibid.,89). To justify this system, Timothy Eaton commented on the differences between girls and boys:

Girls are more apt when young. They take hold more rapidly at first than boys. But boys in time exert themselves more and aim at being something and to rise higher. But with girls it is different, and the wage they receive depends entirely on how much they apply themselves to business (Ibid.,88).

Timothy Eaton was basically claiming that girls and boys had different aspirations in employment which justified the gender distinctions.

Timothy Eaton's relations with his workers were also motivated by the awareness of the increasing militancy of the labour movement. His seeming benevolence in shortening the hours of work, for which he is most remembered, was in response to this union unrest. He was determined to keep his shop union free. Evidence of Timothy Eaton's opposition to unions can be found in the printer's strike of 1902. By this time Eaton's had moved to larger quarters at Yonge and Queen Streets. Printers, employed by Eaton's to produce their mail order catalogue, were organized by the Typographical Union. The Labour Gazette gave this account of the events:

[the Typographical Union]... called out on strike two union printers employed by the T. Eaton Co. on account of the refusal of the firm to run their composing room under union rules. The men obeyed and the five pressmen employed by the firm also

struck. Several bindery girls who were in the employ of the company were asked to do the work of these men and upon their refusal were discharged (1902:647; cited in Sufrin, 1982:26).

This account not only reveals Eaton's opposition to unions, but also the vulnerability of women's work position, relative to men's, since few women at the time were protected by union status. Eaton's would remain throughout its history a private family-owned organization, capitalizing on apparent benevolence, maintaining strict class and gender-based control of the workers, and harbouring a strong opposition to unionism.

#### **EXPANDED FIRM AND NEW SYSTEMS OF CONTROL**

When Timothy Eaton died a millionaire in 1907, his heir, John Craig Eaton, continued to manage the company in the traditions established by his father. He was now, however, dealing with a labour force of over 9,000 employees. The size of the department store necessitated that management be concerned not only with the need to increase profits, but to address the more complex issues of human interaction and the firm's social role. In general, Eaton's working conditions were apparently slightly better than other firms in the retail industry (Bryant, 1977; Starowicz, 1972).

Nevertheless, Eaton's employees had many reasons to grieve. Even the "official" history of Eaton's, written by William Stephenson, noted: "At the whim of Jack Eaton or any member of managment, any employee could be dismissed, without cause or redress" (1969:63). Moreover, during the cloakmakers' strike in 1912,<sup>4</sup> "...the public was supplied with a long list of grievances, ranging from low rates, and acceptance of graft by management personnel, to homework, unsanitary washrooms and child labour" (Speisman, 1979 cited in Sufrin, 1982:27). The strikers were attempting to get union recognition. Sufrin argues that despite considerable public support, the strike ended within fifteen weeks, thus revealing the ability of Eaton's to override negative public opinions by presenting its "benevolent image" and by controlling the press, which had initially supported the workers, by denying them their considerable advertising revenues (op.cit.:28).

John Craig Eaton attempted to deal with the expanded firm and employee resistance by trying to standardize relations. In 1923, a New York drygoods economist, S.H. Ditchett, described Eaton's managment relations with its employees. According to Ditchett, the overall policy

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<sup>4</sup>According to Sufrin, most of the apparel that was sold in Eaton's stores was made by Jewish garment workers in the Eaton's manufacturing factory. These garment workers were in the process of attempting to unionize to put an end to sweat shop conditions in the factory (1982:27).

"...being at all times to temper justice with mercy and yet insure continuous and general efficiency" (Ditchett, 1923:35). He discussed, for example, the Employment Department which was charged with advertising for the hiring of employees as well as the payment of salaries.

The office of the Employment Department Head is always open to employees, so that they may discuss their troubles freely with him or with one of his immediate assistants and not only receive a square deal but be so convinced that they are getting fair treatment as to remove any possible feeling of hostility or resentment (Ibid.).

Working closely with the Employment Department was the Staff Service Department, "formerly known as the Efficiency Department" (Ibid.) This department was charged with setting fair quotas for salespeople's commissions as well as the training of the sales staff. Salespeople were required to attend instructional classes after being hired and to take written tests periodically on the merchandise they handled, while continuing educational work by attending films and lectures in the daytime and evening (Ibid.).

The continuing benevolence and paternalism of Timothy Eaton were further carried out by John Craig Eaton in of welfare plans and employee input programmes. A welfare department was instituted to oversee the running of the employee emergency hospital and dental clinic. Moreover, as Ditchett indicated, "Not only do employees go to the Welfare

Department when sick or hurt, they tell its head their personal and family troubles, and find in him a sympathetic and judicious counsellor" (Ibid:37). In addition the employees were given a discount on purchases; monetary rewards for suggestions that bettered the firm; banking services; restrooms and cafeteria facilities; and outside of working hours, recreation events such as summer camp for boys. It was Ditchett's assessment "...that the T. Eaton Co. errs on the side of liberality, if at all, whenever one of the members of its organization is in need" (Ibid.,36).

John Craig Eaton's running of the firm ended prematurely with his death in 1922. He was described by the Hush Free Press, an alternative newspaper of the day<sup>5</sup>, as follows:

Sir John Craig Eaton was the best loved Big Business executive in Canada. He was a great man, a great humanitarian -- great in heart and head -- always approachable by the humblest of his employees - quick to right wrongs anywhere in his merchantile empire, if he heard about them - impulsive in his generosity -- magnificent in his human traits. He infused into the Eaton Company a good spirit of fraternity, justice and goodwill ... and won from his employees a loyalty money could not buy (Oct.9,1948:4).

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<sup>5</sup>Copies of the Hush Free Press that contain articles on Eaton's can be found in Special Collection, Sufrin Eileen, MG 31 B Vol.I. Public Archives, Canada.

## CONTRADICTIONS OF CONTROL

According to the Hush Free Press when Robert Eaton assumed the presidency, he came to be known not for his concern with the welfare of his employees, as was the case with his predecessors, but for his love of money (1948:4). He was faced with a growing industry and ever-larger numbers of people, both of which created problems of cost, efficiency, and control. Robert Eaton continued the standardization techniques instituted by his brother, John Craig Eaton. Under these practices the company continued to prosper right through the years of the Depression and "to branch out" in what was described as a "capitalistic way" (Ibid).

Stores were now located in eight cities across Canada. During the Steven's Parliamentary Committee on Price Spreads and Mass Buying Practices (1934), which, according to Sufrin (1982:29) was one of the only times Eaton's was forced to open its books to the public, the committee auditors "...found that in 1929 Eaton's accounted for fifty-eight percent of all department store sales and did seven percent of Canadian retail business, a share unmatched by any company in the United States" (Steven's Parliamentary Committee, cited in Sufrin, 1982:29) The growth of the firm was, however, paralleled by the increasing discontent of its workers.

Simple control of the workers continued, but was necessarily modified due to the size of the firm. Departmental managers controlled the workers by means of "close supervision" and their right to hire and fire at will. The Steven's Parliamentary Committee (1934), noted above, identified the key role of the department store managers in both the control of workers and in ensuring the financial success of Eaton's:

His was the responsibility for running "his own little store". He was in charge of the buying, advertising, merchandising and staff. For this he was paid a good salary and, as well, an annual bonus commensurate with the profit his department showed for the year...To protect his bonus, or even his job, the manager was compelled by the practice of "loading"<sup>6</sup> to drive as hard a bargain as he could with his suppliers, and to keep payroll and other employee costs to a minimum (Ibid., cited in Sufrin, 1982:29).

The employees, the majority of whom were women, suffered low wages and poor working conditions under this system which placed unlimited power in the hand of the managers.

Evidence of these poor working conditions can be found in the testimony of Eaton's workers before the Steven's Commission on Price Spreads (1935). At the hearings the

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<sup>6</sup>The practice of "loading" referred to adding charges to the department for stock and other items at more than the actual cost superficially lowering the profit margin justifying higher retail costs.



workers emphasized that conditions had been deteriorating since the death of John Craig Eaton in 1922. Sufrin notes that "The Committee learned that 68.7 percent of the Eaton's female salesclerks earned less than \$13 a week (April, 1933). Across the street, 51 percent of Simpsons' women salesclerks received \$12.50 (January, 1934) which was then the Ontario minimum wage for a 44-hour week" (Ibid., cited in Sufrin, 1982:29-30). This minimum wage did not apply to about 20% of Eaton's workers who were supposedly "learners" or part-time, the majority of whom worked in the garment area. Mrs. Wells, for example, had worked at Eaton's from 1916 to 1934. She testified that for twelve of those years she taught the other girls to operate the machines. When she went back on the machines herself, after twelve years service, she was paid the "learners" rate of eight dollars (Steven's commission, 1935 cited in Eaton's Today:185).

In addition the women testified to being "badgered", "harassed", "threatened", having their work timed with a stopwatch, being subjected to a system of "speedup" that had them in tears or hysterics, the slashing of their piecework rates, arbitrary firings, and being sent home without cause or justification (Ibid., 185-194). To protest their exploitation the women in one department attempted to form a local of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. Eaton's locked the women out when they walked off the job to

consult with the union. So notorious was the company's opposition to unions that in the 1934 Labour Day parade "...marchers dipped their flags in sorrow as they passed Eaton's..." (Telegram,1934: cited in Sufrin,1982:30).

### CRISIS OF CONTROL

When John David Eaton took over the direction of the Eaton's empire in 1942, he would be forced by the five-year-long (1947-52) unionization drive by RWDSU, in the Toronto operations, to deal more directly with the complicated social reality of the department store. The store now employed over 30,000 people (Sufrin,1982:31) and its operation was described by the New Liberty (1948) magazine as "...sprawling 'like an octopus' over 200 communities and, through its huge mail order business, into virtually every Canadian home" (Ibid.,23). The empire consisted of "48 department stores, five warehouses, service and factory buildings, and 352 catalogue sales offices" (Stararowicz,1972:8).

John David Eaton found the firm "seething with dissatisfaction and discontent" (Hush Free Press, Oct. 13,1951:4). The news article further stated:

In the years between the death of his father and

his own advent to power, employees below the top ranks were only cogs in a monstrous machine or robots controlled by hands behind a curtain. Almost without exception they were at the mercy of departmental managers who in turn were at the mercy of the executive. They could be fired for the most trivial reason or no reason at all. There was no certainty, no security, anywhere (Ibid.).

Until the RWDSU unionizing drive in 1948, any employee even suspected of union sympathies would have been instantly fired. The managerial strategies utilized by John David were motivated by objections to unionism and a need to win back the goodwill of the consuming public.

In 1948, at the start of the unionization drive, John David announced a plan of action entitled, The New Deal for Employees. It was touted as a modern "magna carta" of employee relations and was expected to deal with the discontent of workers and promote the benevolence of the firm (Hush Free Press, Oct. 9, 1948). On the New Deal, John David was quoted as saying:

It recommends hospitalization, welfare and many other things. But the greatest thing in it is the pension plan which will take care of EVERY employee under any circumstances. It is the biggest and greatest mass pension and welfare plan ever put forward by any company or any government; and one of the finest things in it is that NO employee of Eaton's can be fired without cause and without the closest scrutiny by a committee to be appointed for such a purpose. It gives its beneficiaries more help and greater security than any Labor Union in the world could offer (Op.cit.:5).

All the major newspapers provided extensive coverage of the new benefit plans proposed by John David Eaton, pointing out the tremendous cost to implement these programmes and lauding his benevolent concern for his employees (e.g. Oct.15,1948 in: Toronto Star; Globe and Mail; Toronto Telegram; Winnipeg Free Press).<sup>7</sup> Some employees, however, saw things differently. According to one pro-union Toronto employee:

With a union, an employee feels he can bring an injustice to light without risking getting the sack. Paternalism might have been all right in 1869 when Timothy Eaton knew all his employees by their first name, but I don't think it works at all today in a place with over 12,000 employees (Mr. McIlrath, Radio Broadcast, Nov.16,1948).

In reality, there was a large gap between the ideological pronouncements of John David Eaton and the practices at Eaton's in Toronto that were revealed during the five-year-long unionization drive.

The class and gendered dynamics of systems of control were very visible in this post-war period. Many women had been drawn into paid work to fill the jobs vacated by the men who had gone off to war. Management retained the cheaper labour power of women after the war to expand their operations.

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<sup>7</sup>Copies of these news articles and all other newspaper articles cited in this chapter are located in Special Collection, Sufrin, Eileen, MG 31 B 31 Vol.I. Public Archives, Canada.

Between 1942 and 1948, Eaton's took on over 20,000 workers, the majority of who were women (Toronto Star, Oct. 9, 1948). While many women were forced to return to the home, those that remained in paid work, out of economic necessity, were subject to a renewed enforcement of paternalistic dominance, for example, in terms of a lowering of their wages relative to men's. This served to justify the continued employment of women and the subordinate nature and structure of their work relative to men's. A salesman's account of this relation was that:

There wasn't women's lib in those days. Each war opened up more positions for women. There was a certain resentment towards the women who were involved. Eaton's was very old fashioned. Men went out to work and women stayed home. This was from the Victorian days. And Eaton's represented this. This is why men got more pay because he needed more to support the woman at home. This was the whole philosophy. They always preferred men. Women they felt only came into the workforce for a short period of time. The women were mostly single. For the single girls it was a job. But they quickly got married and when they got married they were laid off. Just like my wife (who worked at Eaton's), when she got married she was forced to leave her job. No floor managers were ever women (Tom).<sup>8</sup>

Women could be paid lower wages than men due to their occasional status and the ideology supporting the notion that they were earning "pin money". The differential treatment

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<sup>8</sup>"Tom" is a name given to this respondent to protect his identity. This system continues throughout the thesis.

ensured the wives's services to men in the home and cheap labour for the capitalist.

Moreover, there were "men's jobs" and "women's jobs". The public patriarchal strategy of segregation and subordination (that male workers and management supported) was apparent in the strict job segregation by sex on the shop floor. The growing number of women workers was very visible and a real threat to men's jobs. One worker commented to a respondent that in his working area:

When I went to war I could have counted the number of women on one hand and when I came back - they had guaranteed the vets their jobs - and we came back and you could have counted the number of men on one hand and that seemed to continue (cited by Mary).

Male workers could see that women were replacing them, and the wage differential only made their jobs less secure.

There was a differential in the rates of pay. This worked against the women but the guys felt kind of threatened that Susy down the aisle could do my job for a dollar and a half less. This was a general feeling. So while men were afraid of their jobs there was also a fair amount of physical work so the men felt that would keep them out (Carl).

Men's and women's jobs were defined by the amount of physical labour involved in them.

Eaton's used to deliver groceries at that time and it wasn't a job that women could do because the boxes were heavy. In heavy lifting areas

there were no women. In the warehouses, large appliances, rugs... No women (Tom).

It was certainly in the capitalist's interests to employ all women. One manager went "...on record saying that if he were top dog in the General Offices, he would fire all men and use men only as managers and section heads - so that he would have a cheaper and more docile staff" (Unionize, Aug.3,1948). The interaction of patriarchy with capitalism conflicted enough to provide a measure of job security for the men. Overall, women were viewed as easily replaceable and they had very little recourse to fight this injustice.

Management was primarily male and it retained broad latitude in dealing with the workers - a contradiction given John David's stated intent to do away with arbitrary and discriminatory management but consistent with a modified form of simple control. One of the RWDSU organizers stated:

The company preached the line that you don't work for Eaton's you work for your own department. Each department is a little store (John, Union Executive).

Departmental managers, with interests of their own, had considerable control in the running of their departments. Commenting on the departmental managers, one employee contended:

I know of lots of departments where I wouldn't

want to work because of the difference in department managers. At Eaton's so much depends on the departmental manager - he practically runs the department as a little store of his own. In fact, the managers take this out on their help (Mrs. Bell, Radio Broadcast, Nov. 16, 1949).

Women were more vulnerable than men to management's arbitrary rule due to their subordinate status in the workplace (Carl). Unionize gave many hints of sexual harassment occurring between management and the women. For example,

A number of long-service Reserve Staff employees have notified the Union in recent months of the dissatisfaction existing over the way Mr. Davidge is running the department. Placements are not running smoothly, and his general attitude toward employees is far from gentlemanly (Aug. 21, 1951).

The Reserve Staff, comprised mostly of women, were particularly dependent on the goodwill of the manager to ensure their hours of work. The Unionize pamphlets were replete with examples of hirings, firings, promotions and disciplining of the workers on the basis of nepotism, favoritism, age and gender. Moreover, job incentives for skilled sales people in the form of commissions added to hourly wage rates, were gradually dropped from most sales positions (Unionize, 1947-52).

The pension, sick pay policy, and retirement plans, instituted by John David, were also influenced by the



recommendation of the departmental manager as well as being structured to omit many workers, predominantly women. For example, part-time employees were excluded from the plans, and benefits were based on whether or not employees lived at home with their parents or had a second income, notably the male wage. Women in cosmetics were also excluded on the argument that they worked for an "outside company" (Unionize, Oct.12,1948).<sup>9</sup> Moreover, accounts in Unionize and by respondents repeatedly referred to the lack of respect for older workers and the attempts to get rid of them before they were eligible for pensions. Overall, the welfare plans benefited a minority of workers and then only to a limited degree.

By 1960, Eaton's share of department store business had dropped from the over 58 percent of earlier decades to 39 percent (Stephenson,1969:113). It was stated:

...as if feeling its years, the corporate body known as Eaton's seemed unwilling or unable to chart a course. It was as though massive doses of tranquilizers - or perhaps pain-killers - were being pumped into that body dulling both perception of danger and the will to combat it. One possible reason for this was that Eaton's like many other firms in the United States, had not taken on new managerial staff for almost thirty years...they formed a sort of inbred self-perpetuating managerial cadre which, though still vigorous and well-meaning, was stifling the opportunities for advancement of younger men

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<sup>9</sup>For a more elaborate account of the welfare schemes see Sufrin,1982.

(Ibid.,119).

It was Stephenson's contention that the personal touch and benevolence of the Eaton firm was no longer possible when "costs were spiralling". "Sheer survival", he argued, "decreed a more businesslike approach to business. The word "profit", in mild disrepute since Robert Young Eaton's day, must be reinstated as a respectable goal of every part of the huge firm" (Ibid:124). This meant, according to Stephenson, that drastic changes had to take place in both service and labour that would entail a new "corporate philosophy" (Ibid:25).

#### THE MODERN FIRM

Eaton's began moulding an entirely new "corporate philosophy" by putting men whom were not a member of the Eaton family at the head of the firm. In the centennial edition of the Eaton's Quarterly (1869-1969), Robert Butler, the first non-Eaton to hold the presidency in the firm stated:

The need to control costs and improve productivity necessarily focussed our attention on organizational and operational matters. The shopper, and her requirements, got out of focus. Now, we can, and must direct our attention to the shopper by improving the atmosphere in our store, the interior design, the presentation of our merchandise, our attention to her convenience. In this respect - our response to the shopper - the dependence of the company on every staff member is made apparent. In the final analysis, what determines a shoppers reaction to Eaton's is the way she is treated by the individual

Eaton staff member. There isn't one person in our company whose attitude towards and treatment of a shopper can't make us or break us with that shopper. Management is fully aware of this and that's why the continued enhancement of our good corporate spirit is a cornerstone of company policy (Ibid.)

In practical terms, Butler encourage skilled selling in contrast to the self-service schemes: service was emphasised in order to attain loyal customers. In short, good social relations were seen as playing an important part in satisfying customers and as importantly, in the essence of the work itself. Moreover, the achievement of this goal required that everyone operate according to the dictates of company policy. Butler continued:

Management must be a closely-knit smooth working team of different abilities and different specialized knowledge...(which) must be integrated and made mutually supporting by common philosophy about the character of the company, its objectives and its policy toward staff, customers, suppliers and the community at large. When you have this kind of team among senior management - as we have - and among managment at all levels, it soon permeates the whole organization with all members of the Eaton staff, no matter what their responsibilities, as applying their different talents and abilities to a common purpose in what we might call "the Eaton way" (Eaton's Quarterly, 1969:3).

In order to pursue this new "corporate philosophy", Butler set out on a course to, at one and the same time, institutionalize hierarchical power, rationalize store operations, and enhance skill among the salespeople and improve service to the

customer. All of which were in direct contradiction with each other and the social complexity of the firm.

Between the end of the 1960's and the early 1970's alone, for example, a company merchandise office was set up to handle buying previously done by individual stores. A new computer programme was initiated to cut down on manual labour and speed up data processing. Eaton's factories and groceries were closed down and 14 of its 23 branches in smaller cities and towns throughout Ontario were sold or closed. They then opened up a series of discount stores called Horizon to compete with such juniors as Towers, Woolco and K-mart. Many managers were let go, or transferred to other work, or given early retirement. University graduates were brought in to take their places. Finally, in 1976, they closed down their catalogue sales division and laid off 9,000 employees, the majority of whom were women (Bryant, 1977; Stephenson, 1969; Toronto Star, January, 1969; Canadian Business, Aug. 1984; Stararowicz, 1972). None of these changes occurred smoothly.

#### CONTRADICTION AND CRISIS IN THE MODERN FIRM

In 1978, the period of experimentation was over. After leaving the presidency to non-Eaton personnel for less than

a decade, the four sons of John David stepped in and took direct control of the company. In the next six years, the strategies to bureaucratize the firm and the continuing reality of modified simple control of the labour process came into increasing contradiction, leading to the crisis precipitating the unionization events in 1984.

The firm continued to expand while at the same time severe staff and wage cutbacks were employed to rationalize the operations of the stores and to finance the expansion. For the most part, it was the women who were laid off. Management also used sexual harassment and intimidation to control the work behaviour of the women. While strict rules dictated company policy on firings, evaluations, discipline and promotions, management wielded considerable arbitrary power in the implementation of those rules. For example, one women stated:

The store manager used to imply sexual innuendos. The way that he has spoken, you know that he means something a little different than what he is saying. And I have been in the stock room and he came in and made a comment that he had dreamt about me and and he went on about it and said he didn't think my boyfriend would like it. I had heard that he had bothered other people in the store. That really bothered me. I was in the stockroom and no one was around - he was a much older man than me - it was annoying and scary. Everytime he was around I would try to avoid him and just do my work so that he had no complaints or reason to call me into his office. I didn't like the way he talked to some of the women. Many women transferred to other stores or quit because of him. I just tried to avoid him as much as possible as I knew I would be leaving

Eaton's soon (Edith).

Sexual harassment could force an "undesireable women worker" to quit as well as maintain discipline.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, favoritism in applying the rules could hinder a promotion, evaluation, or shorten her hours or create cause for dismissal. As one respondent pointed out, "the only way that one could get fired is theft, or N.S.F. cheques or if they're steadily late -- like, we have a rule that you get like two verbal warnings and three written, then you're out" (Susan). Sexual harassment was a more subtle way to get rid of an employee.

Favoritism was also rampant at Eaton's and one of the major causes of discontent among employees. A full-time saleswomen argued:

One girl comes in late and doesn't get told anything and the next girl or myself comes in late and I get my ears blown off. Several warnings and I could lose my job or it would prevent me from getting a better cosmetic line. There was one girl who was constantly going home with headaches and it was convenient at long weekends and it was okay. People, they get out of stock taking and we couldn't even ask to go home early (Judy).

For the part-time employees:

If they didn't like you and you were late or called

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<sup>10</sup>Gannage (1986:13) points out that Edward's (1979) identifies sexual harassment as an aspect of systems of simple control. He does not, however, link this to a theory of gender oppression.

in sick sometimes they'd say, well don't give her all the hours (Susan).

Men, on the other hand, all worked full-time with the exception of some male students. As they were on commission, their hours were more flexible. They were not harassed for being late or taking long lunch hours as such practices implied that they were basically taking money out of their own pockets. Moreover, with one exception, their managers were male and they were not subject to sexual harassment.

Overall, Eaton's embarked on a mode of expansion hitherto unmatched in its long history. Most notably, in 1977 they opened the first phase of the lavish showpiece, the Toronto Eaton Centre, with the second phase completed in 1978. Reminiscent of the early days of the Eaton's store, the centre appealed to a limited segment of the population and a limited class of people. At the same time, they cancelled the Canadian institution of the Eaton's Santa Claus parade. Furthermore, they drastically reduced their sale staff across the country by over thirty percent, ended merit raises in 1977 and in the midst of the recession in 1981 imposed a 26-month-long wage freeze.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>see e.g., Globe and Mail, May 31, 1977:5, April 7, 1982:B1, April 21, 1982:B3; Winnipeg Free Press, June 7, 1977:4; Financial Times, Aug. 15, 1977:6, Feb. 7, 1983:12; Financial Post, Jan. 24, 1976:15; Toronto Star, April, 7, 1982:A3.

The wage freeze ended in 1984, but the employees did not recoup the losses they had suffered. The raises averaged up to four percent and some employees did not receive a raise at all. In the face of high style, elegance, and emphasis on personal service to the customers of the Eaton's Centre, management stepped up efforts to harness and rationalize sales skill at the older stores. They demoted some female department heads to section head, effectively eradicating one level of supervisors. From coast-to-coast women departmental heads lost the right to do the scheduling and to be involved in hiring and firing. In addition, self-service schemes were pushed which removed skill from the workers as well as cut back on selection and service for the customer, not to mention the fact that this method required less labour. As the Canadian Business magazine noted:

What's more, about half of the people who are left have been converted into a part-time labour force. The chains gambled that any erosion in service would be more than compensated for by savings in benefit payments. They also figured that a mixed workforce would be more resistant to union organizing and that any old retainers who were kept on the payroll would stay loyal (Aug., 1984:59).

Whenever full-time employees left the firm, they were not replaced. By 1984, most sections comprised only one full-time person and the rest were part time or occasional.



On the eve of the organizing drive, none of the workers felt they had any job security, and loyalty to the company was hard to justify. Eaton's now comprised 110 stores located all across Canada selling hundreds of commodities and services and employing over 180,000 workers. Reminiscent of 1948, labour was just a commodity to be bought as cheaply as possible, manipulated for profit and then discarded when it had served its purpose. Eaton's was ripe for unionizing. Only now, the intersection of the changed dynamics of patriarchy and capitalism affected the nature of the struggle as well as the outcome.

### CONCLUSION

The history of the Eaton firm and management practices of control reveals times of intense conflict and contradiction as the dynamic interaction between patriarchy and capitalism continually changed. Unlike the factory setting, social interaction was the essence of the work in the retail store. Edward's (1979) argument that the systems of simple control are prevalent in retail industries is borne out in this study of Eaton's. The crises of control were precipitated by the continuing forms of simple control of the labour process and the gradual bureaucratization of the firm necessitated by the size of the operations.

This chapter has shown that Walby's description of a form of public patriarchy in paid employment existed at Eaton's and that the major patriarchal strategies of segregation and subordination were also applied. The conflicting and contradictory relations of the two systems of capitalism and patriarchy were revealed in increasing tension on the shop floor at Eaton's, most notably in the two time periods under study. The next chapter examines the patriarchal relations on the shop floor in more detail, specifically addressing evidence of changes in the degrees of patriarchy.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DEGREES OF PATRIARCHY: THE GENDERING OF JOBS

In the last chapter, evidence was presented to show the presence of public patriarchy in paid work at Eaton's department stores. Walby has argued that along with the gradual move from private to public patriarchy, in this century, there has been a reduction in the degrees of patriarchy. She has found this to be true in all six of the dominant patriarchal structures that comprise her theoretical model of patriarchy (1990:195). However, according to Walby, these changes have, at the same time, produced the changes "...in form, incorporating some of the hard-won changes into new traps for women" (Ibid.,201).

This chapter will examine the gendering of jobs at Eaton's during both of the time periods under study. The purpose is first, to show that paid work is a site of gender production. Secondly, it will show that superficially there has been a reduction in the degree of oppression for women in paid work in the 1980's, relative to women in the 1940's. However, it is argued that this change is more apparent than real. The changed form of patriarchy, evident

in that it is now built into the labour process itself and hence is much less visible than in the 1940's, has resulted "in new traps for women". It is my contention that relative to men, the overall intensity of oppression in women's paid work at Eaton's has increased over time.

Finally, and most importantly, this chapter provides evidence for Walby's major assertion that the public sphere of paid work is crucial to maintaining patriarchy. She contends that the lifting of the marriage bar during the Second World War was the most important effect of the war on gender relations (1986:248). It is from this contention that she makes the further claim that "The labour market is more important and the family less important as the determinant of women's labour force participation than is conventionally assumed" (1990:56). As noted in chapter one it is this assumption that has been controversial and contrary to previous understandings and explanations of women's oppression.

In what follows, we will first present a brief profile of salesworkers in Canada up to the time of the unionization events in 1984. The intent will be to show that job segregation by sex among salesworkers was not unique to Eaton's department stores. Secondly, our concern will be

with providing evidence for paid work as a site of gender production. We will examine the historical gendering of jobs at Eaton's and how the changes in form, by becoming more subtle, obscured the reality of further intensification of women's subordination on the job. The final section will examine women's perceptions of gender segregation at work in the 1980's to provide support for Walby's claim that the labour market has taken on increasing importance relative to the family in determining the nature of women's work experience.

### **SALESWORKERS**

It would be surprising to argue that job segregation by sex exists among salesworkers. Unlike most other occupations, where either men or women predominate, saleswork comprises almost an equal proportion of male and female workers. The visibility of both sexes on the shop floor and in the occupation of sales as a whole, masks the prevasiveness of job segregation by sex and its effects on the conditions of work for women. Moreover, given that both men and women perform the same job of selling, any differences in product sold, or in establishment worked in,

is often perceived as a matter of choice. A close examination of this occupation reveals some fundamental differences for men and women.

Overall, it is difficult to provide an accurate profile of salesworkers in Canada. First, there has been relatively little research done specifically in this area of women's work.<sup>1</sup> The majority of the information we have comes from the considerable body of literature produced by Pat Armstrong (1984) and, together with Hugh Armstrong (1983,1984), on women's work as a whole. Secondly, as Armstrong and Armstrong (1983:232-248) have noted, the available statistics present a problem in comparing industries and occupations over time and tend to camouflage the degree of sexual segregation and concentration.

What the work of Armstrong and Armstrong (1984) has reinforced is that historically saleswork has been one of the leading occupations for women. Approximately 6.8 percent of all women workers were employed in saleswork in 1941 and this figure rose to ten percent by 1981 (Ibid.,34,36). Not

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<sup>1</sup>Research that specifically addresses retail salesworkers include Julie White's study (1983) of the impact of Microelectronics in the Retail Trade and Pamela H.Sugiman's material (1984) on retail clerks' discontent and obstacles to collective expression in their working lives.

only were more women finding work in this area but the proportion of women to men increased. In 1941 41.4 percent of this occupation were female workers and by 1981 they comprised 59.4 percent (Ibid.).

However, the majority of jobs arising in later years were part-time. During the economic recession in 1980-1982, Armstrong found that "...full-time jobs declined while part-time jobs increased" (1984:91). Women accounted for 60 percent of those losing full-time work and made up the majority of those taking on the new part-time jobs (Ibid.,91). This is not an isolated factor associated with the recession of the early 1980's. Julie White's (1983) research has shown that part-time work has been steadily increasing over the last 30 years and has been confined to a few industries and occupations where women are predominantly found, one of which is sales.

Other statistics point to some significant differences between male and female salesworkers, in the wages they receive, the hours they work, and the industries and workplace establishments in which they are employed. The gap between male and female wages has been higher in this occupation than the national average. In 1983, for example, the national average wage of female full-year workers was

60.2 percent of men's. Within sales, women earned 48.7 percent of the male wages.<sup>2</sup> Armstrong (1984) has documented that part-time saleswork in 1982 was primarily the domain of women who comprised "...over two-thirds of all part-time sales workers... and 39,000 saleswomen usually worked less than nine hours a week..." (Ibid.,91)<sup>3</sup>. Finally, women salesworkers are concentrated into a few jobs in the trade sector, while men occupy a wider variety of positions in the industrial sectors. There is a further breakdown by sex within trade, with the majority of women found in retail and men in wholesale (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1983:9).

In sum, when we look closely at the occupation of sales, within the labour force as a whole, we discover that job segregation by sex is not unique to Eaton's department stores. Moreover, women's saleswork is predominantly performed in the retail industry, as opposed to trade for

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<sup>2</sup>Ontario Women's Directorate. "Women in the Labour Force "Basic Facts". This fact sheet notes that this figure was taken from a table which included "all full-year workers, that is, those who worked 50-52 weeks. No distinction is made between full-time and part-time workers. Since a larger percentage of women than men work part-time, earnings differences are distorted". This, of course, does not change the main point that the saleswomen's earnings are far below the men's; and far below the average national earnings of women workers in all occupations relative to men's.

<sup>3</sup>See also, Julie White(1983).



males. In the retail establishments, their co-workers are overwhelmingly female, working increasingly on a part-time basis, with all the attending inequities, and earning less than half the wages of their male counterparts. Greater detail exposes greater gender inequities.

#### GENDERED JOBS

How is it that men and women salesclerks, selling in many cases essentially the same commodity, came to be seen as performing two distinct jobs of unequal value?<sup>4</sup> The answer to this question lies in the patriarchal, ideological, and material construction of gendered jobs. Feminist research has exposed the patriarchal ideology that defines domestic labour as part of women's biological or god-given natural role. By virtue of this work being performed by women, domestic responsibilities are understood to be "unreal" work, unimportant to the economy as a whole

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<sup>4</sup>In 1987, an investigation by the Employment Standards Branch of the Ministry of Labour, at the request of the Retail, Wholesale Department Store Union, concluded that men and women salesclerks at Eaton's were performing unequal work of unequal value (Private communication, Paul Kessig, Business Agent, RWDSU local 1000 and Lesia Harris from the Employment Standards Branch of the Ministry of Labour in the fall of 1988).

and are performed for free.<sup>5</sup> This ideology that devalues the work that women do and identifies domestic labour as women's primary responsibility, carries over into the labour force, shaping women's working lives, albeit in a more obscure way in the 1980's than was apparent in the 1940's.

The recent literature has begun, for example, to explore the ways in which aspects of skill, which are used as a means to understand and describe differences among workers, have been socially constructed along lines of gender. Phillips and Taylor argue:

...the classification of women's jobs as unskilled and men's job's as skilled or semi-skilled frequently bears little relation to the actual amount of training or ability required for them. Skill definitions are saturated with sexual bias. The work of women is often deemed inferior because it is women who do it. Women workers carry into the workplace their status as subordinate individuals, and this status comes to define the value of the work they do. Far from being an objective economic fact, skill is often an ideological category imposed on certain types of work by nature of the sex and power of the workers who perform it (1980:79).

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<sup>5</sup>Domestic labour theorists have revealed that what women do in the home is real work: it is the other side of wage labour and integral to the capitalist economy. The patriarchal ideology that devalued domestic labour and defined it as women's primary responsibility still shapes women's work lives, although in a more subtle form. For an overview of what came to be called the "domestic labour debate" see the reader edited by Roberta Hamilton and Michelle Barrett (1986).

While in agreement with Phillips and Taylor's analysis of the social construction of skill, Jane Gaskell contends "...they do not go far enough..."(1986:364). The criteria of training and ability are usually presented as objective fact, whereas these aspects are also socially produced. Gaskell's work has shown:

The time and form that training for a job takes are created through a process of political struggle between workers and capital.<sup>6</sup> ...some male workers have been able to retain relatively lengthy apprenticeships with restricted access while women in clerical work are trained in programmes that are short and widely available. While one might argue that neither job is actually very difficult to learn, or that both are quite difficult, there is little basis for arguing that one is significantly more difficult to acquire than the other...training programmes can help to create "skilled" workers through limiting access to jobs and institutionalizing and mystifying the "skills" involved (1986:378).

The skills involved in a job are thus socially constructed in the context of struggles between workers, unions, and employers, contributing to a reproduction of differentiation among workers along lines of gender. Moreover, within this process, the skills involved in the work that women do go unacknowledged. In a study of gendered jobs in the health service, Davies and Rosser (1986) found

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<sup>6</sup>This process will be elaborated on in chapter six.

that the qualities and capabilities that women bring to these jobs, in practice, are not formally recognized by their employers as skills.

Davies and Rosser argue that "A gendered job was one which capitalises on the qualities and capabilities a woman had gained by virtue of having lived her life as a woman" (Ibid.,103). In a study of the health care system, they demonstrate how gendered jobs are built into the labour process itself. They contend that the skills acquired by women in their domestic lives through household management are seen as part and parcel of women's identity rather than being acknowledged as part of their job description that should be formally rewarded. Collinson and Knights elaborate on the issue of women's identity. They argue that the fact women continue to perform these informal responsibilities to secure their self-identities, is an example of how "...gendered jobs" "are both the medium and outcome of the structured segregation of work" (1986:150).

Gendered jobs persist not only because they capitalise on the skills women have acquired in their domestic lives but because of the very fact that the job of domestic labour is identified as an integral part of a woman's identity and her continued primary responsibility,

whether or not she is involved in paid work. The ideology and the reality of women's "double day of work" (Luxton,1980) is part of the dynamic process that differentially structures women's day - to - day working conditions and the possible strategies they can engage in to control their working lives. In other words, gendered jobs, as we will see below, are intricately and imperatively intertwined with the ideological and material reality of the work women do in the home.

#### **Men's Work and Women's Work**

The quote from the salesman in the last chapter (p.125) sums up the patriarchal ideology that defined men's and women's roles in the 1940's and which in turn translated into explicit material differences between men's and women's jobs on the shop floor at Eaton's. "Who did the job" was a more important distinguishing criterion than the job itself. Wages, for example, were paid according to age, sex and marital status. By the 1980's, women's increased labour force participation, the rise of the women's movement, and new labour laws, served to disallow this kind of blatant discrimination. However, the patriarchal ideology remained, while becoming more subtle in form. The emphasis was now on

the "characteristics of the job" rather than "the person" performing the job. However, the characteristics did in fact reflect the gender of "who did the job".

At the start of the unionization drive in the 1940's, the gendered distinctions that could be made between men's and women's jobs, rested on the amount of physical labour involved in the work and whether it was skilled or unskilled. Sufrin has pointed out that among Eaton's restaurant workers, for example;

The skilled jobs - chefs, cooks, bakers - were nearly all performed by men. Preparation of vegetables, salads, sandwiches and desserts was done by women, mainly on a part-time schedule...Unskilled work such as washing dishes and pots was done by men or women, depending on physical demands (1982:73).

While men and women sometimes worked side-by-side engaged in different jobs, it was more often the case that men and women were segregated into different departments or areas of work. The overall gendered division of labour throughout the Eaton's operations served to support job segregation by sex on the selling floor where the criteria of skill and amount of physical labour involved in the work was more ambiguous.

Men's and women's sales jobs could be distinguished by the nature of the product they sold. Men dominated the departments that carried the "big ticket" items, such as furniture and appliances. Due to their cost, these products were seen to require more skill to sell than the lesser priced items. Moreover, the size of these items was thought to necessitate physical strength to perform the stock work. In contrast, women dominated in the departments that sold the lesser priced, smaller items such as notions, toys and infant wear.

The distinctions based on the size and cost of the product were not as clear-cut as the above examples in all departments. Women were found selling products such as fine china, furs and jewelery, that were not only expensive items but sometimes required considerable physical labour to display. Men, on the other hand, sold hardware and home repair items that were small and inexpensive. A major question is how did some men, and no women, acquire or manifest the "skill" necessary to sell the "big ticket" traditionally defined "male" items. In order to be hired at Eaton's a person was not required to have had any previous training or sales experience. All training was done "on the job". The "skill" to sell "big ticket items" was passed on by men to other men that were hired to sell in these areas.

Moreover, physical labour was primarily an aspect of stock work and generally was performed by stock boys hired for this purpose, negating this criteria as a basis for gender differentiation.

### **Masculine and Feminine Nature of Products**

The only consistent criterion of how a product came to be associated with a male or female salesclerk rested on the societal ideological construction of the masculine or feminine nature of the product. For example, women sold housewares and female apparel and men sold hardware and male apparel. Products sold by women were seen by definition as having less value and requiring less skill to sell. The status hierarchy that existed between genders, on the basis of the size and cost of the product, was also apparent between stores. The "big ticket" furniture salesmen in the main store had a higher status relative to men in hardware, and furniture salesmen in the budget annex. Similarly, women selling in the fur salon in the College Street store had more prestige than their counterparts in the Main store, and both groups of women had more status than women in the notions departments. This elaborate, ideological, gendered, social construction of status operated as a "skill definition" to differentiate between



workers in the absence of material criteria of formal training or special abilities.

This social differentiation served to support unequal wage rates. All men earned more money than women. Employees in the College Street store earned more than workers in the Main Store, who were paid more than the Budget Annex store employees. Those selling higher status products earned more than those employees selling products that were less expensive and smaller in size. Three systems of payment existed. The first was straight commission. Earnings were determined by the value of the merchandise sold. An advance or draw on the employees' future earnings was paid to the employee to maintain a certain salary level in the event that sales were down. Only men, and primarily a few "big ticket" salesmen, were paid on straight commission and they earned the highest wages.<sup>7</sup> A second wage system among sales employees was a combination of salary and commission. The commission was paid on a percentage of sales exceeding a quota set by management. All men not on straight commission and the majority of women were paid in this manner. The third system was a straight salary paid to a minority of only women workers. These women were the lowest

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<sup>7</sup>The social construction of the gendered wage form is the subject of chapter six.

paid salesworkers. It is important to keep in mind that this system was cross cut by age, sex, marital status and favoritism, all of which were allowed under the law, lending considerable arbitrariness to the system as a whole. However, it is necessary to paint this general picture to provide a basis for comparison in the 1980's as well as to identify the roots of gendered jobs.

### **Job Characteristics**

The ideology that defined the class and gendered hierarchy associated with the product throughout Eaton's stores in the 1940's remained intact in the 1980's. What changed was the characteristics of the work which served to widen the gap between men's and women's sales jobs and cemented the oppressive gendered division of labour. At the same time, the overall status of men's work increased while women's declined, relative to their earlier counterparts. The majority of men now worked full-time, were paid primarily on a straight commission basis, which amounted to a significantly higher wage rate compared to that of women, had greater autonomy in their work, and participated in manufacturers' product knowledge training programmes. Women, on the other hand, were working increasingly on a part-time basis, were paid on a salary basis earning approximately

one-third of the men's wages, were closely supervised, received "on the job" training, and now spent the major proportion of their day performing "housekeeping tasks".

Men's ideological status as skilled workers was now enhanced, in part, by the product-knowledge training<sup>8</sup> they received, while women's devaluation accrued from their increased responsibility for "housekeeping tasks", most of which was performed previously by cleaners and stock boys. In response to a question on day-to-day responsibilities, the commissioned salesmen reported spending ninety per cent of their day selling and the rest on paperwork.

We are responsible for a certain amount of paperwork and ordering. We take care of the floor (selling). There is an average of at least one hour of paperwork a day (Ray).

I asked the salesmen if they ever did any cleaning or dusting. One salesman commented:

Well hardly ever that. Real men don't dust (Donald).

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<sup>8</sup>Some women also used to receive this form of training. It basically consisted of a night out, on the employees unpaid time, at a hotel for dinner and drinks. The product manufacturer would present a new product. The difference in 1984 was that women were no longer allowed to attend these meetings and the men now received a non-selling wage rate for the hour involved.

In contrast, the women reported spending ninety percent of their day doing "housework".

About half an hour of the day you sell. You have your paperwork to do, you load the shelves with stock, sales to be taken off, just more or less cleaning and straightening up the area (Bertha).

Women's saleswork, relative to men's, had become devalued and "deskilled" in societal terms because of its likeness to housework.

The contradiction here is that the saleswoman's status is lowered due to her increased responsibility for housekeeping tasks when it is these very unrewarded skills and abilities that increase the profits of Eaton's. The women attested to wearing many different "hats" in the course of their daily work.

I was everything from a stockgirl to a business women, bookkeeper, a display person. I was everything. A housekeeper, I cleaned, I was back in the stockroom climbing ladders to get the heavy boxes down with my good suits on (Edith).

The women were utilizing very real skills and abilities that were simply built into the job and went unrewarded. One of the union organizers observed:

And like the people don't really see what the job is, what sales ladies do. I mean, its not an easy job and it does not just require someone coming off the street and pushing a few buttons on a cash register. I mean, the jobs require the ability to handle that stress, the tension, the strain, the ability to do book work, to know how to display, I mean mind you, you are not the person who is the display artist but at least you have to have an eye and you have to have sales ability. And you know that requires talent (Kathy).

It is significant to note that respondents had generally worked in more than one department, and more often five or six, during their tenure at Eaton's. They had therefore acquired knowledge of many different products relative to the men who usually remained in one sales department. While it was women's jobs that required considerable skill and abilities it was men's jobs that were rewarded with better working conditions and status. This differentiation was supported by the status hierarchy, reminiscent of the 1940's, that permeated the Eaton's empire, by department, between stores, and through the overall ideological image projected to the public.

## Image and Customer Profile

Within a "woman's salesjob", which "prestigious" product she sells and in which department she is employed depended on whether or not, according to the company, she "reflects the image and customer profile being attracted by the merchandise sold".<sup>9</sup> This statement referred to the woman's looks and dress. Moreover, on this basis a woman could be hired, laid off, or promoted. This was also the case in the 1940's. Eaton's distributed a booklet entitled, "How does your appearance rate?", "They suggest: Weekly shampoos, weekly manicure, correct diet, clothes "in perfect order", make up just right..." (Unionize, Nov.21,1950). They were also told that their dresses had to be black (Unionize, Nov.30,1948). In the 1980's, women were allowed to wear more of a variety of clothes and colours but a dress code remained.<sup>10</sup> Sexism, ageism, racism and classism were hidden under the rubric of the "image and customer profile" associated with the product that Eaton's demanded saleswomen reflect.

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<sup>9</sup>This was taken from the Agreement between the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store union and T. Eaton Co. Limited, 1985-86.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid: Article IX - Management Rights (g).

Eaton's tried to create an image for the customer of a glamorous department store, with very glamorous saleswomen attending to the needs of the customers. The young, beautiful and beautifully made-up cosmetic women are visibly located at the entrance of all Eaton's stores. As you move toward the back of the store, the shelves from hardware and homeware goods for example, are high enough to make the salesperson immediately invisible. It is here that you find the older women, a few, if any, women of colour, and those women who are overweight or not considered pleasing to the Eaton's customer's eye, according to management. There was frequent involvement of women in and out of departments, and was a form of management control. It was a means to remove a woman to a less visible location in the store as she grew older or her appearance, according to Eaton's standards, declined in some way. At the time of the 1984 unionization drive there was an explicit attempt to remove a long-time cosmetic worker out of her department due to the fact that she had gained weight.

The dress code and appearance requirements between departments was fairly arbitrary; however, standards were much lower in the back areas of the store. A woman in the downstairs housewares department reported:

Downstairs I always wear slacks and now we have smocks after four years of complaining about our clothes being wrecked (Bertha ).

In the back toys department:

Dress,pants, cords are acceptable. I have also been wearing jeans and will wait until they tell me differently (Alice).

The above dress requirements were in stark contrast to those women working at the front of the store in cosmetics and ladies wear. Here they were expected to have a more professional dress and it was more strictly enforced.

If there was a clear defined guideline for everyone then at least you knew and that would be fair. But even the dress code, the cosmetic people always looked a hundred per cent better than people in the rest of the store...They expected us to dress well. If we didn't dress well or dressed inappropriately for cosmetics but appropriate for ladies wear, for example, we would get reprimanded. A girl came in with a long t-shirt dress one day. In ladies wear it looked like a bulky sweater with leotards. They kind of joked about it. They didn't send her home. They told her that she shouldn't wear that kind of thing again. A girl came into our dept. with a leather skirt on and they made comments on whether or not it was appropriate. Indirect comments that were telling her she should not wear it again. Or Sue for example, who was very trendy, they told her she didn't dress appropriately (Theresa).



What exactly was appropriate was left up to management discretion. One woman who worked in ladies wear and used to have responsibilities for hiring and firing stated:

You could definitely send somebody home if they were not dressed properly...no short sleeves, women are not supposed to show their armpits. They are not allowed to come to work without nylons on their feet. Their feet have to be covered at all times. They had to wear pretty well presentable clothing. They couldn't come in with sloppy dress. You couldn't wear anything with jeans or jean material. I even went to work one day myself and I had a dress pair of jeans on and a black velvet jacket and you really couldn't tell they were jeans. I was told never to come back to work like that again. They sent one woman home because she only had little cap sleeves and they could see her armpits. That was their dress code (Charlotte).

The dress code system was also cross-cut by age. One older saleswoman stated:

Everything revolves around the younger people...I mean even the dress code. I mean half of the young people come in and you think that they are going to a dance. I mean there has been a dress code there for ages. But managers don't make them live by it or obey it. They just seem to overlook it or ignore it (Margaret).

The persona of the salesclerk in terms of her age, sex, race and attractiveness determined what product she would sell: and this product would determine her status in the store, and whether she was seen as a skilled or unskilled worker. This social construction of image throughout the store

blurred the oppressive aspects of women's saleswork both for the women themselves, as we will discuss later in this chapter, and in terms of the general public.

The whole visual picture of the store in the 1980's suggests that the saleswomen in Eaton's stores did very little physical work and were primarily there to model the products and wait on the customers. This image served to mystify the exploitation. One respondent who was attempting to tell her mother of the exploitative working conditions discovered that her mother simply refused to listen. The saleswoman said, "I guess she just wanted to hold on to her fantasies and dreams about Eaton's" (Beth). It was very difficult for these women to continue to fulfill this image of glamour, in addition to the enormous expense involved. This created considerable stress insofar as keeping their jobs depended on maintaining this image.

The women's clothes got ruined in the course of performing all manner of housekeeping duties and the discount offered to salespeople by Eaton's did little to alleviate the cost of maintaining a glamorous wardrobe. Many complaints on this issue were reported in Unionize by the women in the 1940's. For example:

Girls are again being told to wear black dresses. Even with the 20% discount coming up, it takes a lot out of a pay to buy a dress for work (Nov.30,1948).

"Selling" covers a range of duties including washing shelves and getting "dishpan" hands in the basement Economy China Department. Salesladies complain that they are not even provided with smocks to save their dresses. They are expected to be delving into suds one minute and come up to the standards of Eatonian sales attire the next (Jan.30,1951).

The increase to spending ninety percent of their day on housekeeping tasks in the 1980's led to serious damage to the women's clothes and it was increasingly difficult for them to maintain a professional wardrobe.

They wanted us to dress well and then they wanted us to go into the back and cart boxes. We would end up ruining our nice clothes and paying incredible cleaning bills (Theresa).

Many times I ripped my clothes or I dirtied them. All the time. And you had to be dressed professionally for work. They expected you to only wear the best (Edith).

The discount on merchandise seemed to benefit Eaton's rather than offsetting the cost of the clothes. One salesman commented:

We get twenty percent off clothes and fifteen percent off everything else across the board. It helps. It keeps your Eaton's account card very high. The employees are probably Eaton's best customers. It is just convenient for us (Ray).

This salesman identified one of the major benefits to Eaton's in giving discounts on increased sales. Moreover, he talks of shopping at Eaton's primarily as a mere convenience rather than being cost-effective. This reveals a major difference between the men and women. Men did not do housekeeping tasks so they had less difficulty maintaining their wardrobe. Moreover, the dress code was fairly straight forward and not a concern.

Respondent: Normally a suit or a jacket and  
                    slacks...always a tie, but you know,  
                    business attire.

Author: Do you have to wear a certain colour shirt?

Respondent: Oh No, Nothing like that  
                    (Ray)

For the women, the discount held the promise of mitigating some of the costs associated with keeping up a certain appearance. However, during the strike when the women starting shopping elsewhere, they discovered they really were not getting a deal at Eaton's.

Well we found when we were out on strike that we could buy identical items for a lot less even with the discount. I don't shop at Eaton's anymore. I have even told customers about better deals at other stores...Your discount is also recorded on your tax form as a benefit (Jane).

The cost of clothes, in addition to hairstyles and cosmetics, did in some cases, pose a formidable barrier to women who wanted to work in the higher paid areas such as cosmetics. They simply could not afford the cleaning bills and the expense associated with having to replace ruined clothes. In general, the women shopped at Eaton's for the same reason that the salesman above mention - for convenience. However, for the women this was more integrally tied in with their added responsibility for homework.

#### **Status Hierarchy Between Stores**

Shopping at Eaton's saved time in women's overburdened schedules and working at Eaton's was also convenient for women in terms of integrating their domestic lives due to the close proximity of the stores to their homes. By the 1980's, the Main Store had been replaced by the lavish Eaton's centre and department store branches were located all over the urban landscape, primarily in neighbourhood shopping centres. This enabled the majority of employees to work at the Eaton's branch store that was close to home: a major plus for women who were juggling "two jobs", and who in addition had young children.

My job was convenient, it was close to home...It is convenient in terms of my children. I can keep in touch by phone and if they had to go home from school I could leave without any trouble (Abigail).

Look at the advantages - it's close to home. That was one of the reasons that kept me there. It was close to home. If any emergency arose in my household when the kids were small, boy, I'd be there in five minutes. I liked that idea. It wasn't too far away (Aemilia).

But there were also costs associated with this convenience. As we will see later in this chapter, management capitalized on the fact that women had the primary responsibility for the household through the use of exploitative part-time, occasional and fluctuating work schedules each week. For the moment, we want to make the point that, similar to the 1940's, the overall status hierarchy within the store was also reflected between stores. Domestic responsibilities in many cases necessitated taking on paid work close to their homes, which presented a restriction to working in the higher status stores that had better working conditions and higher pay. In addition, the consistency of the ideological status hierarchy served to have a cumulative effect in reinforcing socially constructed material differences between workers.

The location as well as the size of the store determined the branch's position in the Eaton's status hierarchy. Stores in the city of Toronto had more prestige

than suburban branches and those located in the smaller cities of southwestern Ontario. The largest store in a specific geographical location outranked its smaller sister stores. The benefits of working at a higher status store were different for men and women, reflecting their differential working conditions. I asked the respondents whether or not it was more prestigious to work, for example, at the Toronto Eaton's Centre Flagship store than anywhere else. The following sums up the respondents comments:

In the store, which is the flagship store, which is on Queen and Dundas, they have a night crew... The merchandize is brought up on elevators and what have you, through the night. It is brought out and unpacked, put out in the stock, then therefore when the "day staff" come in they look after customers. They do what they were initially hired to do, to look after the customers... They look after these people the way they are entitled to be looked after, sell them goods, show them goods, how to line the register. In the smaller stores this does not exist, what you see is what you get, you lug, you haul, you put out, and if there is a customer there you think, I don't have time to serve this person, I have to get this stuff out or the Manager is going to be on my back. So therefore even from store to store there is a big, big, difference. Of course, the Toronto Eaton Centre is Flagship so miracles are done down there and as you go down the line to the smaller lesser stores the people are involved who may make the same money but are responsible for doing much more. The smaller the store is the more they have to do to make the money they make (Isabella).

For the women, the more prestigious the store the fewer the housekeeping tasks they were required to perform. They emphasised that they did not make any more money by working in a more prestigious store. However, if you were a cosmetic worker, to work in a more prestigious store meant more money and more opportunities for advancement.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, men's responses to my question generally went like this salesman's comments for a store in St. Catharines:

Not from the people's (customers) point of view is it any different. The problem with the Eaton's Company where you find a difference from outlying stores like St. Catharines and London is that the focus of Eaton's attention, from a merchandising point of view, was on metro areas, particularly Toronto. In the outlying areas we were like second class citizens. An example of this would be, on a major weight goods campaign which is your appliances. We were at a meeting in Toronto a few years ago and they were running an advertising budget they were telling us. It was the first million dollar appliance campaign and they had an advertising budget of eighty thousand dollars. Sixty thousand of it went to metro Toronto, and twenty thousand went to the rest of Ontario. So that would pretty well tell you where we came in their attention. We always felt that the salesmen in the big stores downtown had first crack at a prime merchandise and then they told us about it when ninety percent of it was sold. The volume (sold from a store) had nothing to do with it, or the market... I think they obviously look at the volume of the store and base their overhead costs on that. But when it comes to display (of merchandise), I think, for example, that Scarborough Town Centre will get the gravy and Shoppers World will get the hand me downs (Mark).

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<sup>11</sup>This is discussed in detail at the end of this chapter.



In sum, a clear status hierarchy existed between stores. Working in a store with more prestige meant more money for men and less housekeeping tasks for women, mirroring the overall major distinction between men's and women's job characteristics. The ideological status hierarchy had been entrenched since the 1940's and served to mask the patriarchal oppression of women's work in the 1980's.

#### **PATERNALISTIC DOMINANCE**

The subtle nature of patriarchy that obscured, for the women themselves, the oppressiveness of their subordinate work can be seen in the example of the relations of one mode of patriarchy -paternalistic dominance. Paternalistic dominance was a key aspect of management control shaping the gendered division of labour on the shop floor. An understanding of the dynamics of paternalistic dominance is critical because far too often women are shown participating in their own oppressive subordination, with "face-value" explanations that blame the women and their "faulty attitudes" (e.g. Sufrin,1982). According to Lerner:

Subordination does not have the connotation of evil intent on the part of the dominant;

it allows for the possibility of collusion between him and the subordinate. It includes the possibility of voluntary acceptance of subordinate status in exchange for protection and privilege, a condition which characterizes so much of the historical experience of women. I will use the term "paternalistic dominance" for this relation (1986:234).

Lerner emphasises that it is important to recognize that paternalistic dominance includes oppressive aspects but it also involves a set of mutual obligations. Originating in family relations as they developed under patriarchy, she contends:

The basis of 'paternalism' is an unwritten contract for exchange: economic support and protection given by the male for subordination in all matters, sexual service and unpaid domestic service given by the female (Ibid:240).

Paternalistic dominance enabled the subordinate to perceive this relation as beneficial rather than oppressive. As Lerner has pointed out, "It was a rational choice for women, under conditions of public powerlessness and economic dependency, to choose strong protectors for themselves and their children" (1986:218) It has been shown in the previous chapters that this represents the conditions under which the women at Eaton's worked in the time periods under study.

The women at Eaton's accommodated paternalism on the shop floor as long as they perceived an adherence to the mutual obligations and reciprocal rights of the "unwritten contract". For management, it was imperative in order to maintain paternalistic dominance to ensure the perpetuation of this perception. This was accomplished by keeping the material facts relating to their end of the bargain hidden from the workers and promoting an image of paternalistic benevolence. Wages are a case in point.

#### **"WAGES ARE CONFIDENTIAL"**

In both time periods, the workers received their paychecks with the notation of "private and confidential" inscribed on the front. Employees were threatened with dismissal if they revealed to anyone what their wages were or if they received a raise. In the 1940's, Unionize published a number of reports like the following:

It is reported that the manager of the Mail Order jewellery dept. threatens girls with dismissal if any raises which they get are divulged. When they say "wages are confidential", they mean **CONFIDENTIAL** (May 23, 1949).

Similarly, in the 1980's, the women gave evidence of the threat of repercussions for breaching confidentiality. According to one woman:

Eaton's didn't allow us to discuss our wages and if we did then we would be fired. This is how they kept it all hidden. One girl was fired in Peterborough in shipping and receiving for talking about wages (Alice).

The workers upheld the requirement of confidentiality under threat of losing their jobs but also because Eaton's led them to believe that they were recipients of paternalistic benevolence. For example, a former Eaton's employee during the 1940's stated:

Well it was older people who had a certain loyalty to Eaton's. Because they had worked there for so long through the Depression and the war. So they had a job and that was important to them. Plus they used to give a little extra wage to some people. They would say don't show anyone we are giving this to you, because you are special. I would tell everyone (the amount of his pay) and the old guys would find out that you were making more than them. They didn't complain because they didn't want to rock the boat. I was 29 then (Tom).

Likewise, in the 1980's, employees were led to believe they were special and that Eaton's would take care of them. In response to continual complaints about not earning a living wage, one woman commented:

I gradually got a raise every three months but it was like don't tell anyone and that's it. It was literally said, "Let's keep this between you and I dear". That kind of thing...So for the first year every three months I got a raise (Theresa).

This respondent felt she was being rewarded for being a good worker. However, in return for her raise, management increased her workload.

I found out quite quickly that if they found out that you are a good worker that they will take advantage of you. I found this out the hard way. When I first started out I had two cosmetic lines and they were very tedious to take care of. I found out quickly that they reshuffled cosmetics and then I got another line. They say "who shall I give it to"? ...So what was happening is that now I had three lines...(Ibid.).

Even made aware of the oppressive aspects of supposed benevolence, the workers could still envision a mutual exchange in the broader context of control. In the former case, the workers exchanged loyalty for keeping their jobs, and in the latter, the woman exchanged an increased work load for the recognition of being viewed as a "good worker" which held the promise of future promotions.<sup>12</sup> As noted in

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<sup>12</sup>In cosmetics promotions were very important to the women. As noted earlier in this thesis, a promotion to one of the elite lines of cosmetics meant they were closer to being hired by one of the cosmetic companies.

chapter four, the notion of loyalty and the good worker is integral to perpetuating the respective, differing systems of management hierarchical and bureaucratic control.

Garnering individual loyalty through paternalistic benevolence and keeping the workers ignorant of the extent of worker inequity on the shop floor served to divide workers thus preventing the development of female solidarity and group cohesiveness necessary to resist this mode of patriarchy. As family relations, developing under patriarchy, changed, so did the women's expectations of the nature of the mutual obligations and reciprocal rights of the paternalistic contract. Management responded by enforcing more obscure forms of paternalistic dominance. One example is the system of hiring.

## **HIRING**

Overall, Eaton's hired according to age, sex, marital status, "who you knew", race, and union sympathies (Sufrin,1983). In the 1940's, the dictates of paternalism required the hiring of mostly single women who upon marriage or the birth of a child were forced to leave their jobs. This was congruent with societal norms. Eaton's did, however, go against the norm in some cases by hiring a few

older women who were past childbearing years to produce the "family" effect. Moreover, the mature woman could watch over the morals of the young women and act in the role of "mother". As one respondent stated in the 1980's: "They thought they needed someone who was older that could present an older point of view if there were any problem" (Ron). The women of the 1940's did not view this system of control as oppressive but rather as a basis of exchange.

By the 1980's, women could no longer, by law, be subject to this kind of blatant paternalistic discrimination in hiring. However, the basis of this system of control continued in a more subtle form. During discussions with respondents on whether or not many women took maternity leave, the subtle workings of paternalistic hiring were revealed. The replies were similar to these women's:

Never. People are either young or old (Susan).

There was one women who was pregnant when we went out on strike but she never came back. Other than her there was one other women - that was two years ago - she was also part-time (Beth).

The gap between the ages of female employees was commented on by almost all of the respondents. One woman elaborated by asserting that:

(...) the age bracket are young women still in school or those older who have already had their children and they are grown up. There is a big gap in the middle (Ibid.).

In other words, women who were in their childbearing years were not apparently visible on the shop floor. When I asked the women who, in the early 1980's, had hiring responsibilities whether or not this was a consideration when interviewing a potential employee, their responses were similar to the following.

That I couldn't comment on. But if there was a woman who was planning to start a family, No I wouldn't hire her for my area. You need people who will stay and get to know the product...Like the people I have hired were 16. They have been with me for five or six years. That's better than getting someone who is 19 because they will only be there for six months or a year (Abigail).

There was clear discrimination occurring in hiring that the women felt uncomfortable revealing. Another woman who responded to the criteria she used in hiring stated:

When I went to hire...I would look for what schools they went to. Like, I'm not Catholic myself but the



Catholic are more disciplined...I guess I shouldn't say that really. That's what you call discrimination in some respects...but they were really good workers. I used to look probably at the schools they went to and definitely how old they were. I would never hire anybody 19 or 20 because I knew they were only going to be with me for over Christmas or the spring and they were gone...they were usually in grade 11 or 12 when I got them (Katherine).

These responses clearly contrasted with the hiring criteria for men. Contrary to women, having several children was viewed as an asset rather than a liability. In one man's account of his job interview, he commented:

There was one thing that I noticed. At the time, I was still married, I had \_\_\_\_\_ children. I still have \_\_\_\_\_ children and that seemed to be the deciding factor (as to why he got hired). I thought well, gee, that's good, that somebody would think about that...It was mentioned to me in the interview when I started. That's very nice but its not right. I mean, I wasn't going to turn down the job because I didn't think it was right because I needed it badly, but it surprised me that a manager would admit to that sort of thing (Peter).

This aspect of the hiring practices was subtly re-enforcing the 1940's ideology of men as breadwinners and women with children remaining in the home. In a work organization that comprised over eighty percent female employees, the absence of visibly pregnant women, as well as the omission by the women respondents of any discussion relating to childbirth, pregnancy or maternity leave in their working relations was

a startling finding.<sup>13</sup> It attests to the pervasiveness and tenacity of the paternalistic dominance operating on the shop floor at Eaton's.

#### PART-TIME WORK

While it is likely that some women working throughout the Eaton's empire did manage to get pregnant, Eaton's had a further hiring control criterion of part-time work to maintain paternalistic dominance. Almost all of the female respondents reported being hired initially on a part-time, or temporary basis over the Christmas rush season.

I got hired over Xmas. I worked part-time for awhile... Then I started full-time about five months later (Theresa).

They make people work part-time first then take them on full-time (Judy).

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<sup>13</sup>It was also a startling to find an absence of women of color, or different races. Sufrin noted that in the 1940's, "...there was no doubt that Eaton's hiring policy was preponderately WASP. I do not recall blacks or Asiatics, although Wally Ross claims he remembers one "token negro" (1982:61). In the 1980's, respondents consistently commented on the number of blacks that were hired as scabs to work during the strike. One respondent commenting on what it was like to return to work after the strike stated: "I came back in and I felt like I was working on the Islands. There was all black people in there. I just could not believe it...they popped up from everywhere" (Kathy). I asked the respondent whether this was unusual and she stated: "Yeah, I think they did this as a gesture at that particular time to make it look good (Ibid.).

In order to be hired full-time there were two paternalistic considerations: One, that you were a subservient type of woman.

Eaton's hires a type of female that is very subservient to men and especially, management (Tom).

I have applied (for a full-time time position) but my mouth is too large. They don't like people who speak out. If you are not acquiescent the chances of getting full-time is impossible. I continue to apply but I don't get an interview. Usually when a full-time person leaves they don't hire another full-time person they replace them with part-time. I have been moved around a lot. I am now in accessories. I am a high energy person and they try to keep me in check by moving me around (Rebecca).

Eaton's management sought to hire the more traditional type of woman on a permanent basis. In doing so they could more easily ensure the enforcement of the various aspects of paternalism.

The latter respondent above first identified what happens to someone who is not considered suitable for Eaton's during the trial part-time period and secondly, how over time management expanded the part-time workforce. Women judged unsuitable by Eaton's standards simply do not

get hired on a full-time basis. Moreover, they shuffle them around the store in the hopes that they will quit. No one really knew of anyone getting fired at Eaton's. (They had heard of people being fired for stealing and there was the ever present threat of firing for revealing their wages to another employee). Overall, this makes Eaton's appear to the public as a very benevolent and just employer. Most people can support dismissal on the basis of theft. We saw earlier in this chapter, with regards to image and profile, how women are moved to areas of the store with less status when not keeping up with the Eatonian image. Likewise, the above respondent spoke of being moved into different departments. At the time of the interview, she was in the low status department of accessories. In regard to part-time work, the increase of this more profitable form of employment was accomplished by replacing full-time workers who leave the company with part-time employees.

The second consideration for full-time employment related to whether or not a woman was thinking about having a family. One woman who was unique at Eaton's by virtue of the fact that she was pregnant asserted,

I didn't get a full-time job because I was suspected of being pregnant (Beth).

She had her baby in October of 1985. She was then hired full-time in December of 1985. She commented on how unusual her case was:

There was one women who was pregnant when we went out (on strike) but she never came back. Other than her there was one other women - that was two years ago - she was also part-time. I am the only one who has gone on maternity leave and has come back to work (Ibid.).

This women was against the union when anti-union workers were collecting votes to apply for the decertification application. This may account for her being hired on a full-time basis. Her comments were taken from the decertification hearings where she was testifying for the union, having become pro-union as a result of supposed ill-treatment by Eaton's due to her position as a new mother. She stated:

Since I came off maternity leave my manag had a prejudice thing on me because I kept my job after my pregnancy. She said, I made my road and I must follow it. I said, you don't have to be the one to put potholes in it (Ibid).

This woman testified to her experiences of being constantly harassed and receiving unfair poor evaluations and eventually quitting her job as a result. Management's

charges against her centred on the fact that she was not a "good worker", that she was constantly late, took days off and had a "flippant" attitude toward the company (Decertification hearings, Labour Board, Aug.22,1986).

The above respondent's experiences were recounted to another worker who previously had hiring, firing and promotion responsibilities. I asked her whether or not she perceived Eaton's would actively set out to discriminate against people due to expected motherhood or lack of a subservient character. She replied:

Yes, but they would never admit to it. Eaton's actively have little ways and little things that they do and little things that they pull on different people for promoting or not promoting people. Basically, they check you over. I think that is the way I got full-time so easily, within a couple of months, because here is a woman that has four kids and has just left her second husband. She doesn't plan to have any more kids. She has to work. She is going to be reliable. She is going to be here every-day. Give her the job. It is as simple as that (Charlotte).

The contradiction here is that this woman's account of how she managed to get full-time work echoes what our quote from the male respondent said. In this instance, having children

was an asset but only because of the absent male breadwinner.

The dictates of paternalism were the same in the 1980's as in the 1940's and similarly resulted in keeping women of childbearing years off the shop floor. The major difference was that in the 1980's paternalistic dominance was more obscurely imbedded in the social organization of the labour process. It was more difficult to perceive this oppression and therefore it was not resisted by the women. Management could shift justification of the system of wages and hiring onto the ideological construction of the "good worker" which was integral to bureaucratic control, mitigating a recognition of gender-bias. Concomitantly, the rise of resistance to paternalistic dominance resulted when it was perceived that the unwritten contract was breached. We turn now to a discussion of how the women perceived the gendering of jobs.

#### WHO DOES THE JOB

In 1986, Sears, Roebuck and Co. won a case filed against them for the underrepresentation of women in the higher paying commissioned sales jobs. This case of sex discrimination was filed against the company by the Equal

Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC) in the United States. Sears won this case by claiming that women's underrepresentation in commissioned sales jobs was not due to discrimination, but to women's own job preferences (Kessler-Harris, 1986:57). Sears argued that women generally were not interested in commission sales jobs because of their:

(1) fear or dislike of the competitive, "dog-eat-dog" atmosphere of most commission sales divisions; (2) discomfort or unfamiliarity with most product lines sold on commission...; (3) fear of being unable to compete, being unsuccessful and losing their jobs; (4) fear of non-acceptance by customers in such traditionally male-oriented divisions as hardware, automotive, installed home improvements, and tires; (5) distaste for the type of selling they believed was required in commission divisions; (6) preference for noncommission sales jobs; (7) preference for "keeping busy" and dislike of the relatively slower customer traffic in most commission divisions; (8) the overall belief that the increased earnings potential of commission selling was not worth the additional responsibilities, problems, pressure, and uncertainty.<sup>14</sup>

To respond to this claim, Kessler-Harris has stated:

To believe Sears, in short, we would have to believe not only that women were not interested in maximizing income, but that the competition involved in such jobs and their lack of interest in the products sold would deter them from nearly doubling their wages (1986:67).

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<sup>14</sup>"Post-Trial Brief of Sear, Roebuck and Co". p.9,11-12 cited in Milkman,1986:384-385). The reasons why some jobs are on commission and others on straight salary will be discussed in detail in chapter six.



In what follows we are going to examine women's perceptions of the commissioned sales jobs. It is significant to note that the women's comments generally reiterate what Sears suggested about job preferences when taken out of context. We will show that these stated preferences are in fact the outcome of subtle patriarchal control that defines "who does the job" on the basis of the ideological masculine and feminine personality characteristics of the workers reminiscent of the 1940's. Moreover, male workers and management actively set out to maintain this social construction. To reenforce this argument a comparison will be made with the case of female dominated salary plus commission work of cosmetic salesclerks.

#### THE DENIAL OF DISCRIMINATION

Game and Pringle (1983) have argued that the subtlety of patriarchal bureaucratic control lies in the denial that there is any discrimination. Patriarchy without the Father, they argue:

In some ways it is harder to fight, for it operates on the denial of authority relations, it is impersonal and no one can be held responsible. Men can be let off the hook or claim that they too are victims. Therein lies its strength and flexibility (Ibid.,22).

In the 1940's, women just took it for granted that there were "men's jobs" and there were "women's jobs". A saleswomen from the 1940's, responding to whether or not women ever applied for a job in men's commissioned departments, stated:

I suppose I took it for granted...I can't answer that question because I never would have applied for that kind of a job. I don't think women in those days ever thought about applying. I don't think that a woman, who would know about a stove more than a man would, would have considered or thought about applying for a job in a men's department. I think that the women accepted the fact that there was men's jobs and women's jobs (Mary).

By the 1980's, the reality of differential jobs was the same but the women generally perceived that the men "earned" their higher wage rate in commission rather than receiving it due to their gender. To work in these areas was envisioned as a matter of personal choice.

I would have the choice to apply if I wanted to. Women do have the option to move because the positions are posted. But there are no men that will go down and make my wage. Come on, they have families. They are going to go into commission. They have to work really hard and push to make the kind of money they do (Joan).

There was a distinct recognition that men's jobs were higher paid and that this was the reason men were not found in the

women's positions. Moreover, while this woman stated they earned this wage, she also ironically referred to the ideological notion of men as breadwinners to justify this situation and to deny the presence of discrimination.

### **THE MASCULINE SALES PERSONALITY**

Commissioned saleswork was defined as competitive, aggressive and risk-taking when in reality this described aspects of the personal characteristics of the men. The personal characteristics of women were historically seen to be gentility, neatness, morality and cleanliness. This was envisioned to mean that women were not suitable for, and did not want, commissioned sales jobs. In the Sears Case, noted above, Kessler Harris reports that,

Sears chose to try to convince the court of three things: that commission sales jobs in fact required competitive, aggressive, and risk-orientated personalities; that Sears had made enormous attempts to induce women to take these jobs; and finally, that women's family values and domestic roles had undermined Sear's efforts" (1986:62).

The following will show that these arguments are not valid, and in particular, the case of the female-dominated

commissioned work in cosmetics presents a stark contrast to the prevailing opinions.

In explaining why they did not move into these higher paid positions the women referred to the "masculine relations of selling" rather than their inability to do the work or "discomfort or unfamiliarity" with the product.<sup>15</sup> One woman vehemently argued:

I know I could sell the commissioned products - I could sell an iceberg to an Eskimo, but that isn't my thing. I have to pay my way, I have to know what I am making. If they could guarantee me all that money every year I would go for it. But I don't wish to work for a commission because I have heard a lot of stories about people being "done in" in commissioned areas, and getting screwed out of their commission (Isabella).

Again, we hear the women referring to working in commission as a personal choice, yet at the same time identifying specific barriers preventing this choice. In being "done in", the respondent was indicating the negative social relations that occurred when working in a male-dominated area that would jeopardize her ability to earn enough money to support herself.

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<sup>15</sup>As you may recall earlier in the chapter it was shown that women are constantly moved around the store and are used to learning about new products.

## COMPETITION

Male workers, in alliance with management, often banded together to keep women out of their privileged areas. One way was by preventing the women from making sales. One salesman said:

There were five or six men in my area when I started. Then they added two women because they added sewing machines into the area. So two women crept into the area and one of them was really greedy and they got to sell everything. So now we had 6 or 7 people rather than 4 (Daniel).

This salesman stated that having the women in their section caused a lot of problems.

Not so much if they stuck to their own goods but they kept trying to come over and sell our stuff without knowing anything about it. They were easy to ring up a sale but if a customer had a problem they had to call us. If they sold something and they had a problem you had to look after it. Anyway we thought why are we wasting our time looking after the women's customers...This caused alot of dissention...The women didn't last long (Ibid).

This man emphasized the idea that the men were more skilled

and knew more about the products than the women. When women were brought into their areas, primarily by combining two areas, the men set up territorial boundaries.

### RISK-TAKING

The territorial boundaries enforced by the men translated into considerable risk for the women in terms of making a living wage. A women who was put in men's wear on salary and commission stated:

That is why I got out of there, because they put me on commission. This was quite a while ago now. I think it was four percent and four dollars an hour or something like that. If you didn't make your draw you went into a deficit and you had to pay them back. When we were there, we were just part-time... I think there was three boys, they were just students. We couldn't touch this, we couldn't touch that. We could only sell shirts. We could sell sweaters, but we couldn't touch outerwear. We couldn't touch suits and all this kind of stuff. At one point I got, I remember this very distinctly, I got \$150.00 some odd dollars from a pay cheque and I had to pay out I - it was twenty dollars for babysitting...I had to pay twenty dollars and I had to give them back thirty-two dollars because I didn't make my draw. You can hardly make a draw when you are getting twelve hours per week (Aemilia).

Because the women were prevented from selling certain products, mostly the more expensive items, they were unable to make a living wage. It did not have anything to do with

their ability to sell; rather it resulted from the territorial boundaries that the men set up. In contrast not one of the male respondents reported ever not making his draw.<sup>16</sup>

The risks for women were in fact of a different nature. In the previous chapters, for example, it was noted that a considerable amount of sexual harassment occurred on the shop floor on a daily basis. In the commissioned areas that were male dominated, the risk was greater for this type of harassment occurring more frequently. One salesman attempted to explain why women were not in the commissioned areas:

Well it may not seem reasonable to you, it's that a lot of people are afraid to be in commissioned sales and if the company can exploit that fear, then it certainly will. The other thing too is that you find a great number - and this may sound like a bit of a sexist remark - but it is the absolute truth - a lot of these women are married and have another income and they don't want - they don't care, in a lot of cases, this sounds terrible, but its true - they don't care how much money they make...I asked one women. I said, "Don't you want to make any more money?" And her answer to me was, "I am too old to be a prostitute", which I didn't understand, you know, I mean it didn't make any sense to me. So she said, "No, I don't want to make any more money" (Peter).

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<sup>16</sup>The draw basically meant that a commissioned salesperson could borrow on their next weeks earnings if they did not make a certain amount of money from commission during the week.

This is an example of how what the women said got misinterpreted. The women did want the higher income but were not willing to put up with the sexual harassment in order to earn a greater wage.

### AGGRESSION

The aggressive requirement of commissioned selling also took on new meaning when women were involved. As the following statement shows, even in the recognition of discrimination there was denial:

Alot of the women that are single in the stores that would need the money,(but) don't have it to be that aggressive to work in commission. You have to be pretty aggressive to work with those men. Like (blank) and a few of those men. They don't want those women to cross that line to sell televisions. He even fought against it. I used to get angry at him. Who are you to discriminate against a women who could do it. Well he said they wouldn't do a carry out or whatever.Well I said, that is something you will have to take up with your boss (Joan).

But even in the identification of aggressiveness, the women themselves did not define this solely as a male characteristic. These women argued that some women could do the job but were clearly prevented by the actions of the



men. The salesmen felt not only that their jobs were threatened by women's cheaper labour, but also the status and higher wages they received. By harassing and intimidating the women, they effectively kept them out, maintaining male dominance in the commissioned areas.

#### **MALE COLLEGIALITY**

Overall, the men stuck together and rarely had any contact with the women. This helped to uphold their status as skilled, specialized workers. As the salesmen describe it:

We are a different breed of people. We had more control and freedom over our work....We hung out with the guys. The two floors are very distinct. We didn't really socialize with those downstairs. The women were very different upstairs as well. They could be overweight or whatever, housewives and older women (Daniel).

Commission sales people generally speaking have a non involvement policy. First of all, the average commission salesman will make at least double what any clerk makes on the floor. From that point alone puts him, as far as he is concerned, in another area. He is a full-time employee rather than part-time and when you have an operation like retail that has a lot of part-time, you don't necessarily get to know them... There is a lack of a social connection. I mean one of the striking things to me when we went out on the picket line was that I had worked with these women for eleven years and I didn't know first names never mind last names...You have a tendency consciously or sub-consciously that you think you are one step above everybody else. It has a bit of snobbery to it (Mark).

The men all stuck together. None of the men reported having any difficulties with their male co-workers or feeling competitive, except between stores, or when management increased the number of salesmen on the floor or brought in part-time workers. Nor did any of the respondents refer to working on commission as a risk-taking adventure. The historical definition of women, as being interested in the cooperative, social aspects of the work situation, reflected how the men got along. They maintained the "old boys network", socialized at lunch time and after work, and cooperated in the effort to keep women out of their departments through aggressive, competitive and unwanted sexual behaviour.

#### **"WOMEN NEED NOT APPLY"**

What happens when a women tries to apply for a commission sales job? One salesman responded:

If she was applying to a male manager of Eaton's and there were two people applying, one was male as well and they had equal qualifications, the man would get it over her (Mark).

Women were ready, able and willing to take on commission salesjobs. Like this woman I was told about by one of the

union organizers:

One women from Simpsons, she went to the company. They had a posting or something of the sort for a commissioned sales person in appliances and furniture. She wanted the job and they didn't want to give it to her because women don't know anything about commissioned sales. I mean selling appliances or furniture. And like she was so upset, she said, "who the hell do you think uses the appliances, you men? We the housewives" (Mary).

This woman identified the ludicrousness of the argument that women would feel uncomfortable or were unfamiliar with the products men sold. It is not only primarily women who use the major appliances, such as washing machines, stoves etc. but they generally are also the ones who buy them.

Another strategy utilized by men and management to keep women "in their proper place" was to locate women in an apparent position of "authority" over the men. Here is the story of one woman who was put in the position of section head over five commissioned salesmen. The men were paid on straight commission and she was paid on hourly wages. She argued that she was not paid on commission, " Because I look after the area. I do selling, but for the majority of the time I don't" (Helen). When this women did sell items she rang them up on a salesman's number so he received the commission for the sale. When I asked if she thought this

was unfair, she initially said no. After probing her on this issue and reminding her that she supposedly had more responsibility and authority, but made the least amount of money, she stated:

It's unfair. But they will not take a women on in men's clothing in the commission area. Now I don't know why. It is not company policy. My manager would not hire a women. She can do all the heavy slugging; she can do all the moving; she can do all the price changing and all the hairy work(dealing with customers) but she will not get commission. He won't give a reason, but you know, he's just a chauvinist (Helen).

The women were very reluctant to admit that a gender bias existed and did so only after considerable probing. The woman's job title and responsibilities effectively distinguished her from the men, justifying her hourly wage and at the same time hiding the reality that she was receiving far less net pay than the men. Her primary duty consisted of ringing up the men's sales, paperwork and housekeeping chores that freed the men to concentrate on selling. Friction only occurred in this relation when the woman attempted to assert her supposed authority. This above respondent contended:

I don't tell them what to do...Whereas the girl they had in there before, from what I can gather demanded of them and told them what they could do and not do. You know - like I'm your boss when she

wasn't. She left and when I came up here first, I mean, I could get no help off of them really. But after awhile I got used to them and to the area and then afterwards, they were willing to help me... (Helen).

In other words, when she learned her subordinate place the relations became more harmonious. Otherwise, as with the woman in the position before her, male workers would harass and intimidate her or management would remove her from the position.

Another women who was placed in the position of cashier in a male-dominated commission areas responded in a similar way when asked whether she ever thought of being a commission salesperson:

The guys thought about it (sic). But not me. The reason being that we get along so well as a group of people, but I have a low level of temper. If you cross me or whatever, I am sure we would not be friends. This way, I am not cut out for commission. I love selling, I enjoy the selling of it. I sell for them. This is for them (Julia).

Interviewer: What are your daily activities:

Respondent: I do everything whether it is my job or not. Whatever needs to be done, I do it. I was hired as a sales associate but I do everything. I cannot sit out there and do nothing.

Interviewer: So doesn't it bother you that the commission on the sales you do goes elsewhere?

Respondent: Not at all. Because those fellows out there do more favours for me. I do sales, dusting when I feel like it, and occasionally I make a cup of tea. They treat me like one of them. They treat me on their level (Ibid).

This woman sold appliances, furniture, televisions and bedding - all the things that women were not supposed to want or be able to sell. But it was acceptable as long as she knew her place and her wages were different. Another woman in the same situation stated:

The last time they were advertising a couple of the guys actually begged me to do it. I guess they figured that I would be less competition. That's what they thought. I have thought a lot about it in the past three years...I really enjoy selling (Frances).

When I asked whether or not she would get hired if she applied, she took refuge in "physical strength" as an explanation:

I don't know about getting the job. But at that time, the manager didn't like me and I didn't like him. I didn't really apply, not because I didn't think I would get the job, but because realistically there was no way I could stand on the floor...I thought my health wouldn't stand it. Otherwise I would have tried it because I think I can sell just as good if not better than many of them out there. The other thing...If someone needs a washer or dryer in a hurry my guys will load it up on a truck for delivery. One man said why don't you do sales. I said yes until the first time I would have to load up a fridge. He said don't be silly the rest of us will help you with that kind of thing. Our manager at the time used that kind of thing as an excuse for why there were no women. (Ibid)

These are the same women who talked about not wanting to sit down, wanting to be busy and did all manner of physical jobs. The women simply could not see that they were subjects of discrimination which reflects the subtlety of patriarchal control.

#### **"THE FEMALE SALES PERSONALITY"**

What comprised the "female sales personality" was quite vague. Generally, it meant an absence of the supposed male characteristics of aggressiveness, competitiveness and risk taking. Characteristics as we saw above were used more in their relations with women than in selling. More significantly, it was a broader definition associated with women's primary role as domestic labourers. On the one hand, this meant that women did all manner of housekeeping tasks, tension management, paperwork and general organizing work. On the other, it posed structural barriers to women's work options, conditions of work and the burden of performing "two work days". This ideological definition was so entrenched in the labour process over time that the women could not perceive it and clearly denied any form of gender discrimination. One salesman stated that, "women's work being what it is, it is much more difficult for them to

handle commission" (Roger). A female co-worker responded, "I think that they could do it if they had the opportunity to. If they had been brought into that world from the beginning" (Virginia).

#### **THE CASE OF THE FEMALE-DOMINATED COMMISSIONED SALESWORK**

Saleswork in the cosmetic department has always been paid on commission plus a base salary. This makes the women in this department unique relative to their co-workers in other departments. Their work is also seen as more skilled as they have received training in cosmetology outside of Eaton's. The majority of the cosmetic personnel are hired on a full-time basis and they basically work for two bosses - Eaton's and the cosmetic firm. For all of these reasons, to work in this area would place these workers in a higher status position, relative to the other women workers and more equal to the male commissioned workers.

At Eaton's this was not the case. The socially constructed characteristics of men's work that served to widen the gap between male and female sales jobs at Eaton's, and to support the claim that they performed two different jobs of unequal value are reflected in the job



characteristics of cosmetic selling. It is here that we see most vividly how "who did the jobs", rather than job characteristics established the invisible primary criterion for differentiating between jobs and their concomitant value in the 1980's. The selling of cosmetics had all the elements of a highly skilled, status job, a definition reserved solely for men's commissioned salesjobs, but because it was women who performed this job, the conditions of work were shaped by Eaton's management to align it more with the social definition of "women's work"

Cosmetic workers were paid by Eaton's who received a commission on the women's sales from the cosmetic companies. Generally, the commission rate was somewhere around nine percent of the overall sales depending on the cosmetic firm. The women themselves only received a small portion of this amount usually around three percent and the rest went to Eaton's. The payment of commission for sales gave the cosmetic firms considerable control over the work that the women did but Eaton's maintained final control. This was not always the case. In the 1940's, women who were called "demonstrators" were more clearly defined as specialists working for the cosmetic firm. This distinguished them from other workers, although the monetary relationship was intact.

The cosmetic demonstrators feel that there is a good deal of unfairness in this. Demonstrators spend as much time selling Eaton's products as their own. When they are wanted to do any work for Eaton's, they take orders from Eaton's management, but when it comes to any concessions, such as other Eaton's employees get, they are quickly given to understand they work for an "outside company" (Unionize, Oct. 12, 1948).

Demonstrators received their pay from Eaton's but were exempt from company benefits. By the 1980's, the women were clearly defined as working for Eaton's and received their salary and benefits from them.

By receiving their pay from Eaton's the women had no idea how much commission the cosmetic firm was giving to Eaton's on their sales. The women generally had differing conceptions of how their wages were divided. When asked one woman responded: "I was told that I got three per cent of my sales paid by the cosmetic firm" (Edith). This women had no idea that the cosmetic firm actually gave Eaton's a far greater percentage. Another women stated:

Half my salary, forty or fifty percent was paid by the cosmetic company I work for plus the commission is paid by the company you work for. Eaton's gives me the commission on my paycheck every month or every week, whatever but I send the sales report in to my company every month and then the company reimburses Eaton's for that so they are not really paying you commission (Judy).

In reality, Eaton's only paid the women a small portion of what they received in commission from the cosmetic firm. As we saw earlier, paternalistic dominance generally kept women uninformed about wages overall under threat of dismissal.

I asked questions and they didn't like me. I asked too many questions. I think they knew there was going to be a problem with me when I first got my paycheque. I think one of my very first paycheques, I went through it inch by inch to make sure it was right...I went to one of the girls and I asked her. I said, "Can you tell me what this deduction is, I don't understand this." And, she said, "Oh, Well, I don't have that on mine. I don't know". I said, "Oh". I went and asked my boss...I was told that I was not to show my paycheque to anyone. Yes. I was basically told that's private business... Everything is always very subtle. Even a raise is subtle you know, a little brown envelope. Here take this and put it away for another time. Give me a rest. "Oh a raise, did everyone else get one too? No. Oh gee that's too bad" (Ibid).

This mystique served to gloss over the "skilled aspects" of women's cosmetics work. It also bifurcated the connection of the saleswomen between the cosmetic firm and Eaton's.

Eaton's continually attempted to devalue cosmetic work in order to derive accustomed benefits from the women's jobs. Eaton's got away with hiring primarily part-time against the wishes and knowledge of the cosmetics companies.

The overall view was that the cosmetic women worked full-time.

Eaton's tries to get away with having part-timers and the cosmetic companies don't want a part-timer on the line. They want a full timer so in order to make sure they are going to get a full-timer that is going to stay on their line they say "we will pay half of her salary" so that is how it works...But Eaton's sets my rate of pay (ibid).

Generally, only one full-timer worked each cosmetic line. The rest worked part-time. Eaton's justified this to the cosmetics firm in terms of the part-timers doing the stock work and other housekeeping tasks leaving the full-timer to do the selling. However, this was not the reality.

Some part-timers got commission and some didn't. There wasn't really a difference. Most of the part-time at first - there was alot of confusion around this. I don't really know who got commission and who didn't. I know that one girl got commission and two others who didn't. Where they should not be on commission because that way - like when it started out the girls would be on salary. So they were told to ring up things on our numbers. But the manager told the girls to ring up things on her number. So there would be no commission divied out to anyone in the department...You know if she (the part-timer)is going to sell something on my line it should be given the commission because I do all the work for the line throughout the year. Well no, they didn't want to pay out the commission (Edith).

Considerable conflict and competition were created between the part-timers and those working full-time. This is quite apart from the conflict involved for the women who had to account to two bosses that often had conflicting demands - one to sell and the other to do housework.

Part-timers, who had received no special training for the job, were used in cosmetics to dilute the skills of the cosmetic workers as a whole. The full-time women had considerable training for their job:

I took a cosmetics course. I had a cosmetics course from college plus I had a make-up artistry diploma from another school too. I think my education probably helped me a lot more than the average person walking in off the street (to get full-time work). But they still make people work part-time first then take them on full-time (Judy).

The women also attended product knowledge training meetings:

The night ones we never got paid for. They would make it in the evening and make it sound like a party so you would go right after work and they would serve hors d'oeuvres and a drink and you would get a little sample of what they were discussing and then you would have to listen for a couple of hours and absorb all this knowledge and take all the papers back to work (Edith).

Despite the college training and their attendance at product knowledge meetings, these women still suffered a lower status in comparison to the men.

It was a belittling job to work at Eaton's and especially you got enough of that stigmatism working in cosmetics. They thought you were an airhead which a lot of cosmeticians are I am sorry to say. A lot of them were. They were there to look pretty (Theresa).

There was a total devaluation of the women and their skills because of their gendered identity. They were seen as "just a pretty face" with no skills thus forcing the ideological subordination of women to men even here where there were material abilities and skill in "male defined terms" to be rewarded. Moreover, despite their specialization, because they were women they were expected to do the housekeeping tasks.

The cosmetic saleswomen, like the rest of the female saleclerks, spent the major part of their day in housekeeping tasks. The larger companies had considerable authority over the women and applied a great deal of pressure on the women to sell:

The larger companies...they had a lot of clout. When they put the pressure on us then Eaton's would put the pressure on because they were real money makers... In my situation it was very frustrating because I was selling two conflicting lines. And the cosmetic company was pressuring me to keep names and customer files and to sell so much of skin care and beauty treatment. If I didn't sell I would get reprimanded and they would say if you are not keeping up your

end of it we are going to take you off of the line. I would complain to my Eaton's department manager to take some of the load off because I am getting flak from the company and she would say don't worry about it we are paying your salary. So I was caught in the middle (Theresa).

In order to deal with these conflicting demands, some women took the burden of work home with them:

My representative from the cosmetic company would want all her paper work and figures done by a certain time...If I was busy with customers and all the other work I would have to do, I was forced to take this work home. In order to get it done - on my own time or it wouldn't be ready and then that would look really bad on me - the next day when she came in, "Why are your figures not ready, what have you been doing". I did this for a couple of years, I took this work home and we all got fed up with doing this and we went to the manager and said why must we be taking all this work home with us and not getting paid extra for it and obviously I am not getting promoted for it...It was getting confusing you know when you had demands from the buying office at Eaton's and you had different demands from the cosmetic firm. It was just a bit crazy, especially when Xmas came, and promotions from the cosmetic firm, the volume of product and money that we were dealing with. It was unreal. It was a lot to handle for one person. I was everything from a stock girl to a business woman, bookkeeper, a display person. I was everything. A housekeeper. I cleaned. I was back in the stockroom climbing ladders to get heavy boxes down with my good suits on...(Edith).

In sum, women's devalued societal status shaped their subordinate working conditions regardless of the skills and abilities they had. "Who did the Job" rather than the characteristics of the job, was still the major question

asked when distinguishing between jobs in the 1980's, as in the 1940's.

### CONCLUSION

One of Walby's major assertions is that the public sphere of paid work is more important than previously assumed in shaping the labour force participation of women. In this chapter we have provided support for this assertion. It is apparent that women in paid work in the 1980's relative to the 1940's suffered a reduction in degree of oppression. However, women's experiences relative to men's was very different. The patriarchal oppression of women relative to men intensified by the 1980's. In other words, the change in form in patriarchy concomitantly shaped the nature of the specified dimensions of oppression. The major patriarchal strategies were segregation and job grading, accomplished within the struggle of the social construction of the wage form; this is the subject of the next chapter.

### POSTSCRIPT

On July 6, 1989, the British Columbia Human Rights Council awarded \$2,000 in compensation to a Vancouver women



employed by Eaton's after finding the company discriminated against her because of her sex, causing her embarrassment, injury to feelings and loss of dignity. The women's allegations were upheld that Eaton's had built in a systemic barrier that prevented women from becoming commission salespersons in the appliance department, and that abusive threats and obscene language by male employees were directed at her. The court also ordered Eaton's to give the woman the first vacant position available as a commissioned salesperson. (From the "Reasons for Decision" in the Matter of the Human Rights Act and in the Matter of a complaint between Elaine Cook and the T. Eaton Company, June 30, 1989.)

## CHAPTER SIX

### STRATEGIES OF PATRIARCHY AT EATON'S

Chapter five demonstrated changes in the patterns of gender relations in employment at Eaton's between the 1940's and the 1980's. It was illustrated that the more things changed the more they stayed the same. As Walby has stated:

Patterns produced at one historical moment build on previous patterns and the sexual division of labour at any one time is the result of the accumulation of these rounds of restructuring gender relations (1986:243).

By the 1980's, the major job characteristic that distinguished men's saleswork, from women's, was the wage form. Salesjobs that were paid on a commission basis were predominantly occupied by men and the salaried positions were filled by women.<sup>1</sup> Pay rates reflected the social

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<sup>1</sup>A minority of men and women did receive a salary plus commission in the 1980's. The small number of men in this situation were primarily students working part-time and along with some women were located predominantly in the men's furnishings (ties, shirts, belts) department. The role of women in this department as "housekeepers" has been discussed in chapter five. There was a tendency to classify young boys and women in a similar strata, albeit with the "boys" receiving higher wages than the women. Overall, these

definition of commission work as being more highly skilled than salaried work. The net result was that all the men received higher wages than all women. This begs the question of "how this gendered relation in the wage form came about?" More specifically, "how did the commission wage form become an intrinsic part of the definition of "men's work"?

The focus of this chapter is on the patriarchal strategies, between 1947-52, that produced a new set of gender relations, constituting the patterns that would be the precursor to the sexual division of labour in the 1980's. It is Walby's belief that,

...gender relations in employment are critically structured by processes within production, within the firm, and also by political forces, such as state policy...the family is not the only social structure of relevance in determining the position of women in the class structure (1988:9).

She is suggesting that the determination of gender relations is not reducible to one base. It is my belief that the explanatory power of Walby's model of patriarchy is the most

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young men received a salary plus commission to maintain their distinction from the women and also not to convolute the status of the "straight commission" full-time men. In terms of location, the young part-time men were put in a separate department from the full time men, to visibly demarcate the latter's status within the store.

The women who received a salary plus commission were mostly the cosmetic workers. They are a special case as their earnings were paid by an outside cosmetic firm.

persuasive for the discussion of the balance of conflicts and tensions between patriarchal and capitalist forces in responding to women's employment.

It is Walby's view that patriarchal strategies of segregation and subordinate job grading govern women's employment within the form of public patriarchy. The particular balance of patriarchal and capitalist forces within a specific industry and locality would determine the extent that these strategies were followed, relative to the exclusionary strategies of the former societal form of private patriarchy. Walby asserts that the use of both exclusion and grading with segregation, by some unions at the end of the nineteenth century demonstrates what some regard as the most controversial aspect of her theoretical model (see e.g., Bradley, 1986:56) - the independence of patriarchal relations from those of capital.

This chapter supports Walby's contentious position on the independence of patriarchal relations from those of capitalism, and provides further evidence for her second controversial position on the increased importance of the work sphere, relative to the family, in determining women's employment participation. In what follows, we will first examine the wage arrangements at the beginning of the period under study. The intent will be to show that there was a

myriad of wage arrangements in place at this time and that the wage form was not gendered.

Secondly, the forces precipitating the change in the gendered relations at Eaton's will be discussed. This includes: a) the unionization drive; and b) the feminist struggle for a state policy on equal pay. It will be argued that the presence of the feminist political movement changed the balance between the capitalist and patriarchal forces. The resulting patriarchal strategies that were followed to maintain gender distinctions, as will be outlined in the third section, demonstrate the independence of patriarchal relations from those between labour and capital. In the final section, the social construction of the gendered wage form will be illustrated as the resulting compromise between the conflicting forces of capital and patriarchy.

### THE WAGE FORM

At the beginning of the five-year period under study one could already detect the gendered pattern in the wage form that would predominate in the 1980's, even though considerable arbitrariness and inconsistency existed in the payment of employees at Eaton's. There were three types of wage arrangements: 1) combination of salary plus

commission; 2) straight commission; and 3) straight salary. Almost all of the saleworkers at Eaton's, both male and female, received their wages based on the first arrangement - some combination of salary plus commission. Only a small minority of workers were paid on a straight salary or straight commission basis. What is significant here is that those paid on straight commission were all male and the straight salaried workers were all female. Within the processes of restructuring gender relations at Eaton's during this period, the wage arrangements of the majority of workers - of salary plus commission - underwent change in the direction of the arrangements of the minority of the workers - of straight commission for men and straight salary for women.

Implementation of changes in the wage form and the reinforcement of work paid on a straight commission basis as more highly skilled relative to salaried work, can only be understood in terms of how commission rates were determined. Commissioned earnings were formulated in two ways. In the first instance, for the male and female workers who were paid by salary plus commission, a quota system was applied. For each department, management determined a weekly sales dollar figure for the amount of goods that an employee was required to sell. For any merchandise sold in excess of this fixed figure, the employee was paid a percentage of the

additional sales as commission.

In the second formulation, which applied only to those few males whose wages were arranged on a straight commission basis, commission was paid on a percentage rate for all goods sold as opposed to only those goods sold in excess of a fixed sales figure. This system was seen to involve a serious risk for the men, insofar as the possibility existed that they might not sell any merchandise in a given week thereby jeopardizing their families' livelihood. In reality, to ensure that the men received a basic weekly wage that they could count on in the event that sales were slow, a system of a "draw" was in place. This system enabled the men to draw money from their potential future earnings to supplement or replace earnings to a set amount seen as an adequate weekly wage by the employer. These monies, when paid out, were then to be deducted from the employees pay whenever their earnings

exceeded an adequate weekly wage.<sup>2</sup> The net result was that all workers at Eaton's had a basic weekly wage, albeit the myth that these few straight commission men did not have this safety net was maintained, garnering them considerable status among salesworkers.

While we can visualize these broad common generalizations in the formulation of commission earnings, it is important to underscore the fact that discrepancies existed between employee earnings within these common categories of wage arrangements.<sup>3</sup> There was a differentiation of wages based on the criteria of age, sex, marital status and favoritism. Quota numbers, the amount of the draw, commission percentages and salaries could be, and

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<sup>2</sup>Throughout the years of doing this study, I never heard of any man having to use the draw option. The system of the draw was actually discovered in the interviews with the women. The few women who tried a straight commissioned job, in the 1980's, spoke of having to rely on the draw quite often. This further substantiates my argument in chapter five that the definition of men's commissioned work as "risk taking" simply was not a reality for the men or inherent in commission work because of the guaranteed wage, and the fact that the men all earned well over this dollar amount all the time. Rather this concept of the "draw" takes on different meaning and has different consequences for women. Risk taking is associated with the gender doing the work rather than being intrinsic to commission selling.

<sup>3</sup>A further form of commission earnings for all employees was "spiffs". A spiff was an amount of money given to any employee for selling certain items within the store. This could be an item, for example, that was overstocked or a lost leader - a sales item that the company advertised and took a calculated loss on in order to draw people into the store.



were, raised or lowered for individual employees or departments, at different times, at the discretion of management.

This myriad of wage arrangements cannot be misconstrued as being haphazard or reflective of bad management. Coupled with the existing rule of wages being private and confidential, the broader picture of management's intentions in shaping the wage form could be easily disguised within this multitude of arrangements. While the wage form was not gendered at this time, the design for the future gendered wage form was already in place. We turn now to examine the forces that precipitated the changes in gender relations at Eaton's in this post-war period.

#### **FORCES OF CHANGE**

Like most industries during the Second World War, Eaton's underwent considerable expansion creating new struggles with patriarchal relations. Women were being drawn into paid work in unprecedented numbers to replace the men, and after the war capital was retaining many of these female

workers rather than forcing them to return to the home. Walby has argued, "The dropping of the marriage bar during the war was the single most important effect of the war on gender relations" (1986:247-8). The increase in women's employment set off a new round of restructuring of gender patterns at work. The tension between the interests of capitalism and patriarchy in relation to women's increased labour force participation concluded in patriarchal strategies of exclusion further giving way to segregation and job grading.

The independence of patriarchal relations from those of capital, and the conflict and tension between the two, can be demonstrated by examining the dynamics of the struggles between the workers, union and management at Eaton's during the course of the post-war unionization drive. In this section, our purpose will be to set the stage for this undertaking by introducing the forces involved in this struggle and to illustrate the issue of wages as the "contested terrain". It will be argued that the presence of the feminist political movement calling for equal pay for equal work for women altered the balance of capitalist and patriarchal forces in the unionization struggle.

**WAGES: THE CONTESTED TERRAIN**

Management's first response to the threat of unionization was to depart from the policy of wage increases being "private and confidential". Sufrin noted that in the fall of 1947, Eaton's employees received a general raise of \$2.00 a week (Appendix A, 1982). This response occurred before the unionization drive was officially underway and RWDSU was in the initial stages of canvassing the homes of Eaton's employees to recruit potential union activists. Sufrin stated that this was the first general raise the employees could ever recall having received. In addition,

In October, New Liberty magazine carried a rare interview with "Young Mr. Eaton", then 39, describing him as "Canada's richest man, "boy president" of a vast department store chain that's largest in the Empire". Under a smiling, and indeed, very boyish picture was the caption: "John David fights unions with employee benefits, shorter hours" (cited in Sufrin, 1982:23).

The timing or form of these events were not serendipitous. Both the general raise and the news interview were precisely aimed at reinforcing the Eaton image of paternalistic benevolence among employees and the public at large (Ibid.).

The initial targeting of the wage form as the arena of change to forestall resistance was a precursor of the

union's strategy. According to Sufrin, "It became apparent that the common denominator propelling Eaton's employees toward collective action through a union was bargain basement wages and a pay policy that discriminated by age, sex, and marital status" (1982:48). Bargain basement wages became the union's focus in the dispute. The pay policy was allowed under the labour laws at this time and therefore had limited bargaining power potential. This explains, in part, why pay discrimination on the basis of age, sex, and marital status was to become convoluted, as will be argued below, in the union's drive to establish a job classification system based on skill levels. RWDSU saw their initial task as breaking Eaton's code of secrecy around wage rates, disclosing the injustices in order to incite the workers to unionize (Ibid.)

General raises to Eaton's employees continued to be a direct attempt to forestall RWDSU's objectives although, in the years to come, management began to implement a broader and more indirect approach to wage reform. The impetus necessitating a more encompassing strategy, to maintain control over the workers and gender distinctions, came from the feminist social and political movement that was calling for "Equal Pay for Equal Work" for women.

## **EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK**

Management's wage reform strategy was formulated in concert with RWDSU's interpretation of and response to the proposed equal pay for equal work state legislation. It is important here to emphasize that this legislation spoke directly to the inequities of age, sex, and marital status, identified by RWDSU as one of the sources of discontent among employees at Eaton's. The Union's subsequent actions can be interpreted in light of the overall historical record of the labour movement on this issue and it is necessary to return to the origins of the movement for this reason.

The record shows that unions in the 1880's had responded to the enigma of the "working woman" with "At least three different, and contradictory, positions...: exclusion of women from the labour force, protective legislation and unionization (White:1980:14). According to Hartmann (1979a), these three "different" and "contradictory" positions reflected the interactive effect of class-based interests and gendered relations with the emergence of female labour and its indirect threat posed to the security of male labour. Walby, however, contests this interpretation arguing instead that:

The discrepancy between the use of the grading strategy in, for instance, the organization and grading of semi-skilled and unskilled men, while

simultaneously attempting to exclude women completely, demonstrates the independence of patriarchal relations from those between capital and labour (1986:245).

The relations between capital and patriarchy are seen here by Walby to be more conflicting and contradictory than argued by Hartmann (1979a) and others (Bradley, 1986:56).

The labour movement's objective, however, of ensuring that women were subordinate to men at work, was clear.

The principle of equal pay for equal work was supported historically by labour, as a means to protect the man's wage scale, not for the benefit of working women. Resolutions to this effect, passed by the Labour Congresses in the late 1800's in Ontario, arose from concern over the increasing use of women's cheaper, unskilled labour in factories. It was argued among labour, that the use of women workers had the potential of undercutting men's jobs and wages. Given this, their support for equal pay for equal work was based on the premise that women's work was not the same as men's or of equal value and could not be paid the same wage.<sup>4</sup> In the 1940's, the labour movement's response and RWDSU's specifically, was comparable to their historical counterparts, in that, they supported the principle of equal pay for equal work.

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<sup>4</sup>For evidence and further elaboration on these events in Ontario see Aylward (1983a), chapter three.

In contrast to the earlier period, the focus of the equal pay for equal work movement was on improving women's wage rates rather than protecting the men's wage scale. The movement, spearheaded by feminist political figures and not by labour, explicitly called for legislation that would address and correct the wage gap between men and women. In April, 1949, RWDSU announced in Unionize,<sup>5</sup> the organ of the union, that:

An act entitled "An Act Respecting Women's Wage Rates" has been introduced into the Ontario Legislature...This act is designed to put into effect in Ontario the principle of equal pay for equal work for women. The general purpose of the act has been approved by resolutions passed by the two labour congresses in Canada (April 5, 1949).

Subsequently, a Statute legislating equal pay for women was enacted in Ontario in 1951 with the passage of the "Female Employees Fair Renumeration Act." It is important to recognize that Labour's position on this legislation was conditional. They supported equal pay for equal work for all workers, but this did not extend to including a commitment to improve women's subordinate working conditions relative to men's.

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<sup>5</sup>Unionize, Special Collection, Sufrin, Eileen, MG 31 B 31, Vol. I. Public Archives, Canada.

The following radio interview,<sup>6</sup> hosted by RWDSU, reveals the union's position, and the gap between what was called for by feminist politicians and what was actually legislated, concerning equal pay. Aimed primarily at the audience of Eaton's employees, this radio interview was conducted by Ernie Arnold of RWDSU with Agnes Macphail, a member of the Ontario legislature, who was pivotal in bringing the legislation forward.

Arnold: ...Miss Macphail, it must give you a good deal of personal satisfaction to see equal pay for equal work getting into the legislation stage after you have campaigned for it for so many years.

MacPhail: Yes, I would be very happy if we had passed a bill providing for equal pay for equal work, but unhappily such is not the case. The Government Bill is called "Female Employees Fair Renumeration Bill". It is an awkward name to begin with, but it is, as I said in the Legislature a gesture toward doing justice to women in regards to pay, but only a gesture. It will not affect the pay of many women in Ontario and will I fear prove a great disappointment to women. (Printed in the original, emphasis mine) (Transcript, C.K.E.Y. Radio Broadcast, March 27, 1951)

The highlighted text, referring to women, was edited out for the broadcast by the union. This underscores RWDSU's conditional position discussed above. The Statute was referred to by the union as one of equal pay for equal work. Any reference to injustice relating to women, as a special

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<sup>6</sup>Transcripts of Radio interviews, Special Collection, Sufrin Eileen, Mg 31 B 31 Vol. I. Public Archives, Canada.



group, was mitigated, despite the fact that the expressed purpose of the legislation was to address "women's" inequality.

The "Female Employees Fair Renumeration Bill" was congruent with the patriarchal interests of the union, in that it only addressed equal pay for "identical work". This legislation posed no immediate threat to men's jobs or wages, and in fact, served as a mode of protection, for the same reasons as in the past. This relation is revealed in MacPhail's further comments.

Arnold: I take it the Frost bill does not measure up to what you feel should be in an equal pay bill, Miss Macphail - would you tell us why?

MacPhail: Yes, equal pay is only given in the case that women are doing the "same" work, not comparable work or equal quality or quantity of work. In England where they have striven for the rate for the job, they have emphasized equal quantity and quality of work rather than identical work, and the Women's Bureau of the Labor Department in Washington stresses repeatedly that Bills should never use the word "same" work as between men and women who are to get the same pay (Printed in the original, emphasis mine) (Ibid.).

Macphail was speaking to the fact that few women did the same jobs as men and therefore the bill would not affect many women's wages. The aim of the movement was not simply equal pay for equal work, but for "same" or comparable work which would address the needs of all women whose wages, as a group, were subordinate to those of men.

Macphail went on to emphasize that for those women it did affect and who did complain against their employers, the penalty that was levied was minimal, and the employee had no protection from dismissal after lodging a complaint. MacPhail's conclusion was that "...there are no teeth in the Bill" (Ibid.). Arnold suggested that the union could help correct this situation:

Arnold: It looks to me as if employees will need a union to help them put any teeth into this bill - both to help the employee present her case and to make sure her job is protected afterward. By the way, how will this legislation affect unions who already have equal pay clauses in their contracts?

MacPhail: I shouldn't think it would have any effect. It is approving of what they are doing. (Ibid.)

MacPhail's final comment could be interpreted as a trenchant critique of labour's patriarchal position. As with their historical counterparts, the union's backing of the equal pay for equal work legislation cannot be misconstrued as support for women's equality. Rather, it was based on the premise that women's work was not the same as men's or of equal value and could not be paid the same wage. This will further be shown below when we examine the actions of RWDSU on the shop floor at Eaton's.

In sum, the above sets the stage for the dynamics involved in the changes in gender patterns at Eaton's. The

movement for equal pay was gaining momentum during the course of the organizing drive and the initial legislation was enacted before the drive was over. Both management and the Union were aware of the terrain and the scope of this movement, of legislating equal pay for "comparable" work with the aim of equalizing women's wage rates with men's. This goal was antithetical to the patriarchal interests of both the Union and Eaton's management of maintaining gender distinctions.

#### **MAINTAINING GENDER DISTINCTIONS**

This section will illustrate that in the struggles between the workers, Union and employer at Eaton's, the interests of patriarchy, in maintaining gender divisions, contradicted and conflicted with the interests of capitalist relations. The result of this struggle was a compromise, as seen in the social construction of the gendered wage form, to be detailed in the final part of this chapter. What is important here is that Hartmann (1979A) and others (i.e., Bradley, 1989; Barrett, 1980) have seen the compromises, for example, the family wage, during the consolidation of capitalist development, as the result of an interaction between capitalist and patriarchal interests. Instead,

Walby's position of the independence of these interests supported in the ensuing data, and the dynamics of the two systems in conflict and contradiction are illustrated with the ensuing resolution in the form of a socially constructed compromise.

In what follows, the focus is on patriarchal strategies in the maintenance of gender divisions. According to Walby, public patriarchy is characterized by strategies of segregation and subordinate job grading. At the beginning of the unionization drive in 1947, we see again the mixed responses to the "working woman" which emphasizes the yielding of exclusionary strategies characteristic of the private form of patriarchy, to those characteristic of the public form, and in addition, the independence of patriarchy from capitalism.

#### "PROTECTION STRATEGIES"

The only explicit, relevant concern to RWDSU was the "working woman". The Union's purpose was to protect the working woman and obtain a union contract.

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Union's unstated interest in maintaining gender distinctions can be ascertained.

Given the Union's focus on the "genderless" worker, it seems ironic that special appeals were made to women in Unionize concerning the benefits of joining the union from the outset, and in general, women were referred to as a separate group. For example, to show that employees were not earning a living wage, RWDSU published an actual budget of a single female employee on the front page of the second edition (Unionize, April 13, 1948) and of a married man in the fourth (Unionize, April 27, 1948). On the last page of the latter edition, a separate discussion of the "union maid" appeared along with "A message to Eaton Women Employees". It stated that the Union stood for higher salaries, promotions based on ability and seniority, and the establishment of a grievance procedure and pension plan (Ibid.).

This early appeal, directed at women, did not include the Union standing for equal pay for equal work. The subject of equal pay for equal work appears to have been brought forward by women workers. The first reference to equal pay in Unionize appeared in the May 11, 1948 issue among a list of contract demands advanced by the women workers in the mail order department. A quick response by

RWDSU to their list of demands came in the June issue in the following form:

\$25 MINIMUM FOR WOMEN?

Since our April 13th "UNIONIZE" in which the plight of the average Eaton woman employee was emphasized by the "Sally" budget based on \$20 a week, there has been a great deal of comment and discussion on minimum rates. Rumor has it that the minimum salary for women within a year or more service will shortly be \$25 a week. Let's hope it is true - the girls can certainly use it  
Unionize (June 1, 1948).

RWDSU shifted the focus away from equal pay for equal work by addressing minimum wages rates, and for women only. It was to be well over a year, in 1949, before RWDSU specifically addressed the issue of Equal pay or incorporated it into the Union's agenda. <sup>8</sup>

The Union's patriarchal interest took precedence over their relations with capital in the form of calling for a minimum wage rate for the women and not for men at Eaton's. It is important to note that there was an historical precedent for RWDSU to follow. Women had replaced men in some jobs during World War I. After the war, a struggle ensued for "protective" legislation in the form of

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<sup>8</sup>This occurred, once again, at the insistence of the female employess (Unionize, Oct. 4, 1949). This reference in Unionize does not specifically state that it was the women who demanded that equal pay for equal work be included in the union contract. This was, however, the case as the evidence in the discussion below demonstrates.

should pay and when you can expect your increases (Fall, 1948).

There was discontent, among both male and female workers, regarding new employees being hired at the same rate as long-term employees (cf., Unionize, Aug. 10, 1948; Sept. 21, 1948; Nov. 2, 1948). However, the Union's reference to new employees being hired at lower rates to replace and undercut other employees, echoed the trade union movements' historical concern over women doing just that. Moreover, in an issue of Unionize, a notation entitled, "Cheap Labour Policy Factor in Lay-Off...", announced that a male pastry cook had been laid off and replaced "almost immediately" by two part-time women for considerably less pay (Jan. 25, 1949).

It therefore comes as no surprise that comparisons of women's work or wages to men's, or a critique thereof, was never presented by RWDSU. The reports in Unionize concentrated on the same-sex age and favoritism discrepancies, mitigating those based on sex and marital status. For example, a pertinent early edition of Unionize, quite appropriately entitled, "What Price Loyalty...?" contained these remarks in the front page discussion:

There is something wrong when a firm which capitalizes on its "paternalism" is paying a women with 10 years' service \$22 a week and takes on new employees at \$20 for the same work. Thirty-five dollars a week is a pretty low wage for a man with a family with

a minimum wage rate for females. This struggle resulted in the enacting of the Ontario Minimum Wage Law in 1920 that effectively excluded women from paid work, or limited their participation.<sup>9</sup> Now in 1948, RWDSU kept up the call for a minimum wage for women. This call was listed in contract demands along with a separate agenda item of job classifications based on skill levels that was slated for men's jobs (Unionize, Aug.3,1948).

The strategy of a minimum wage for females, and a job classification system for men, was specifically formulated to ensure that females were not hired at a lower rate of pay to replace or undercut men's wages. This fact is underscored in a number of leaflets and editions of Unionize that were distributed in the fall of 1948. For example, it was stated in a leaflet, entitled, "Some of the Things a Union Can Do ---":

When "Salaries are Confidential" the permanent employee is the loser. Wage inequalities and favoritism become rampant. At times of labour scarcity, new help is often paid as much or more than long- service employees are getting. When labour is plentiful, new employees are hired at low rates to undercut and replace older higher paid employees.

**A UNION CONTRACT CORRECTS THIS BY CLASSIFYING EACH TYPE OF WORK.** Employees and management draw up a salary schedule. You know exactly what the job

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<sup>9</sup>For a more elaborate and detailed discussion of this in Ontario in relation to the Ontario Minimum Wage Laws see Aylward(1983).



today's living costs, but when you figure it took him 15 years to attain his present salary, it is even worse (May 11,1948).

A second example was printed in the "Shop News" column of Unionize;

Drug Stock...Girls in this department get \$22 weekly as compared to \$24 in Provision Packing. Single men in this department get \$22 as compared to \$27 in Provision Packing. How come - when the same kind of work is done in both departments? Incidentally, there is more profit in drugs than in groceries (June 7,1948).

The last sentence relating to profit margins served to redirect attention away from obvious pay differences, as did the different length of service between females and males in the initial quote. The explicit gender discrimination cited here did not receive comments from the Union in this instance nor in any other edition of Unionize.

The inclusion solely of the men's marital status, and the printed gap between male and female wages without critique, underscored the point, as it did in the previous quote, that wage discrepancies based on sex and marital status were seen by the union as justifiable. Overall, citing information associated with both males and females, at the same time, was rare, but as in this, and the above example, it was not incongruent with a patriarchal position.

The concept of Patriarchy includes the domination of all men over women, and of older men over younger ones. In the above quotes, the "men" in these departments were actually part-time young schoolboys while the "girls" were full-time working women. Comparing younger men and adult women was therefore in keeping with a patriarchal perspective. In addition, as noted in the quotes, the wages of the younger men were higher, on average than the women's.

One might well ask, "where did the loyalty of the Union lie? - with the worker or the "male" worker?" It was announced in Unionize that,

Elevator Men have received a \$2.00 weekly increase, bringing single men to \$32 and married to \$37. (Aug.3,1948).

Elevator operators were one of the few positions at Eaton's where men and women did exactly the same job. The differential pay here for single and married men was not criticised, nor the fact that the women did not all receive this raise. This is a further example of the Union downplaying women's inequality, even in the case of their identical work with men.

The workers' anonymous submissions to Unionize, however, did continue to focus on the question of equal pay

for equal work. In July 27, 1948, it was indicated that telephone operators were paid differently for doing the same work, depending on whether they worked on the Drug Order, City Order, or Grocery Order switchboards. These workers were all women but their sex was not identified in this citation. This omission may relate to the following quote:

It has been drawn to our attention that "Unionize" has written up the struggle that self-supporting girls are having in trying to get by on salaries of \$20 and \$22 per week, but that we have neglected to point out that some young single men at Eaton's are having an equally hard struggle on equally low pay (Ibid., July 27, 1948).

The quote may also account for the sole reference to male elevator operators in a later issue as cited above. Note that the pay rates of the young men are not indicated here. The Union was explicitly attempting to keep the focus away from any injustice to women.

RWDSU's "loyalties" were with maintaining the domination of the "male" worker, but the views of the workers were generally divided by gender. This was more difficult to determine at the beginning of the organizing drive, as the workers were not willing to talk about their wage rates in public for fear of being fired. This extended to the anonymous submissions to Unionize, where it was felt

that they could be identified by their departments (Sufrin, 1982:100). Further evidence is provided by the fact that the first four months of Unionize publications were devoted to trying to break the taboo around wages being "private and confidential". It was much later, approximately May of 1949, before the RWDSU considered the taboo to be broken, and the workers started talking openly about their wages at Union meetings (Ibid.).

#### SEGREGATION AND SUBORDINATE JOB GRADING STRATEGIES

At the beginning of 1949, changes in the strategies to keep women subordinate became readily apparent. The timing of the changes coincided with the introduction of the Equal Pay for Equal Work Act and the CCL directive to affiliates to address equal pay in their negotiations. Calls for a minimum wage for women disappeared from the Union's list of objectives (Unionize, Jan.10,1949; and separate leaflets distributed). However, the issue of equal pay for equal work did not become an explicit objective of RWDSU local 1000 until October of 1949 at the insistence of the female workers. According to Sufrin, it was decided that "Equal pay for equal work, ending pay based on age, sex or marital status, should go hand in hand with classifying

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jobs rather than people" (1982:107). This did not mean that gender would no longer be an issue but that they would aim for equal pay for equal work together with/or "hand in hand" with developing a job grading system.

Elaborate job classification systems based on skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled labour were drawn up for most departments. For the majority of departments, these categories were quite easily defined, primarily due to the fact that men, women and "boys" performed different jobs. The definitions were also established, judging from the lack of discord reported in Unionize, without contention. Women, along with some boys were simply defined as unskilled workers doing unskilled work.<sup>10</sup>

In the case of the salesworkers, establishing a job classification system that would maintain gender distinctions was more difficult. Categories of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled were more troublesome to apply as salesworkers all did the same job of selling. The major existing distinction between jobs was an ideological status

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<sup>10</sup>As soon as the classification system was firmly in place, the Union began to call once again for a minimum wage rate. This time however they explicitly indicated that it should be for all unskilled workers regardless of age, marital status, and most importantly, gender (Unionize, Sept. 20, 1949). This is an important example of how labour, in the earlier call for a minimum wage for women, had gone against their class interests to maintain gender distinctions.

hierarchy based on the prestige of the product sold, as discussed in detail in chapter five. This materialized in the form of higher commission earnings for those selling the higher status products. The commission wage form established the basis for distinguishing between men's and women's work with commission wages becoming intrinsic to the definition of men's work.

There was no basis for distinction among salesworkers due to special abilities or training. All salesworkers were hired without previous experience. In addition, no product knowledge training was given other than that learned in the course of the job. A loose formulation was maintained in terms of the male workers, paid on a straight commission, who were considered to be located at the top of the status hierarchy, as opposed to women on a straight salary at the very bottom. However, at this time, these two groups of workers were a minority of the employees at Eaton's. As again, most workers were paid on a salary plus commission basis. The Union simply did not attempt a classification system of salesworkers.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Private communication with the RWDSU organizer of the 1940's, Eileen Tallman, and Ernie Arnold of RWDSU executive, confirmed that no classification system was set up for the salesworkers. Sufrin stated that it was basically self-evident that some salesjobs were more skilled than others. Her example, was that it took more product knowledge to sell a washing machine than to sell an item in notions. Pushed further, she reiterated the response that I received from Arnold, that it was simply the men's jobs that were more skilled in those days, simply because they were

This is not to say that the workers themselves did not have some idea of skill levels in their salesjobs. The most contentious department was hardware. The following appeared in Unionize.

Employees in the hardware department report dissatisfaction with their commission arrangements. They maintain that there is no comparison between their commissions and those made by the salespeople in the heavier lines.

It takes a good deal of salesmanship to sell small stuff like screws, hinges and rope - technical knowledge, patience and as much energy very often as it takes to make a really large sale. These small hardware sales are important too, for when a customer has received courteous, interested attention and sound advice from a salesman when he has bought nails or a bolt from a certain store, he is much more likely to return to that store when he needs something in power tools or other large equipment (Sept.14,1948).

Hardware was traditionally "men's work", but apart from this observation, there was no other justifiable basis to see it as skilled work. It was more comparable to the women's notions department. This department provides a good example of the ambiguity distinguishing between men's and women's salesjobs and the need for some basis according to the

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performed by men (Fall,1988).

dictates of patriarchy, in particular, in light of the upcoming legislation on equal pay for equal work.<sup>12</sup>

Congruent with the Union and management's strategy, the male workers did not contrast their jobs with women's, but the women consistently made these comparisons. This is illustrated below in an excerpt from RWDSUs' series of CKEY radio programmes. RWDSU organizer, Eileen Tallman, is questioning two salesworkers on the issue of equal pay for equal work right after RWDSU local 1000 adopted equal pay for equal work as one of their contract objectives:

Tallman:...What about the Union objective of equal pay for equal work, Mrs. Mould?

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<sup>12</sup>It was noted in Chapter Five that the hardware department was located at the back of the Eaton's stores. In the 1980's, it was a place to which management moved employees if they fell out of favour, and/or management wanted to get rid of them, for example, if they gained weight or grew old. It was a place that employees were transferred into and generally their position with the firm was very vulnerable. No doubt as a result of the opaqueness of this department, and the outcries by the hardware employees, the management strategy of the "open transfer system" developed in the 1940's. The following is a discussion of the open transfer in Unionize, May 9, 1950: "We have been asked by members to advise Eaton employees of the real meaning of an "open transfer". In Eatonian language this usually means the "open-door" - out! Sometimes employees who are not satisfied with their department make the mistake of asking for a transfer before locating another department manager who will hire them. In such case, they are often given an open transfer. The Employment Office may or may not interest itself in placing the employee, and after a run-around of several days in reporting back to the Employment office, many give up and seek work elsewhere". - or, as respondents told me in the 1980's, take a position in Hardware.



Mrs. Mould: I agree one hundred percent. There should be a rate set for a job, not for the person who does the job. What difference does it make whether it is a man, woman or boy who does the job? If the result is relatively equal. I can't see for the life of me why the pay shouldn't be. In Eaton's, many women salesclerks have as much responsibility as men, but get much lower pay.

Tallman: Thanks, Mrs. Mould. Next, we'll introduce Mr. Fred Tinker, a salesman in the Bedding Department. What is your opinion on this equal pay for equal work issue, Mr. Tinker?

Tinker: As a male, Miss Tallman, I am probably expected to say - "Back to your stove, little women, and let me hear no more of this! Equal pay, of all things, what next. Why I have responsibilities...However, having looked beyond my own masculine nose on this question, I don't see it that way. I think we men must make it our business to see that women do not undercut our rates of pay. I know that if we don't, and a depression comes along, we'll find women doing our work at half the price, and we'll be out in the cold. I think equal pay for equal work now is the best job security our Union can aim to get (Nov.16,1949).

The job security this man is speaking about is not protection in the case of a depression but from women taking "men's jobs". The male worker is making a definite statement about men's jobs and women's jobs as being two distinct entities whereas for the woman this difference is not as clear. The quote reflects the gender difference in the views of the workers in relation to the equal pay for equal work legislation.

As the struggle around equal pay for equal work for women gained momentum, management responded by more clearly

demarcating the differences between men's and women's work. In some occupations they just removed either the males or the females.

After several years of service, two women graduate pharmacists were told late one afternoon that they were being replaced by men...These druggists were told that as they were married women they should expect to be let out. They were also given to understand that the company prefers to have men behind the drug counters...Such prejudiced behaviour against qualified women must have a dampening effect on the enthusiasm of this year's brilliant young women graduates...  
(Unionize, May 23, 1949).

The replacing of women by higher paid men went against the interests of capital. It is, however, in the interests of patriarchy. Management recognized the need for a longer range plan to maintain gender distinctions. Pharmacists required training to do their job whereas other jobs such as packers did not.

"Women Packers Replace Men". Eaton's cheap labour policies have hit the staff of packers in the College St. Sub-basement. Men with long service have been transferred to less desirable jobs elsewhere and women are being put on their packing jobs - at less money, of course...What will Eaton's do next for a fast buck (Unionize, Sept. 4, 1951).

Note that the protest by the Union was far more substantial when the women were replacing men. Management was not simply

replacing one gender, when men and women were doing identical work, which was one of their tactics. Management's actions here indicated a more far-reaching strategy to ensure the perpetuation of the gendered division of labour.

Jobs that required ability and skill were to be men's jobs and lighter, more menial work was to be staffed by women. The best example is the Manning case. Mr. Manning was unable, due to illness, to continue to do the heavier "men's work". It was suggested by management that he retire.

MANNING PROTESTED - he needed a job - he COULDN'T retire - he had nothing to live on. He reasoned that he was quite able to do the lighter types of work - why couldn't he do C.O.D.'s? No, he was told, that's girls' work - he couldn't be paid his present wage (\$29 a week) and do that job (Unionize, June 29, 1948).

In this quote, the issue of concern for the Union was not the gendered work but the lack of job security, and treatment of older workers. The Union was in agreement that women should not be doing heavy work (cf., Unionize, Sept. 20, 1949). However, the message again was a reinforcement of distinct definitions of men's and women's work.

More direct changes were made by management to effect a difference between the sexes in ability and skill. A system of training was implemented for straight commissioned salesmen. Four mornings a week, they were taken

off the floor to attend sales classes (Unionize, May 1, 1951). Selling areas became more sectionalized in order to separate the higher paid male workers from the rest of the employees thereby increasing their status. For example, straight commissioned men in the Stove department could previously sell any item in the store along with the stoves. The department was changed and sectionalized so that the salesmen could sell in one section only (Unionize, March 29, 1949). This reference to the stove department quoted in Unionize was registering a protest by the workers who contended that their commissions were lower by being limited to one selling area. This strategy would also keep women out of their sections which is in conflict with the interests of capital but congruent with patriarchy as seen in the following quote from a prepared script for radio programmes on CKEY around the same time period.<sup>13</sup>

(Two fellows drinking coffee at table)  
 Jack: There I am pushing trucks of stock around the only day this week we've had a mob of customers in the department - so the women get all the sales and the men lose all the commission - it burns you up - there should be a way to compensate us for all this stock work.

The Union in presenting this script is underscoring the issue of women doing the work of men by presenting it as the

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<sup>13</sup>There is no date on this script but we can assume it is around the end of 1949 by the content.

downgrading of the men's work by having them do stock work. In fact, much of the more "menial" labour that straight commission men had previously been required to do, such as stock work and clerical duties, was now being done by young boys and women respectively (see e.g., Unionize, August 15, 1950).

There was a deliberate move to upgrade men's work, while women's work, in contrast, was being downgraded. This was occurring, on the one hand, by virtue of the fact that training was not instituted for women employees. On the other hand, women began to be responsible for more "housekeeping tasks", which included the men's clerical work. Less and less selling was done by women, as self-service began to be instituted in their departments (Unionize, March 13, 1952). They were also required to do more cleaning jobs (c.f. Unionize, Jan. 30, 1951). Generally, women were sectionalized into the more menial positions and hired more frequently on a part-time basis (Sufrin, Interview). Part-time work was the beginning of the compromises between capital and patriarchal interests.

In sum, the foregoing section has illustrated two things: 1) the independence of patriarchal interests from those of capitalism in maintaining gender distinctions; 2)

that the restructuring of gender relations built upon the previous patterns of patriarchal strategies. Eaton's complemented initial "protection" strategies aimed at excluding women from paid work, or at least, limiting and determining their labour force participation, at the time of the demand for a minimum wage and later equal pay for equal work. These strategies were for females only and had historical precedents in patriarchal relations. One form gave way to another and at all times existed alongside segregation and subordinate job grading strategies. This demonstrates the independence of patriarchal relations. These strategies were in conflict and contradiction to the interests of capitalism which are indifferent to the sex of those who does its work. The impending aim of the feminist movement of equal pay for "comparable" work was the impetus leading to a compromise in the form of a gendered wage between the relations of capitalism and patriarchy.

#### **THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE GENDERED WAGE FORM**

The wage form was socially constructed to be gendered as a compromise between capitalist and patriarchal relations. In terms of patriarchy, a more far-reaching strategy was necessary to respond to the social and

political movement around women's work because men's and women's salesjobs, if not equal work, were at least comparable. A firmer basis for women's subordination had to be constructed that would withstand the feminist movement around equal pay together with the ongoing expansion of capital which required more and more labour from the reserve in the home of women's labour power. For capitalism, the interest was in maintaining its cheap pool of labour and having access to the reserves. The social construction of the gendered wage form bridged these two conflicting and contradictory interests.

Patriarchal strategies of subordinate job grading and segregation were not as effective on the salesfloor where most workers did almost the same job and were paid in the same way - some combination of salary plus commission. These strategies were used mostly on the least ambiguous salesjobs of the minority of workers. As you will recall from the beginning of the chapter, these workers comprised a small group of men who received straight commissioned wages and a small group of women who were on a straight salary. The salary plus commission workers represented approximately ninety-five percent of all salesworkers. They were the group of concern as their work was the least differentiated. These workers, as noted earlier, were "curiously" absorbed in RWDSU's "self evident" skill definitions based on gender:

men's work was skilled and women's unskilled - without regard to the work that was being done. This left management relatively free to implement changes in wages with minimal opposition from, and more with the support of, RWDSU.

The first wage increases could be understood simply as a means to forestall the Organizing drive. In August of 1948, management responded to the workers and the Union's call for an adequate salary by raising the wages of some workers in various departments. RWDSU referred to this as "Hush Money";

**HUSH MONEY...**There seems to be some confusion in the minds of some Eaton people over the company's current policy of giving increases here and there in different departments. One group of confused Eatonians attribute this trend to the generosity of the company. (One old-timer punctured this illusion when he said: In all the years I have been with the company I've never had so many raises. They almost equal the number of wage cuts I got during the depression.") Another group of confused employees are happy to get the raises and give the Union credit for them, but continue to jog along in their old rut. They are willing to let their fellow employees build the union and are content to sit back and reap the benefits. But there are many employees in Eaton's who are not easily kidded. They know these increases for what they are - "Hush Money", grudgingly doled out to keep the workers quiet - and unorganized.... A Little "Hush Money" won't seduce the members of local 1000 from driving towards their goal of complete union organization of Eaton's employees (Unionize, Aug. 24, 1948).



There is no question that the raises given, along with the general increase prior to the start of the official organizing drive, did serve to forestall, at this time and throughout the drive, some employees' participation in and support of the Union.

The workers and the Union were happy with the increases, and in Unionize, the raises were applauded as gains made as a result of the organizing drive and in response to specific complaints by the workers. Here are some early examples.

Economy China...Salesclerks in Economy China, basement of the Main Store, have been increased to \$25 per week. Quite a boost from pre-union days! There is no commission in this department, however (Unionize, June 15, 1948).<sup>14</sup>

Salary increases in Housewares: \$25. minimum set: The women in Housewares, in Main Store, are now on the same salary arrangements as those in the China department, with the establishment of a \$25.00 a week minimum. There was considerable dissatisfaction amongst older workers being paid the same as the newcomers and this has led to increases for some employees in this department (Unionize, Aug. 10, 1948).

The strategy of a minimum wage for women, as opposed to equal pay, was the Union's objective at this time, as has been noted previously. All of the workers in these departments were women who were paid on a straight salary

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<sup>14</sup>Note that the straight salary is seen here in June of 1948 as being problematic relative to having a commission wage.

basis. The above quotes serve to show an even more significant point, i.e. that wage increases given to the employees were in no way haphazard. In addition, the targeting of the female straight salary workers to receive the first set of wage increases was the beginning of what came to be the socially constructed compromise between capitalist and patriarchal relations: this being a segregation of men and women's work based on the wage form. The development of the changes in the wage form followed a very precise plan to this end.

The Unionize documents revealed that management started with those workers on the lowest rung of the status hierarchy, the straight salaried women workers, bringing them all up to a minimum salary rate. Employees who were paid on commission arrangements began to complain in Unionize that they were not also receiving these increases (Sept.9,1948). In November, RWDSU suggested that, "the solution to the maze of commission arrangements in many departments in Eaton's is the same as that desired by all employees - an adequate weekly wage" (Unionize, Nov.2,1948).

In concert with the Union's proposal of an adequate weekly wage as opposed to the maze of commission arrangements, management began the next stage of their plan of changing the wages of women in some departments from a

salary plus commission to a straight salary. The Union's proposal on this question was further delineated in Unionize.

Straight Salary Best? ..A sampling of opinions in a wide variety of store departments where employees are on a salary plus commission, reveals that many would prefer a straight salary - AT AN ADEQUATE LEVEL, naturally - rather than present salary-plus-commission arrangement. Reasons given:

1. Take-home pay would be a known quantity. 2. Monthly payment of commissions make it hard to budget - and on Eaton's wages, budgets are essential! 3. Fluctuations in buying cannot be foreseen; it is not the employee's fault if buying drops off. Quotas are arbitrarily set by the company at present, theoretically on the previous year's business for that month. 4. Customers would probably get better all-round service. Several departments, such as Housewares, China, Lingerie - Main Store, have already been changed over to straight salary, with fairly substantial increases to balance off commissions. A sampling of opinions in these departments indicate the new basis is more satisfactory to the majority, although the few who made top commissions are not so happy.

Straight commission (with draw) departments, such as furniture, Men's clothing etc. would prefer to remain on their present basis, but have a voice in setting commission rates.

We don't pretend to be "pollsters" (our faces haven't been as red as Gallop's or Roper's.) So what do you think? Would you prefer straight salary or salary plus commission (Unionize, Nov.16,1948)?

RWDSU was in a very precarious position in terms of this question. They supported the higher wage rates of men, and this particular group of straight commissioned men did not support a salaried wage. But any change in wages that could

be argued to have come about as a result of the Union was certainly in their favour. So RWDSU seem to leave the issue up to the workers. A straight salary, on the face of it, did appear to be a good solution to the workers, in order to eradicate the arbitrariness of the present commission arrangements, and very little protest was recorded.

Changing the women's wage form from a salary plus commission to a straight salary resulted in monetary losses for some of the employees. Management calculated the average commissioned earnings in the department and added this to the workers' present salary. The results were as follows:

More Departments On Straight Salary... Three more departments to go on straight salary as of February 3, were Hosiery, Gloves, Infantswear and Girlswear. As in previous cases, the changeover from a salary plus commission has had a mixed reception from the employees concerned. For the top commission people, it will probably result in lower earnings. On the other hand, many employees welcome the removal of uncertainty of commissioned earnings. Employees are told that their salary has been set by adding average commission earnings to their previous salary. However, in some cases, as in hosiery where girls were told when they started that the salary would be \$20 a week and commissions would average \$5 a week, they now find their new earnings have been set at only \$23 a week (Unionize, Feb. 15, 1949).

While some workers were losing out with these changes, again there was no protest by the Union, in light of the more

stable pay check which seemed to be the compromise being made with these women employees.

These women were further losing out in terms of their class interests in that management did not continue the trend of a \$25 minimum rate of pay. A month earlier, the Union had dropped the call for a minimum wage rate for women in their list of objectives. Moreover, two weeks after the printing of an Extract from Circular letter 199 from CCL to its affiliated locals calling for unions to deal with equal pay for equal work in negotiations (Unionize, Feb, 22,1949), it was reported in Unionize that "The trend from salary and commission to straight salary is being accelerated" (March 15,1949). The need for a compromise was now more compelling. The way in which wages were changed for the salary plus commission female workers, demonstrates how a gendered wage was being constructed as the compromise. Calculating the straight salary, based on the differential in-place quota system, did not change existing inequities between departments, or the same department in the two stores. What needed to be changed was the status between men and women in relation to the wage form.

To effect this change, no male workers were placed on straight salary wages. The men paid on salary plus commission and a few remaining women, who had not been

placed on salary wages, underwent changes in their commission arrangements more closely resembling the system for the straight commissioned men. The difference was that now their commissions were calculated on a percentage basis rather than the previous quota system.

4th Floor Coats on 1%... Another department on the 4th floor to go on 1% commission on all sales is the Coat section. This will eliminate confusion over what was "old letter" merchandise on the previous spiff arrangement. Employees feel that earnings should average about the same under the 1% system. There has been no general increase in basic salaries in this section for some time (Unionize, March 14, 1950).

More Departments On 1%... Eaton's policy of revising their commission arrangements to a straight 1% on all sales has been extended to more departments over the past few weeks, including Main Store Piece Goods, Bedding and Linen, and 4th floor dress departments (Unionize, May 1, 1950).

The new commission basis was now in keeping with the commissioned form among straight commissioned male workers, that was calculated on a percentage basis as opposed to a fixed sales quota system.

The end result of all the changes in the wage form was a more clearly defined demarcation between men's and women's salesjobs. The majority of the males were now paid on a commission basis and the females on a salaried basis, with a few minority workers of both sexes paid on salary plus commission. Visually this can be pictured from our

starting point of three groups of workers with the majority in the middle being paid on a salary plus commission; these workers were then moved by gender to the other two groups, leaving a minority in the middle category. This relation was a socially constructed compromise of patriarchal and capitalist interests in the course of struggle.

### CONCLUSION

To conclude, this chapter has demonstrated that the commissioned wage form became intrinsic to defining men's work as a socially constructed compromise between the relations of capital and patriarchy during the period of protracted struggle in 1947-52. It was not the case that by the end of the struggle the wage form was as distinctly delineated as in the 1980's. However, as Walby has argued each round of restructuring of gender relations "build on previous patterns" and the end result is an "accumulation of these rounds of restructuring gender relations" (Walby, 1986:243).

Our examination of the patriarchal strategies that produced the new set of gender relations clearly illustrated

the independence of these relations from those of capitalism. At one and the same time, strategies that excluded, limited or determined women's labour force participation, under the guise of "protection", existed alongside the governing strategies of segregation and subordinate job grading argued by Walby to be characteristic of public patriarchy. The independent patriarchal relations conflicted with and contradicted those of capital as shown in the evolution and development of strategies to produce gender distinctions, i.e. the minimum wage for females and equal pay for equal work on the shop floor at Eaton's.

Finally, the force that brought an alliance of patriarchal and capitalist relations was the feminist movement for social and political change in women's labour force participation. This movement provided such a threat to both interests that the result was the determined response in the social construction of the gendered wage form. Walby has credited the feminist movement with provoking the change from the private to public patriarchy. This chapter has shown how feminist resistance can provoke changes within a specific firm. The next chapter looks more specifically at the feminist struggle within the Eaton's firm with a focus on the female employees' resistance and empowerment.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### WOMEN'S RESISTANCE AND EMPOWERMENT AT EATON'S

In this chapter, our focus is on exploring the processes of women's resistance and empowerment at Eaton's during the course of the 1984 organizing drive and the subsequent strike. In contrast to the 1940's, where the struggle was played out primarily on the shop floor, the fight for the union in the 1980's extended out into the public arena. Here the movement for women's equality had gained a broader political base and thereby a stronger voice in society as a whole. The influence of the broad women's movement and the struggle, in and of itself, fostered the resistance and empowerment of the women at Eaton's.

At the beginning of the organizing drive the women's workers, for the most part, were not conscious of the underpinnings of patriarchy beneath their conditions of work. Minimal or no feminist consciousness could be discerned among the respondents. One of the underlying purposes of this chapter is to uncover and name the invisible, hidden aspects of patriarchy that were operating during the course of the unionization events. No attempt

will be made to examine or provide explanations for all the complex factors involved in the final outcome of this dispute. We will concentrate on revealing the issues of patriarchy that were unseen, or when surfacing, were subverted by the institutionalized system of male dominance. The successes of this dispute are defined in terms of the subsequent processes of empowerment of the women at Eaton's, towards action aimed at improving the quality of their working lives (cf. Bookman and Morgan (1988:19)).

After a swift and highly publicized certification process, the dispute ended after a five-and-a-half-month-long strike, with few workers left on the picket lines and the development of a strong contingent of anti-unionists among the Eaton's workers. Their first contract did not include any improvements in the working conditions at Eaton's and a year later the anti-union forces managed to decertify the union. Blame was placed on the women workers for "not wanting to organize themselves", evoking the old adages of "women are hard to organize" because of their peripheral commitment to paid work.

The "post mortem" accounts of the unionization events at Eaton's raise two key themes to be addressed in this chapter, that have pervaded past literature on women

and unions and that still are taken as truisms about women generally: first, that women are passive victims; second, that women participate in their own and other women's oppression.<sup>1</sup> It is the intention of this chapter to show that these responses are too simplistic. They obscure the differences among women and their different ways of resisting both individually and as a group. Bookman and Morgan have shown that women's political action takes on forms of consent and resistance, and these forms may occur at the same or different times. These are specified by their location and position in society, their race and class and the general activities of their daily lives as women (Ibid.,11).

Bookman and Morgan (1988) have alerted us to the fact that the end result of an action is only part of the story. The processes of women's individual resistance and collective action "are" political engagement which creates change, regardless of the outcome. In what follows these processes will be examined by expanding our traditional understanding of what constitutes "political action", set in terms of women's participation in political action as a process of empowerment. The empowerment of the women at

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<sup>1</sup>There are numerous examples of this. Perhaps the most poignant is in the societal understanding of battered wives. The question consistently asked is "why don't they just leave their abusive husbands?"

Eaton's can be identified in the context of the "stages of feminist consciousness". The first half of this chapter concentrates on the aspects of resistance during the course of the organizing drive identifying the level and nature of gender and class consciousness. The latter half specifically addresses the processes of empowerment within expanded and redefined context of politics during the course of the strike.

#### CONCEPTUALIZING EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment may be seen as the antithesis of paternalism and patriarchy. Bookman and Morgen contend,

... empowerment begins when they [women] recognize the systemic forces that oppress them, and when they act to change the conditions of their lives...Fundamentally then, empowerment is a "process" aimed at consolidating, maintaining or changing the nature and distribution of power in a particular cultural context (1988:4).<sup>2</sup>

In this instance, we are speaking of patriarchal power. These processes of empowerment identified by Bookman and Morgen are analagous to Lerner's definition of the stages of

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<sup>2</sup>I would like to acknowledge Bookman and Morgen (1988) for the outline of aspects of women's resistance and empowerment on which this chapter is based.

developing feminist consciousness:

(1) the awareness of a wrong; (2) the development of a sense of sisterhood; (3) the autonomous definition by women of their goals and strategies for changing their condition; and (4) the development of an alternate vision of the future (1986:242) .

While Bookman and Morgen focus on individual acts of resistance, in a particular cultural context, Lerner's definition encompasses a wider social base, emphasising the consciousness of the group. In addition, Lerner takes us a step further to suggest that the "consolidation" of feminist consciousness is grounded in the recognition of the interplay between theory and political, grassroots action. She suggests that, developing from within women's historical culture, new "women-centered" theoretical frameworks of interpretation provide the tools for envisioning an alternate future (Ibid.,242).

What we can say then, is that all acts of resistance or political activity that women engage in are part of the processes of empowerment.<sup>3</sup> In carrying out these acts they are beginning the stages of empowering themselves which may in turn develop into a feminist consciousness. Feminist consciousness develops when individual acts are related to the overall structure and nature of a patriarchal society;

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<sup>3</sup>I include here the actions of the "anti-union" activists.

it develops when their overall demands are defined and a feminist theoretical interpretation developed or when demands are made upon patriarchal society to actually provide the protection it promises women.

As indicated in previous chapters, few, if any, women at Eaton's had a feminist (or class) consciousness at the beginning of the union action. Most were aware that a women's movement existed, but knew little about it, and in no way did they identify themselves with the movement. The following is a sample of the comments given in response to a question on whether they were aware of the movement:

No, I had no...well, I used to see them in the paper periodically, but no...(Emma).

No. Before any of this I knew there was one around obviously, I read and listened but I didn't agree as a person with a lot of their philosophy. To me a lot of them came across as being men haters... A lot of them came across as getting into a cause because of a gender problem than because of a "real cause" (my emphasis) (Isabella).

No. Well, in a sense of my own opinion, - okay. I believe that equal pay for equal value and if I'm doing the same job as a man, I should get paid the same and things like that...but in a sense like opening my door and stuff like that, I still like that,- okay. (Feminists are)...like hard women (Lucy).

The respondents generally held stereotypical images of feminists or women involved in the women's movement as

"butch", "lesbian", "men haters"<sup>4</sup> which colored and/or contributed to a lack of understanding of the issues of women's inequality. I am not going to suggest that these views changed by the end of the action, or that these women became feminists. In fact, the majority of respondents stated that their views about feminism had not changed at all but the women's movement had gained more credibility in their opinion than it held prior to the strike action. What I am going to argue is that through a variety of processes of political engagement, the women at Eaton's empowered themselves, and the stages of developing a feminist consciousness were set in motion.

#### THE ORGANIZING DRIVE

When the workers initially signed union cards in 1984, it was an act of protest against their perceived betrayal by Eaton's management as opposed to support for having a union at Eaton's. As discussed in chapter four, during the years of the recession, 1981-84, the workers had agreed to a wage freeze and additional work responsibilities, with promises from management of future job security, and financial reimbursement, in return for

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<sup>4</sup>Most of the respondents had difficulty saying the words "butch" or "lesbian". They answered in the affirmative when I put to them the question, "Do you mean "lesbian", "butch".

their loyalty.

It was 26 months, over two years without a pay raise. We were told we weren't getting a raise because it was a recession year and we said fine. We were just thankful to have our jobs. We weren't being laid off. Simpson's was being laid off and whatever. We said that's fine. We thought Eaton's will make it up to us, Eaton's is right. Everyone kept saying and telling me, they will make it up to us, they are not going to shaft us. We can trust Eaton's to do the right thing. No new people were hired and that was good. But we also ended up doing all this extra work...We were trying to help Eaton's out (Judy).

The workers' loyalty and belief in Eaton's paternalism were to continue, unabated, for a period of twenty-six months.

#### THE INITIAL CONTACT

The workers at Eaton's stated that the first notion of forming a union came from a representative of RWDSU in December of 1983, and was met with a lack of interest, at that time, by the male Brampton store employee who was approached. The suggestion of a need for a union evolved out of a conversation between this employee and an RWDSU representative who was out shopping. This worker had the following to say about the chance encounter:

I was selling a man a video and he tried to get me down in price and I said well with the money I make I can't do this. So out came the union card, the old sales pitch (Robert).



The employee was clearly not interested in the Union at this point, and in fact showed some distaste for unions in this quote. This same employee was contacted at a later date by one of RWDSU's union organizers. The union reported:

...he indicated to us that the company was supposed to be coming out with wage increases in January of 1984; that the employees had gone through a three-year wage freeze; and that they expected substantial increases when the raises were announced (Currie and Sheedy, 1988:247).

The employee adopted a "wait and see" attitude; on the one hand, it seemed to put the union off. On the other hand, Eaton's had promised wage increases in the New Year, and he, like the other Eaton's employees, held on to the belief that Eaton's was going to follow through on all its paternalistic promises.

#### **MANAGEMENTS' BREACH OF THE PATERNALISTIC CONTRACT**

In January of 1984, management breached the implicit paternalistic contract, and the male commissioned salesworker at the Brampton store contacted the union, ready to organize. Organizers for RWDSU recounted the conversation with the worker as follows:

We received a telephone call from Paul at the end of January indicating that the company had come

forward with the raises, and that it amounted to an insult for many of the workers because the increases were minimal: one cent an hour, two cents an hour, three cents an hour. The maximum raise was 4 percent. Many of the full-time sales clerks, who are predominantly women, received increases that were considered to be a gift rather than a wage increase because they were at the top of their payment scale.<sup>5</sup> These people became very upset and angry over this. They had waited three years and they felt they had helped their company through a very difficult time (Currie and Sheedy, 1987:247).

Following this call, the employee said:

The next day John Clarke (RWDSU organizer) came to see me and we started from there. After that, John and I went to coffee and decided to start up the Union (Robert).

This employee, like the majority of commissioned male workers, did not receive a raise at all when the increases were given out. He reacted with anger. However, in the course of the interview, when asked why he had stayed at Eaton's for ten years, he responded: "I guess when I started there it was the fact that if you were a "good employee" you had a job for life. Everybody thought that"(Ibid). Management's actions had revealed his job was not as secure as he had supposed.

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<sup>5</sup>What this means is that the company felt the women were not entitled to any increase at all because they had reached the top of the pay scale. The increases that these women received were presented by management as a gift "out of the goodness of their hearts", overlooking the minimal cost of living raises that the women had foregone, and were entitled to, in the twenty-six months of the recession.

The breach of the paternalistic contract was felt throughout the Eaton's empire and was experienced most directly by the women employees. The women similarly experienced the implicit sense of a loss of job security, due to low or no wage increases, in that they no longer felt "they had a job for life". In addition, they were subjected to changes in their status hierarchy. Originally, there were a few women department heads in the larger stores, who wore and were called brown badges, and had some authority to hire and fire; below them were "red badge" women employees who had signing privileges, meaning they could authorize a customer's check; and then saleswomen who could not sign. There was a token difference in pay between these three groups of approximately ten dollars a week. This hierarchy was changed to two groups ie. section heads and sales associates. In the larger stores with department heads, these women were demoted to section heads and lost their authority to hire and fire. The majority of the remaining women were all given signing privileges. In the smaller stores without department heads, one woman who had signing authority was chosen as section head. This in turn demoted the rest of the signers to the same status as the remaining employees. The men were not subject to the same status hierarchy and therefore did not experience this demotion. One man commenting on the differential status system for women stated:

Respondent: The women loved the titles.

Interviewer: Why would they like them more than men?

Respondent:

They just came out of the home with the housewife label. This made them something special when really they are just being gofers more than anything (Daniel).

This statement underscores the perception of men having a higher status than the women. But it also reveals, in spite of the the negative overtone, that there was a recognition of the importance and value placed on the titles by the women that management chose to eradicate.

#### **WOMEN'S DIFFERENTIAL EXPERIENCE OF THE BREACH**

The women who were more subject to Eaton's paternalism experienced shock, hurt, and feelings of betrayal along with anger, and the notion of unionizing was addressed more in this context than as an avenue to ensure and attain better working conditions. The following quotes in which the women recounted hearing about the minimal wage increases and demotions emphasize these reactions. This first quote comes from a woman department head.

At the time, nine of us were called upstairs. We had heard in the rumours - well, we hadn't had a raise to start off with. We hadn't had a raise in the December. So we were all wondering,- and they said after Christmas. So after Christmas came and it was in the January and they said that we were going - they were going, to have us upstairs and explain to us the criteria of the company. ...ten o'clock in the morning...we are called upstairs and we are called into the conference room. This room is like a long table. It reminded me of the Last Supper. ...the salesmanager...he gave a 45 minute speech and really, I'll tell you, he beat around the bush, of the company, the problems they've had in the last three years because of the recession and the sales and now they were just coming out of it, there was a light at the end of the tunnel and that, and they said, "we are going to give you raises", but they also told us that they were revamping the department heads down to section heads and they weren't going to be called brown badges any more, and the ordinary sales people were going to be called sales associates. At the end of this speech, (one woman asked) "how much of a raise is this going to be?" So Mr\_\_\_ said, "It hasn't been decided yet"... "Well, will it be enough to fill up my car?" (He said)... "Well do you have a mo-ped"? ....It didn't bother me. It was just a joke really (emphasis added) (Katherine).

This woman spoke of this moment as the "Last Supper", the dinner before the betrayal of Christ in Christian traditions. Not only were they not getting a substantial raise, but they were being demoted, closing the gap between them and the "ordinary" salespeople, which again points out the perceived importance of the titles. This woman, at the time, thought it was a joke. She spoke of being in shock, and not "knowing what was what". This later turned into anger and she became one of the leaders, spearheading the unionization drive. Notably, even in retrospect, the theme

of betrayal remained. It was the same throughout all the stores. The following is the experience of a woman who was a "red badge" at one of the stores:

What really upset me is that I allowed myself to be used... I walked into work and the sales manager said, "..... can I see you in the office", and I said, "sure". I went up and he said, "I have to do something - I don't agree with it, but it is the T. Eaton Company has decided upon this new set up...I have to take your badge back." I was fit to be tied. He said, "it is not my doing". I asked, first of all did you touch my wages. He said, "no". "This is not my doing. This has gone coast to coast". I gave him the badge and walked out. I said..you hurt my pride....

I thought it was a story. It wasn't a story because personnel was telling me that she had 200 people stuffed in her office that week downtown. Then I heard rumbles of the union at Bramalee in late January, beginning of February...So now I am ready. I will sign every bugger up in this store (Audrey).

The demotions were particularly hard for the women to take as they represented something that was being taken away from them. Notably, this did not involve a loss of pay nor a change of work responsibilities. They lost status among fellow employees, not to mention the considerable confusion this caused on the shop floor. Clearly, the women's anger and hurt were directed at management and unionizing was a way to hurt back.

Even the saleswomen who were lowest on the status totem pole, by virtue of not previously having signing authority, felt very vulnerable and upset about their status within Eaton's and to a lesser extent their conditions of work that a union would specifically address.

...shit hit the fan when they were stripping people of their red badges...The chosen few were the ones that kept these badges (Carol).

In spite of her many years of seniority, this women stated she had never been one of Eaton's "chosen few". Now she just got the work without the status. Similarly, a women at the Yonge and Eglinton store stated:

I said, "now that we all have signing authority I guess that means we are going to be paid that extra \$10 a week that the red badges get." "Oh no". I mean okay sure strip these guys of their responsibilities and then shove it on us and we don't even get anything extra for it. That was just the way it was all the time. They make you think well you got signing authority - now you are a real person. I could do without it (Judy).

The issue of being one of "the chosen" and a "real person" speaks to the whole question of a measure of status and prestige which the women saw slipping away. There was far less concern over what all the changes meant in terms of their increased work responsibilities.

**Insult and Injury**

The theme of "insult and injury" was also central in the women's discussions of the minimal wage increases, overshadowing the material factors of how their standard of living would be affected. At one store the insult and injury was heightened for the employees by the showing of a video on the prosperity of the Eaton's empire.

...we realized, being in retail, that they can't always give you a raise because of the recession and everything and it had been three years since we'd had a raise --actually it was 27 months... and I remember seeing a video and that did it for me, the straw that broke the camel's back. I don't know if every employee saw this, but I think the vast majority did, and it was one of the Eaton's boys with this video and it was after Christmas, saying how they'd had such a wonderful year and things were really up and business was booming and thank you for being so patient, and understanding and we're now going to -- you know, pay you back and reward you for all that you've done for us and stuck by us for these three years and they gave me a 2.2% increase. I mean, that was like a kick in the teeth...After three years and they tell you how wonderful you've been for sticking by them and they're really going to take care of you now. We're now going to take care of you. To turn around and hand out 2.2% when these people, that you felt were your family, not so much the Eaton boys themselves, but the company. Everybody was so together, you were just all one. To get a raise like that, it was just a kick in the teeth or a slap in the face. It was horrible (Helen).

The video shown at this store was a real affront. Employees spoke as though a member of their family had let them down. They trusted and believed in the Eaton promise of paternalistic protection. In return for their trust, Eaton's



had blatantly disregarded their loyalty of the past three years. At other stores, they were verbally told of the prosperity of Eaton's and the substance of the woman's comments above were re-iterated by the majority of employees at all the stores. The following quotes, for brevity, underscore the theme of insult and injury:

...later we finally got a raise and I felt insulted (Frances).

...They insulted us with the pay raises (Charlotte).

When we got the raises they were distributed arbitrarily according to how you were in their good books (Rebecca).

I went to the personnel office and I said this is an insult...(Emma).

When things are not good you are willing to forego a raise because it is good just to have a job. But when things are going well and they turn around and give you 1 cent, it is a real slap in the face. (Jane).

...x got up after xmas and said it was the best year we had ever had. Well I think that really teed people off. That they would say that and they wouldn't give us a raise. ..we all felt we had been treated unfairly. They don't care about their employees (Georgia).

None of the women ever emphasized how their lives were going to be affected financially by not receiving a substantive raise increase. Their major focus was on the "breach of trust". The oppressive material aspects, and conditions, of work were of lesser importance.

### **The denial of oppressive work**

The women's mitigation of their oppressive working conditions can be linked to the subtle and pervasive ideology of paternalistic dominance (Lerner,1986), integrated with bureaucratic control that is maintained by a denial of oppression and discrimination (Game and Pringle,1983). This issue was discussed in some depth in chapter four in terms of women's specific subordination to men. Here it can further be discerned among the women's more general comments on their work as a whole at Eaton's.

Invariably, all of the women interviewed said that they loved their jobs. They consistently re-iterated the same point without being able to specifically tell me why their jobs were so good. I asked every respondent whether or not they liked their job and why.

Oh yes. I have always enjoyed it... I think it is the people contact...I like the people that I work with (Jane).

I like my job. I love where I am now. I just enjoy going to work and even if I have a sale, I'll bitch, you know, oh, god, I have so much work to do and I can't do it and my back's killing me, but it keeps me busy and I like it (Lucy).

I certainly did. I really did. I like the public. I like talking to people. I like all my friends (at work) (Audrey).

I used to enjoy my work. I liked working with people.

I had a good time when I worked (Virginia).

I liked meeting people and working with the public.  
I like my work (Bertha).

I liked my job. I really did (Clara).

The women "really" wanted to convince me that they loved their jobs. They rarely referred to their conditions of work to explain why. Their reasons why always spoke of a broad general atmosphere of socializing. This was understandable on one level given that many of these women had spent a lot of years isolated in the home bringing up their children. However, there was an additional element to their comments that relates to an ideology of the family and paternalism that was promoted by Eaton's.

The women's "blind" overemphasis on positive attributes of working at Eaton's related to their perception of the Eaton Company as a "family affair".

The Eaton's people are more different than any retail working people. They're like family because they treat you like family. It's hard to describe. It really is. But the people that you work with, everybody is really tight knit. They all work together as a family. If you're in trouble and you need help there, then this guy will come over and help you and give you a hand, or if he needs help, you'll go help him, and you didn't mind taking home hours of paperwork at night or taking home books on the weekend. You wouldn't do your paperwork at work. You would take it home and do it, because you loved the company so much...I loved my job (Helen).

In addition to "working like a family", the family atmosphere was promoted by "family outings":

They used to have an evening at the races and they busloaded everybody out to Mohawk and you'd have dinner and watch the races. Every year there's been a Christmas dance. Everybody came out to it. Nobody didn't go. Everybody went: students, part-timers, the full-timers, the managers with their wives, everybody, and everybody was one big group. You didn't talk to your manager as if, as if he was your manager...you know, we were just friends having a good time (Ibid.).

Below are further examples of the same tenor of comments at other stores:

I enjoyed working with people. Its hard to explain. I don't think that there was ever a day when I didn't feel like getting up and going to work. It was that kind of work. I always really enjoyed it and coming into work. At our store, the girls were all very friendly. We had good friends. It was a special place to work. It just had something special about it. And we did have some store managers that made life good. We organized alot of outside activities that were absolutely tremendous. We had great fun (Anna).

We have our own little family type of thing, and Christmas time or summer time we have parties and get togethers and we have a good time, and its just like people from work (Lucy).

The following quotes were interspered with their comments regarding unfair treatment by management. If the women said anything negative they tried to mitigate or negate what they said with blanket statements on the virtues of Eaton's as a family company. This theme would persist throughout the

unionization events and speaks to the pervasiveness of the ideology of paternalism.

### IMAGES OF UNIONS

In contrast to the familial image of Eaton's, the workers, both male and female, described unions as "anti-family". The word union conjured up visions of violence and for many workers was equated with "communism". None of the respondents had ever belonged to a union, nor did many of them even know someone who did. In recounting their image of unions at the start of the organizing drive, the respondents uniformly stated:

Pictures of unions was the steelworkers. Really violent situations. Very tough people, lots of violence (Jane).

...they're nothing but commies (Susan).

...all communists (Donald).

...in Ontario there is a fear of socialism and Unionism. Generally, the people see unionism is communism (Roger).

It was something totally foreign. I think alot of us, not all of us had heard about unions obviously, but really weren't too familiar. But perhaps in all honesty, through the media was all bad news...it was about wrecking cars and being almost terrorists (Isabella).

Even the minority of workers, whose husband, father, relative or friend belonged to a union carried negative perceptions.

My memories as a child of my father's opinion of unions and what it cost him personally, were not of the highest of esteem to be honest with you. I remember as a young man driving him through the picket lines and my impression of the picket lines were terrifying to say the least, about lunatics out there with their signs and obscenities. He was demoted over that...from the family point of view it was a bitter experience (Mark).

My husband's .... and that is where I gained alot of my knowledge to understand what a union means. ...he got immediately active in his union. My husband was participating in courses like 2 weeks away or 4 weeks away. I was very resentful of him leaving the home because I was home being a mother to these \_\_\_\_\_ children and I just completely resented the fact that he was going, I didn't understand at all, not at all supportive and it caused alot of stress (Agnes).

These two examples above represent the feelings expressed by those somewhat familiar with unions. Almost all of the respondents perceived unions as brutal, violent organizations that had negative consequences and were antithetical to family life.

Given the workers' overwhelming negative opinion of unions, and the perceived diametrically opposed union perspective, of anti-familialism, it would seem incomprehensible that the workers would choose to become unionized. However, at the time of the organizing drive,

management had breached the "paternalistic contract" in such an explicit and callous manner that the workers were unable to deny or dispel a realization of the breach. They were ripe for "hurting" back.

### **Why Join the Union?**

It is my contention that the workers initially joined RWDSU precisely because unionization was seen to be in total opposition to the "Eaton Family Way". The purpose of unions as a means to ensure fair and just working conditions was not understood or known to the Eaton's employees. The worker who had initial contact with RWDSU had little idea what unionizing meant. He was angry and wanted to get back at Eaton's. The certification of the six Eaton's stores was accomplished with unheralded speed. In the first stores to certify, RWDSU went to the labour board with union cards signed by over eighty percent of the stores' employees. These percentages lessened with the latter stores to certify, as management began to intervene, and the organizing drive came to a full stop with the start of the strike in November of 1984. The fact that the workers really had no conception of what it meant to join a union was to become clearer as the unionization process unfolded.

Despite the recognition of the unfair wage increases and the demotions, the workers, when responding to the question of working conditions that led them specifically to join the union, invariably personalized the source of their discontent, onto the store manager. At one of smaller stores a woman stated:

Everybody was very discontent. We had a manager, Eaton's sends in people like him to stir things up. In order, during the recession to keep the company in the red, they sent him in. He cut out half the lighting. Things like that... The cleaning ladies come in at six and he wouldn't allow them to have lights on so they put spotlights on the front of their machines. You couldn't throw paper clips away. He was known to go through waste baskets to see if you did. I mean who can work under those conditions. If full-time left he would replace them with a person for four hours. This way he had a smaller wage bill. So he really made the store look good from Eaton's point of view. But the people were really overworked and discontent. He was a horrible person. He would appear from nowhere. You would never see him coming. He would just appear (Rebecca).

I probed further asking the respondent, "is this the reason you organized"? She stated, "Yes,

His name is ----. He was the manager at that time. They put him in to shape things up. If you wanted a glass of water it was eight cents. If you are charging your employees for water, things are pretty bad. You were paying for the glass. These are the sorts of low things that he was doing. People would never believe this was happening. ..If you brought your own lunch but forgot to bring a fork it was four cents to use Eaton's. It was incredible. Then they all wondered why all of a sudden there was a drive to unionize (Ibid).



Similar stories were re-iterated by the majority of respondents at all the stores. What is important here, is that frequently the very first response to the question of why they organized referred to the store manager.

The low level of the workers' union consciousness at the start of the union drive is most directly evidenced by the fact that the majority of workers stated that their sole reason for joining the union was to get back at the store manager.

At that particular time it was just the store manager. He was an egotistical idiot. ...It is because of the store manager why this whole thing got started. He didn't know how to treat people or how to treat them with respect (Ray).

There was general unrest because of the store manager. There was an uncomfortable situation, like I would say he appears to be the hierarchy. Like he owns the store, attitude, a little intimidation, harassment here and there when he didn't like anything (Agnes).

...the store manager...they are all in the same cookie mold. You couldn't trust him (Theresa).

The rapport between management and employee was like adult to child rather than adult to adult. You were just to do what you were told and that was it (Clara).

At the time we had a store manager that was really bad. I think he put everybodys moral down and I think that is kind of what happened (Abigail).

The treatment of the manager was really bad (Emily).

The store manager - I guess you haven't heard. He was a horrifying man. He shouldn't even be dealing with people (Aemilia).

Because of him (the manager) 75% of the store wanted a union (Roger).

The mystification and denial of oppression are readily apparent in these comments. All of the discontent experienced by the employees was, first of all, seen to have developed in the months before the start of the organizing drive. Prior to this time they all spoke of everything being fine and harmonious. Secondly, the source of the problem was the store managers, as opposed to the oppressive working conditions, the organization of which had been in place for years. It is my contention that it was Eaton's that the workers wanted to "get back at" and the store manager was a symbolic figure.

Placing the blame on the store managers enabled the employees to hold on to some vestige of belief in the Eaton family paternalism. They expressed the perception that the Eaton brothers were really not aware of what was happening on the shop floor. One employee captured the views expressed by the respondents overall with this statement:

Eaton's to me was like an inverted pyramid and from the management point of view, starting at the tip as the floor manager and then it went up into the masses to the Ivory Tower. It never got there (Mark).

Similarly,

I think the problems were not being passed up the chain (Clara).

Upper management apparently didn't know that all this discontent was going on before the Union came in (David).

Apparently, downtown had absolutely no idea about the things that were going on (Aemilia).

A lot of the unhappiness in the store never goes very far. It never gets to T.O. (Emily).

The manager at that time was not a popular person. Everybody felt we had to do something. We just couldn't seem to get thru. When we went to communication meetings and discussed all the problems but nothing was ever done. He really didn't let the downtown people know what was happening. All this might have been avoided if this had been addressed (Anna).

In one of the last stores to organize, an employee reiterated the view that the Eaton's brothers were unaware of what the managers were doing and when they "found out" attempted to "correct" the situation.

We both didn't like each other (respondent and store manager) and that was one of my reasons for going union... Our beloved manager was a big problem. His type of management went out 20-25 years ago. It wouldn't matter who you talked to...other than his mother god love him, she might love him, I don't know anyone else who liked him... We were approached by management just before the strike that if they got rid of him would we drop the union. We thought about it but if they could do that to the manager, what could they do to us. So we said no, but they were prepared to drop him (Frances).

In this way, Eaton's presented themselves as benevolent caretakers who were totally oblivious to the actions of the managers. The workers initially believed this, and many were not dissuaded from this perception throughout the unionization events. It was almost as though the employees thought that if the store manager was let go everything would be fine again. One woman, involved in trying to sign up members at stores that did not subsequently attain certification, commented that they did not get a majority vote at many of these stores because the workers were "happy with the management they had" (Abigail).

The workers were imbued with the ideology of paternalism, which is why they were upset with Eaton's breach of the paternalistic contract, but their consciousness did not extend to a critique of, or a desire to change the existing relations of paternalism. The workers, caught in the denial of the oppressiveness of paternalistic dominance, supported this form of control in the structure and organization of work. The focus on managers mitigated or negated the role of the Eaton's family in the current discontent. They strongly opposed any form of attack on the Eaton Family. One of the woman employees, who was pivotal in the attempt to organize further Eaton's stores in downtown Toronto, stated:

He (one RWDSU organizers) always put down Fred(Eaton) or the Eaton family. To me that is a no go. A lot of people looked down on that. Many times I told him not to do that. He would attack them. And that's where they lost it in the downtown stores...Offering the family up...(Joan).

The workers' intent was to shake Eaton's up, not radically change the system of work. They were hurt and angry and wanted to hurt back.

It wasn't wages. It was respect (George).

Joining the Union was seen as an immediate symbolic gesture to obtain this specific objective, of regaining their respect, as opposed to support for a new, long-term organization that would monitor and seek to improve the overall conditions of work at Eaton's.

#### **The initial lack of opposition to organizing**

In recounting the organizing drive, the workers spoke of the relative ease, speed, and excitement of it all, mostly because of having shocked and surprised management. The following are some examples of the respondents' statements in various stores:

It was fast, it drove management crazy (Mark).

That was great when they got served with the first green notice. The manager didn't know what to do or what end was up. He was running around with all these forms in his hand (Daniel).

Everything seemed to happen so fast...(Julia).

We had the whole thing done in two weeks. Our manager was on holiday and he didn't know what the heck happened (Judy).

We had this "twerp" manager who is really going to have a bird. I was just dying to see him get served with the subpoena...It was done in three weeks. Management did not know about it until it was too late (Audrey).

It took two weeks to organize the store. It was very quick and very easy (Lucy).

Management at the time was cockey, I guess they didn't believe that the serfs would do anything like that (Ray).

The most memorable part of the organizing drive for the respondents was having taken management by surprise. Of course at this point, there was no opposition from management, precisely because they were unaware of the drive.

It is interesting to note that at this same time, the workers perceived little opposition from any "anti-union" employees. The majority of workers, in the initial stores to certify, were said to be in favor of unionizing or they did not speak out against it. In response to whether there was tension or conflict between those who supported organizing and those who did not, most responded:

I guess in the store really, a majority wanted it and the few that didn't want it were not hostile against it. They just thought, "oh I can't be bothered, I don't really want it". No real hostility (Charlotte).

There were hardly any non-union people in the store at the time. You have to remember...the eight percent were still the eighty percent so there wasn't. No there wasn't. There were a few people who didn't believe in unions and that was fine. That's what they thought and they always thought that and they didn't sign a card anyway (Peter).

No. There wasn't hardly nothing like that. The ones that weren't union were keeping their mouth shut and the rest of us were all raring to go (Sophia).

It was unbelievable. Almost everybody signed a card (Anna).

No. Everything was fine (Carol).

After Eaton's received the notice of application to the Labour Board for the Brampton store, oppositional tactics began. At the Brampton store, the first anti-union activist surfaced. This worker challenged the certification process but did not have the support of the rest of the employees. At this time over ninety percent of the Brampton store employees were in support of the union.

(one woman) who was a display person challenged it. She was put up to it. Nobody (backed the woman). They just laughed her out of court (Robert).

The feeling among the Brampton store employees was that this woman was "put up to it" by management who promised her

rewards for her loyalty. Further incidents occurred in other stores, but in general there was very little major opposition from other employees during the organizing drive at the stores that attained certification. Again this was in part due to the speed at which the drive progressed. As soon as management became aware of the drive, oppositional tactics began with a fervor.

#### **BARRIERS TO WOMEN ORGANIZING**

Management oppositional tactics appear to have been directed primarily at the women. The men overall spoke of taking a very casual approach to the possibility of unionizing. Unlike the women, they did not appear to be propelled into organizing as a result of mistreatment. The men being paid on straight commission as opposed to a salary basis were less affected by the minimal or no raise increases. Moreover, the changes in the status hierarchy did not affect them at all. The men were experiencing general discontent because overall management seems to have been swept up in the general wave of the organizing drive; women on the other hand were propelled by hurt and anger at Eaton's breach of trust.

The men seemed generally unconcerned about any repercussions from management for organizing and in fact



stated that they did not experience any harassment relative to the experience of the women. The following are some examples of the male commissioned workers which reveal the casual way they approached organizing.

Anyway, I felt that some things needed to be done.  
So I signed a card (David).

It (the minimal raises) didn't affect us much...  
But nonetheless people were discontent. So I  
asked to sign a card (Bill).

I felt it couldn't hurt (Ray).

I had it pretty good. I had no complaints, no beefs...  
I didn't like the way some managers treated their  
employees (Mark).

This last respondent was speaking of the treatment of women. Similarly, other male respondents stated that the reason they organized was to support the women who were being mistreated.

...(the first reason was the manager). I think the fulltime women were pretty much the reason I got involved. They didn't treat us all that differently ...there wasn't any department manager looking down on us (Ron).

No real problems. I didn't have a hell of a lot of respect for management...Well, I guess, and you'll find when you talk to some of the others, they'll say the same thing that they weren't doing it for themselves. It was for the salaried people (Peter).

The men acknowledged that the women were subject to more injustices than the men and more intimidation. One man accounted for the differential treatment by saying:

The men are more aggressive than the women and we would speak out. The women are used to being intimidated. The women in our store are so used to that kind of treatment that they think it is the normal way (Roger).

The men were suggesting that they had little reason to organize for themselves. They disliked the managers but argued that they experienced no harassment or intimidation before or during the organizing drive. Many signed a union card as a result of witnessing the harassment that women were experiencing and to support their struggle.

The women's accounts reflected the reality of what the men perceived as management mistreating the women. In contrast to the men, the women contended, and described in great detail, that they were harassed, intimidated, and were fearful of losing their jobs. The following are some of the experiences of the women who witnessed or were subject to the harassment.

He said, "I just had a call from the most obnoxious loud mouth man from that god damm Union office. He is telling me that we have somebody in there doing a union campaign - it has to stop". I said "that's right"...I was just sweating inside and I thought this man is really pressuring. Now he is pressuring me. That is what he also used. "You want pressure, you

want heat. You ain't seen nothing yet because we are going to give it to you". That's when he started. It was three days prior to certification. He gave it to me okay...They put three salesmanagers on my tail. He sat right there and I could not phone out. I could not phone home. I could not do anything because they were watching me. They walked around my register all night. All night I couldn't even go to the washroom, they were there (Audrey).

This girl didn't speak very good English. She did speak English, but she was foreign and she didn't really want to get involved, but she did. They would try to intimidate her and say, "of course you didn't sign a card did you". This kind of thing...What was she supposed to say? First of all she did or didn't sign a card, but she felt she had to and she didn't, but she had that feeling. That upset her (Judy).

The two accounts above of blatant harassment were fairly early on in the drive when management was first reacting to finding out what was going on in the store. After being appraised of the labour laws, management toned down their harassment tactics but they were no less oppressive.

People were afraid. A lot of people were spreading rumors that we were all going to lose our jobs. They are afraid. A lot of people are afraid even though there are laws to protect you (Maria).

That day management had heard that there was going to be a meeting. Somehow they found out and they gave a letter to us all saying that there was going to be a meeting and they couldn't stop it, but it frightened a lot of people... One of my friends... when it came down to the final crunch, she switched to anti-union. She was terrified out of her wits. She was a divorced woman and she was terrified for her job (Rebecca).

It boils down to the fact that the store is small and there is less anonymity. When you are in a small store you are watched and scrutinized more than you

are in a large store. It was such a small store and you were so easily identifiable and they could make life miserable for you. For example, once they caught on that I was involved you would get comments or dirty looks and if I was 5 minutes late they would hassle me. Everything you know had to be accountable for. Things that were not so important like being a bit short in your cash and they would say you can get a letter warning for this (Theresa).

It was like big brother's watching you, type of thing. I know I didn't like it and I sensed it and felt it too. Managers. Watching everything you did. Even if you were doing your job they thought you weren't. We always had that feeling...Staring. Popping up when you didn't expect it. They were really watching you; they were watching you (Emma).

They were watching us. They were watching with eyes all around the heads. We spotted managers and people from other stores. Like managers from other stores and people from downtown. They would be hiding behind pillars and coatracks. "There's one over there, the blonde one talking to the one with the dark hair". I was waiting to see a tree go walking across (Judy).

The women described the subtle tactics that filled them with "terror" and "fear" which is sharply contrasted with the men's responses. These quotes were taken from the early stores to certify and the tactics were already having an effect on some women who were changing their minds and withdrawing from the Union.

When the organizing drive ended, the respondents contended that management intimidation tactics were, in part, responsible for the unsuccessful attempt to organize further stores. The following quotes are from workers among

the last to certify and a store that failed to get a majority vote to certify. These responses refer specifically to pressure that was applied to the women employees at the store that failed to attain certification:

Our manager used the ploy of bringing each of us into the office, not breaking the law, just telling us about the union etc., but applying subtle pressure. One girl was told she should watch who she has coffee with and who she took rides home with. Meaning us. One woman was turned down as a management trainee because she supported the union (Georgia).

A lot of lies were told. For example, they said if we had a union you wouldn't be able to leave the floor to go to the can or you wouldn't be able to leave to go to the doctor. There would be time clocks. Lots of bad rumors. All during the drive we were hassled, "Why are you coming to work early" etc. all these kinds of questions. What they tried to do was intimidate people (Roger).

Management was threatening them (Julia).

They really watched us (Virginia).

A lot of them got frightened. And I am not saying that management called them and said if you do so and so you're out. I know that it did happen in some stores. No union here or else. And a lot of them were really frightened...they were afraid of their jobs (David).

My manager could never understand that I was pro-union. He was always happy with my work and when I became pro-union my work in his view was terrible. I was beginning to lose my sanity. It was that I really didn't even enjoy getting up to go to work anymore. He made life so miserable for me (Georgia).

They had the vote in a spot that was very difficult. A place where all the managers sat and watched. They went into all the departments and intimidated people to vote (Meg).

Management tactics were very effective. The certification of the London Warehouse store marked the end of the organizing drive. One woman recalled:

Brampton, then Scarborough Town went. They went before us, just a week before us. Then we went and Yonge and Eglinton went. It was like a house of cards collapsing. I think St. Catherines and London warehouse. Then the Union had a walk in the main store. It just went down like that and then bang it stopped (Audrey).

The organizing drive ended abruptly with six stores successfully certifying. It was the women, and not the men, that experienced the oppressive management tactics on the shop floor leading, in part, to the end of the overall organizing drive. Moreover, management's responses during contract negotiations was a significant deterrent to the organizing of further Eaton's stores.

### **Contract Negotiations**

It was during contract negotiations that the workers got their first "reality shocks", not only in terms of what it meant to unionize, but also that Eaton's was capable of further mistreatment. After the initial excitement and speed with which certification occurred, the contract negotiations, in contrast, seemed to drag on forever for the workers. The employees who participated in the negotiating meetings all described the process in a similar manner.

...we had three meetings because Eaton's kept insisting that we were going to negotiate a part-time contract and a full-time contract and we wanted one master contract. This went back and forth for some time...they could delay it right through the year and then come up for desert the following year. It was ridiculous. We used to go and we would sit there and they would pick at the silliest things...we were getting frustrated, we were getting really frustrated ...We had too much faith in Eaton's that they would be co-operative and that was alot to do with our naivete about unions (Judy).

The biggest thing that stands in my mind ... that we were very naive as most people are going into these things. You have preconceived ideas what negotiation means, it means two parties sitting down and talking...When we got in there and saw the attitude of the company we could not believe it, that it was legal, that you could do things like that...It was unbelievable. The frustration level was extremely high for us at that time (Mark).

It was unbelievable. We argued for two days just on where to put the "and's" and the "I's" and the "or's". It was absolutely ridiculous...The company just dragged and dragged and dragged (David).

...total frustration. I had no idea that it was that involved. Looking at every word and the connotations on words. It meant one thing to the Union and another to the company and one to the Labour board (Clara).

After the first two times of negotiating, we knew we were in for a fight. Hubert (Company negotiator) sits there, he drinks glasses of water and he glares at you. As soon as he says something, he glares up and down the table to see what response he's getting, and we were new to it. Like, we never had done negotiating before and I couldn't believe it. He went through every paragraph and gave a big 15 minute spiel on it. So after four meetings of this, you got through it and then he would say, "Well, we at this time don't feel, the company doesn't feel its done anything wrong, and they don't want to apply this in the contract" (Katherine).

When we first started negotiations we didn't know what to do....I really didn't know then because I didn't have any access to what happens. I don't know what negotiating is...like we were in this situation that was as foreign to us as going to the bloody moon (Isabella).

These quotes further underscore the reality that the workers knew very little and were very naive about the whole unionizing process. This became very clear to them during the negotiating process. Management's attitude in negotiations came as a shock to these activists. As will be recalled, the workers expected to shock and surprise management by unionizing. As one of the negotiators stated, "you see basically we thought we are going to get Eaton's" (Joan). But Eaton's turned the tables on them and instead, the workers found themselves in a very laborious negotiation process over which they had very little control.

The workers who were not directly involved in negotiations were not being told the details of the meetings and only knew that the process was taking a long time. RWDSU had instructed the employee negotiators not to reveal what was happening in the meetings. For example:

We were instructed (by RWDSU) not to discuss the negotiations process and we didn't ( Mark).

Everybody wanted to know what was going on and it was very difficult for us to explain what was happening because we are not supposed to talk about negotiations and this and that. Everybody wants to know, were we getting a contract. They are very pessimistic because they don't know much about the union either.



We didn't know a heck of alot about it, but we were learning. We couldn't really tell them anything. So they were sort of starting to doubt the validity of us and the union...it wasn't our fault. We were only going by what we were being told and again like I say, our naivety to unions and all the rest of it - - this was all new to us, all of us. Very few of us had had any dealing with unions (Judy).

Being prevented from talking about negotiations caused further frustration and confusion for the negotiating teams members. Not understanding the union process, they did not question RWDSU's directive and simply followed orders. What they were coming to realize was that Eaton's was not going to respond in the way they had anticipated. They now found themselves involved in a process of unionization, of which they knew very little, and which was not their long-term intention when they first decided to organize. The rest of the unionized workers were still holding onto the belief that Eaton's was going to respond positively to their demands, but the lengthy negotiations were starting to raise doubts in the minds of the workers as to the intentions of management and RWDSU.

Eaton's stall tactics were also having a significant effect on the organizing drive as a whole. The workers in the Eaton's empire were closely watching the process, getting their information primarily from the newspapers. The employees were adopting a "wait and see" attitude. Before signing a union card, they wanted to see what kind of a

contract the organized stores would get. A contract never materialized and a strike was called for November thirtieth. At that point RWDSU abandoned the organizing drive.

#### SUMMARY

The organizing drive at Eaton's can be characterized as a process that occurred with considerable speed and excitement. The workers were outraged at Eaton's breach of the paternalistic contract and wanted to "get back at them". Despite their perception of unions as "anti-family", communist, terrorist organizations, they envisioned joining the union as a way to shake the company up. The majority of the workers were totally unaware of what unions really did or what unionizing meant. Their intention was never to permanently install a union within Eaton's department stores. They did not perceive the pervasiveness of their workplace exploitation. At the beginning of the organizing drive they were upset about the recent treatment regarding wages and changes in the status hierarchy. As such, they were not conscious of, nor did they deliberate a need for, a permanent organization to monitor and seek to improve their conditions of work.

The workers' first and ultimate allegiance was to Eaton's paternalism, as seen through their identification of

discontent with the managers. Management's oppositional tactics that began when the drive was already underway served at first to confirm and re-inforce that their actions would shake the company up. But as the organizing drive progressed, Eaton's tactics, directed predominantly at the women workers, began to take their toll, effectively bringing the organizing drive to a halt. When the strike was called the majority of workers at the unionized stores were still supporting their decision to unionize. Right up until the day the strike was called, the unionized workers expected Eaton's to back down. As one respondent, who was involved in the negotiation process encapsulated it:

I always had hope that it would be the old last minute type of crisis that you see on the news on T.V. and the whole thing. I just could not believe in my heart that this game plan as we were seeing from the company was a reality, was the way we were actually going...That they would not give in (Mark).

The public action of the strike brought further players into the arena of struggle. Family members, social and political groups, the media and the state became involved at different times affecting the experiences and perceptions of the workers at Eaton's. Most notably, the employees were to become more familiar with the specific nature and organization of unions. In addition, with the taboo over the "private and confidential" nature of their

working conditions broken, the workers, for the first time, were becoming aware of the extent of their workplace exploitation and oppression, and the need for a union to address this inequality. However, they were also to find out that this situation was not a simple equation of "joining a union leads to the elimination of unfair and unjust working conditions". The Eaton's workers were forced to confront the whole patriarchal organization and structure of society. This reality put limitations and constraints on the workers' behaviour.

#### **EXPANDING AND REDEFINING THE TERRAIN OF POLITICS**

##### **THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL**

Since the beginning of the second wave of the women's movement in the 1960's, the slogan "the personal is political" has been central to feminism. As Bookman and Morgen note, this concept "...embodied a deep critique of American politics" (1988:8). The radical feminist analyses of the 1960's adopted this slogan to mean that "the original and basic class division is between the sexes. Male domination, not capitalism, is the root of women's oppression" (see e.g. Millet, 1970; Firestone, 1970). In practice, radical feminists developed a number of organizational forms and activities designed to challenge

the sex/class system (Bouchier,1983). What this meant is that issues that we confront in our everyday life are political issues rather than our individual or private problems as women. Traditional politics had only addressed concerns encompassing the public realm. Feminists put issues like ... "abortion and reproductive rights, violence against women..." (Ibid.,8-9) on the political agenda. By identifying what goes on in our personal lives, and in the privacy of our homes, as public concerns, we expanded and redefined the terrain of politics.

Initially, white middle-class women set the political agenda and it was their personal issues that were most widely represented in the movement.<sup>6</sup> In view of this fact feminism was accused of not appealing to the needs of all women. Women of various races, classes and sexual orientations argued that they had unique constraints and limitations imposed on their lives due to their specific position and location in society. On the theoretical level, one current of feminism (socialist-feminism) developed to acknowledge and integrate these important differences among women. At the grass roots level, individuals and groups began to work on specific aspects of struggle.

Our understanding of the Eaton's women's struggle must include a recognition of personal issues that shaped

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<sup>6</sup>See Maroney,(1987) for working class women.

their individual political action. Moreover, their personal issues as a group need to be put at the centre of any analysis. Traditional union issues of wages and working issues were at the forefront of publicity and negotiations during the strike. However, the women's voices indicated that the major issues were status, honour and trust. Recognizing that these were the issues for these women illuminates an understanding of their subsequent behaviour.

#### **MEMBERSHIP**

An essential key to understanding the political activity at Eaton's is in the recognition both of commonalities among the women and of their diversity/heterogeneity. In other words, broadening our understanding of political participation in terms of membership differences explains the differential political involvement and concerns of the women at Eaton's during the union action. The women at Eaton's shared a common relation of subordination to their employer and the male employees. Their working conditions were also the same, with very minimal distinctions between jobs.

Two differences are noteworthy. Some employees were section heads and others salesclerks and some worked full-time and others part-time. These differences did not seem to separate out the women from each other. Certainly, for the women the status of section head was very important but in the context of the work, many straight saleclerks also performed the additional job of "signing" that distinguished section heads. Similarly, part-time employees often worked full-time hours, diminishing the differences. One exception was apparent in the cosmetic departments. Here the majority of workers were full-time, relative to all other female departments where the majority of workers were part-time, and distinctions of a managerial sort were made between full and part-time women workers. From my research, I only came into contact with one part-time cosmetic worker who participated in the strike action. She was a young student. This may speak to the fact that the part-time cosmetic workers felt they could not align with their "bosses".

The interesting thing about saleswork is that the characteristics of its workers do represent the diversity among women in most ways except - in the case of Eaton's - racial differences. The women reflected both middle class and working class backgrounds, and all ages, marital status,

numbers of children, and living arrangements.<sup>7</sup> Their common characteristic was that they were all white.<sup>8</sup> All of these differential attributes determined the extent of their participation and their concerns around the union activity.

Almost all of the workers went out on strike the first day and as we shall see further on in this chapter, their family and personal characteristics contributed to the length of time the women stayed out on the picket line and

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<sup>7</sup>I did not ask respondents their sexual orientation. There was however one woman who was anti-union who was "suspected" by some of the union activists of being lesbian. The term was used in a derogatory fashion, something negative to go with being a scab. This afforded me the opportunity to discuss sexual orientation. None of the respondents knew of any gays or lesbians working at Eaton's which is to say that no homosexuals were openly practicing their gay or lesbian lifestyle.

<sup>8</sup>I personally did not observe or interview any Black women or men workers at Eaton's. I asked all respondents for information about workers of different races, if they knew of any, who they were, where they worked. All respondents indicated that they were sure there were workers of colour but none of the respondents knew any of them personally, nor could they tell me what store they worked in. In other words, according to the respondents in the stores where workers were interviewed no employees were of any other race other than white. Of note, during the strike, the workers commented often about the women of different races that were being hired to replace them on the job, and after the strike action, Black employees were apparent on the shop floor at various Eaton's stores.

One of the Union organizers had the following to say: "One of the ways in which I could remember whether I was talking to Eaton's or Simpsons ...was the lack of visible minority groups. Eaton's was predominantly all white. Very few non-whites"(Currie,1985:35).



the nature of their activities throughout the struggle. Recognizing the differences among workers that may lead to forms of consent or resistance, at the same or different times, is a radical departure from the traditional "you're with us or you're against us" male political view.

### **LEADERSHIP**

A further area in which traditional politics has been expanded and redefined is the concept of leadership. The pathbreaking work by Gilligan and others pointed to the different gendered approaches to political problems by using the images of web and hierarchy (Gilligan, 1982; Hartsock, 1976-77). It has been found that women tend to structure their human relations in the anti-hierarchical form of the web. To quote Hartsock, "To lead is to be at the center of a group rather than in front of others" (cited in Ferguson, 1984:206). Leadership from the center is a form of empowerment.

Karen Sacks (1988), for example, in her study of women's involvement in a hospital unionization drive, found that important leadership roles were held by those whom she called "centerpeople" (Ibid.). Centerpeople were those women who were not out in the front of political action but were integral to leading the group. They were not leaders in

the traditional sense, of having formal power and authority, but rather the centerpeople represented functions or dimensions of leadership. Specifically,

Centerwomen created and sustained social networks and mobilized them around a militant work culture. That culture validated their view of their work and its worth through a consensus language based on "familistic values" - namely, a notion of adulthood and responsibility conceptualized in family terms and contexts (Ibid.,92).

By putting women and women's lives at the center of an analysis of political activity, Sacks expanded on the important ways in which leadership has been exerted by women that has been invisible in the past. Moreover, as stated by Bookman and Morgen, "...it also demonstrates how the particular skills women learn in their families and communities are translated into effective political leadership" (1988:10). The concept of "centerpeople" is valuable in understanding the dynamics of women's activism at Eaton's.

The centerwomen at Eaton's were very easily identified. As outlined in chapter three, these were the women I contacted initially at each store before beginning the interviewing process. It was clear to me that if I did not get the go ahead from these women my research objectives would be derailed. These women held a

considerable amount of informal power again, not in the traditional sense of being the formal decision-makers or having formal authority.<sup>9</sup> These women were, to quote Sacks' description of her hospital workers centerpeople, "...at once repositories of others' opinions and keepers and shapers of the consensus" (Ibid:90). Moreover, there was not just one centerperson in the sense of one leader. In all stores, there were several centerpeople.

The centerwomen embodied the best of familistic symbols and values, of keeping the family together, conflict mediation, upholding notions of responsibility and respect. These were women who held such center positions in their family life. All of these traditional "female" attributes are skills that these women brought to the workplace and in the context of the strike action provided the glue that bonded the women together and resulted in significant political actions. For example, many of the women signed a union card, went out on strike, stayed out on strike or went back to work specifically, because they believed in and trusted the centerwomen. It is significant to note that there were centerwomen among both union and anti-union workers.

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<sup>9</sup>This I had already received from the Union officials.

The most poignant example of the dimensions of the centerwoman's power can be illustrated in the case study of one store where employees were out on strike. Five months into the strike, some centerwomen on the side of the strikers crossed the picket line and went back into the store to work, taking with them many of the other strikers on their line. A published account of this event, written by two of the women organizers of RWDSU contended:

Both (of the women strikers) felt they were justified in going back...knowing the pressure that those two women went through, it is incredible that they were able to sustain their effort for as long as they did. They were getting it from home, from co-workers, and from the strikers. They handled everyone else's problems. Anytime anyone else wanted to go back into work they turned to them...They had to be there (on the picket line) all the time in case they were needed (Currie and Sheedy, 1987:258).

In the above, we hear of the nurturing aspects of the centerwomen. As an aside, there is also the issue of the centerwomen being cognizant of the reasons why some women might have to go back into the store. They acknowledged and validated the very real constraints and limitations of some women's activism, with support, rather than "blaming the victim" for returning to work.

The most telling aspect of this case is that almost all of the respondents, at all of the striking stores, had

something to say about this event. I believe this is the greatest testimony to the power of these centerwomen relative to all the other women strikers who crossed the picket line and returned to work. Generally, all the comments were in this vein:

...we looked at them as leaders and when they left  
...I felt betrayed. I felt hurt. I felt anger. I felt I  
guess maybe even - it is a strong word - but I guess  
I even hated them for a while for what they had done.  
I felt they just forgot all about us. They just all  
of a sudden didn't care anymore and they were just  
out for themselves basically (Aemilia).

While these centerwomen were very clear as to why they returned to work, no one really listened. The remaining strikers felt lost, disorganized, in disarray, left "motherless".

It is my contention that what explains these women returning to work is revealed in the dynamics between two aspects of leadership, identified by Sacks as "spokesmen and centerwomen" (1988). While Sacks expounds on centerpeople, she says relatively little about spokespeople. These she defines as the "...public speakers, representatives, and confrontational negotiators" (1988:79). In the case of Eaton's, the spokespersons were the RWDSU officials. Generally, according to Sacks, centerpeople are women and spokespeople are men. She raises the questions,

...can one person be both a spokesperson and centerwoman? Do these functions necessarily pull an individual in opposite directions? Also - a thornier issue - are these roles necessarily gender-linked as "spokesman" and "centerwoman" (p.93)?

In what follows, we will examine the shaping of women's consciousness, in particular, by noting some of the conflictual and consenting dynamics between the spokesmen and the centerwomen. In response to Sacks' questions, it would seem that spokespeople and centerpeople are gender-linked in the case of Eaton's and therefore do have different interests and are of necessity different people. This finding would further support the work of Gilligan and others on the political structuring of relationships discussed above (Gilligan, 1984; Hartsock, 1974; 1976-77).

#### SHAPING WOMEN'S POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The process of women becoming aware of their individual powerlessness and oppression involved them examining their prevailing understanding of their position as well as the oppositional view that was being presented to them and making sense of this according to the terms of their own individual material lives. As evident from the beginning of this chapter, the women at Eaton's were in a

dependent relationship with the RWDSU officials, defined here as the spokespeople, in part, due to their naivety about unions. It was also the case that all of the spokespersons were men.<sup>10</sup> There had been two women organizers but their jobs were finished once the stores were unionized. This loss of familiar Union officials contributed to the vulnerability of the women. However, aside from signing a union card, which in fact was done in private, the women had not as yet been called upon to do something visible or public against Eaton's. The repercussions had been minimal and contained within the store, leaving the women feeling predominantly empowered by their unionization activities thus far.

The respondents' feelings of power carried them through to the first day of the strike. Almost all the employees at every striking store showed up on the picket line the first day. It is important to remember that at this time they had virtually no knowledge about unions, strikes, feminism or generalized class oppression with regards to

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<sup>10</sup>There was one female who took care of one of the picket lines. She was on loan to the Union from her workplace. She held no power, and her ability to speak and act was constrained by the "male" executives. Due to these constraints she was in effect a "token" women union official.

their working conditions.<sup>11</sup> Most described the first day on the picket line in the following ways:

Sort of excitement of it and the adrenalin was going. Not knowing what you should or shouldn't do. It wasn't even light yet and we were over there stopping cars. It was exciting (Caroline).

It was great fun for everybody on the first day. There was a lot of chaos (Peter).

The first day of the strike was very exciting and very interesting. It really was, and there was a real camaraderie among everyone of us. We were like real brothers and sisters (Emma).

It was a surprise, but it was interesting too, exciting...Nobody was prepared. We had high heels on, and just light clothes. Nobody was prepared to stay out for any length of time (Sophia).

It was very disorganized. I think that is when I began to get disillusioned with the union. Nothing was organized. No picket signs ready. They knew they were going out. And nothing was ready. Everything was disorganized. Nobody seemed to know what anybody else was doing (Abigail).

The first day of the strike was a totally new experience for all of the workers. Not knowing what to expect, strikers were unprepared and looked unsuccessfully to the Union to provide leadership. There was also the overriding understanding that this was a one time action. Some workers were already beginning to feel a bit concerned about their

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<sup>11</sup>To reiterate, this was primarily due to the "private and confidential" rule operating at Eaton's.



strike action and feeling some disillusionment with the Union. As one respondent put it, "everyone was gung ho up until the hour before we went on strike" (Sophia).

The workers were to begin to become conscious of the oppressive reality of their situation when they were faced, in those very first days, with the stalwart response by Eaton's and the domineering attitudes and behaviours of the Union spokesmen. There was a clear hierarchy between the workers and the RWDSU officials as evident in quotes below:

The first morning on that picket line the guys came along and said, "put that strike sign on". Do you think I could? I couldn't...He came back and he said, "get it on. Get your picket sign on". I thought my god I can't. This Union keeps making me do things, - they keep making me do things, they really keep pushing me (Audrey).

"Here comes the guys in the red jackets"! You looked and you would see the guys in the Union. They said, "you better keep moving, you better keep moving." You couldn't stand and talk, you had to walk. Then she said, "here comes the guy from the Union - this is worse than being in there (the store) (Emma).

The women followed the Union's orders and believed in what they told them. In several unionized stores the spokesmen had promised that they would never go on strike.

He used to say there will never be a strike at Eaton's (Audrey).

(He) came down the day before the strike and said "No way we are going to go on strike tomorrow"

(Joan).

The fact that they did go on strike, meant to the women that the Spokesmen lied to them. This, according to some of the workers, was one of the first of many betrayals by RWDSU.

A further early confrontation with the Union officials occurred when the strike vote was called and some workers were told they would only have to be out for two days. Of significance is that some spokesmen made a pact with the centrewomen at one of the stores to get the people out on the picket line.

Me and \_\_\_\_\_ said we are not going on this strike. He said, "well two days, will you agree to two days". So initially, \_\_\_\_\_ and I did. We said well O.K. two days. We'll go with that. Then they had to have a bloomin vote on whether or not to stay out. I still say that was the dumbest thing. The way they worded it I don't think anybody understood it. When we went out on the picket line, most of the people said why are we out here. So (after two days) they had a vote. \_\_\_\_\_ and I said this is wrong. They called us hysterical women ...They outright blatantly lied to us (Ibid.).

There was a scuttlebut about a two-day strike to see if we could get the people out. The hierarchy of the Union felt that once they were out (the workers) they would stay out. A lot of people felt that you asked for two days, then that is all you're getting and then they went back in (Ray).

We were told the strike was only going to be for two days. That caused a lot of people to go back in. That was bad. That got them out there but after two days they went back in. And managment knew this and this was the first crack (Clara).

The pact was made and the workers followed the centerwomen out onto the picket line. At other stores, a similar pact was made indicating a strike duration of one day.

I think that they thought that they would be out on strike for one day....That's what they thought. But when they heard that it was going to be longer they went back in (Eileen).

A lot of people came out just as a token strike and then went back in on Monday (Robert).

The "first crack" was caused by the betrayal of the Union as these workers saw it. The largest group of workers that went back into work at the same time, over the course of the strike, went back after these first two days. The workers only stayed out for those two days because of their allegiance to the centerwomen. These women were to form part of the anti-union movement.

The betrayal over the strike action was simply the last straw for many of the women who from the beginning of the unionization process did not find the spokesmen sympathetic to their concerns. They did not understand the "familistic values" as outlined by Sacks as expressions of adulthood and responsibility (1988).<sup>12</sup> Here are comments on

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<sup>12</sup>This is of course what I argued earlier in the chapter as to why the workers wanted to unionize. The idea was to do something totally antithetical to values supposedly held by the Eaton's.

"image" from a store that did not gain enough votes for certification:

One of them (spokesmen) was a big husky muscular guy. He was sitting there with a short sleeve shirt, tatooes all over his arms etc. I mean if he was working with UAW guys fine. But we had all these little old ladies ...His image at all the meetings created a lot of problems and was a topic of conversation. People felt very uncomfortable with him. He gave the image of a typical union man (Roger).

The "typical union man" according to the workers at this store were violent, rough men. Overall, the women saw the RWDSU officials as more like delinquent adolescents or "bikers", certainly, not people to inspire confidence. Almost all of the respondents had something to say about the image of the RWDSU officials, including the female organizers who were seen as unkempt.

Having worked at Eaton's for such a long time and look at \_\_\_\_\_ as whom we had chosen to represent us and then look across at \_\_\_\_ (Eaton's company representative). I cringed every time I sat at the table. The things he did and his appearance, his whole attitude... Her appearance was not acceptable to the Eaton people. People just wouldn't listen to someone who looked liked her (Anna).

We had her (the female union official) taken off the line because she swore and so the girls didn't like her...Then we got \_\_\_\_\_ (one of the centerwomen took over the line) and everything was done right and proper (Audrey).

I do not think this Union had dealt with a company like Eaton's before. They didn't know how to deal with them. They dealt with them like a Miracle Mart or whatever.

It was a bit rough and crude and didn't sit well. But that was their way. You saw the Bob White Story. I suppose it generally worked. But it offended alot of people....I didn't like it, but there wasn't much we could do about it. They didn't like to be told by women you see. Told anything really. There was an incident during negotiations when a union person went to light up a cigar and we asked him not to. He ignored us (Clara).

(The spokesman)...is very arrogant. Not a classy man. He really didn't have the right approach to handle Eaton's. He didn't dress the part. I mean when somebody shows up in a cowboy hat and shirt open down to the waist and sits at the negotiating table with his feet up on the table it really doesn't impress you. If they had really thought about what they were taking on they might have got somewhere. I know I sound snobbish. But I think you need your negotiators to be the same kind of people that you are representing and negotiating with. The same on the picket line. I mean they just couldn't believe that the women wanted to act like women (Abigail).

Of course, the point is that this "image" was exactly why the workers had chosen to unionize - the fact that it was so opposite to the attitude and behaviours of Eaton's "familialism". RWDSU did not provide the women with any sort of incentive to stay out on the picket line, especially when Eaton's management cleverly gave the non-striking stores a seven percent increase in pay in the days prior to the strike.

During those first days, the workers at Eaton's made decisions about strike action according to the material they were receiving and processing for themselves. This is not to negate or mitigate the very real oppressive pressure the

women were receiving from Eaton's management in making their decision, but rather to underscore that the women felt RWDSU was also not treating them in a fair and honest way. The overriding question becomes "why did they stay out on the picket line"?

It seems, most stayed out on the picket line because the centerwomen did and the centerwoman stayed out on the line because some of the workers did. Despite having concerns about the spokesmen, the centerwomen felt that they owed something to the strikers due to the fact that they had been central in organizing them. As one centerwomen stated:

I would have gone back in a lot earlier or had quit altogether. Only I felt responsible for the people out there (Anna).

It is important to keep in mind that the issues of importance to these women were status, honour, and trust. The actions of the centerwomen were of course in keeping with this. It was adult and responsible to carry through with the decisions made regarding unionizing. Those who stayed out on the line after the first few days were following the leadership of the centerwomen. Throughout the duration of the strike, the centerwomen acted as mediators between the spokesmen and the strikers. This was one of the central reasons the women stayed out on the picket line for

as long as they did.

### COMMONALITIES AND DIFFERENCES AMONG WOMEN

The major common issue that served to constrain the political activity of the women during the strike was their family situation.<sup>13</sup> All of the respondents, and reportedly most of the others who stayed out on the picket line until the end of the strike action, argued that they had the support of their families.

Most of us had the support of our families.  
...my family was fantastic (Ethel).

My wife supported me 100%. I think that made a big difference. \_\_\_\_\_ he had his family on his back. He stayed out for about 10 days...Another chap, his wife just made life miserable for him. He felt like we all did. "Do I throw out my wife"?. So he went back in (Bill).

My parents enabled me to stay out until the end. It was very easy for me, Okay? As a matter of fact, it was probably the easiest for me because I lived at home and I had money saved up...Now if I was living out on my own, I would not have gone on strike (Lucy).

Most of the support referred to by the women was generalized support from family or friends. While I knew of several male

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<sup>13</sup>Much of the literature talks about part-timers not having a commitment to the job and being the cause of strikes failing. During the Eaton's strike, the part-timers were making more money being on the picket line than they would have made working, so part-timers were overrepresented on the line.

partners that were actively supportive of wives on the line, it was more often the case that women referred to the support in terms of "lack of prevention". In other words, their partners did not stop them from participating.

The patriarchal nature of many of the relationships of the employees at Eaton's was readily apparent in the control the men exerted over the women wanting to stay on the picket line. Stories abounded from all respondents about men hauling their wives off the picket lines, and about the harassment that the women were getting at home. The following quotes are representative of what I heard over and over again from the respondents.

I think an awful lot of the men felt very inferior I guess. All of a sudden like, "what the hell are you doing". This is what men do. Women aren't supposed to do this". I do, I really believe that an awful lot of the men felt very intimidated (Aemilia).

A lot went back because of pressure from their husbands. A lot of marriages had a hard time. They didn't like their wives standing out there. It was embarrassing or whatever. I don't think a lot of women thought that they would do it either. For the first time in their lives the women were standing up for themselves and the men didn't like it. I think that the men felt very threatened (Clara).

The majority of the reasons were personal. Spouses pulling wives off the line. Finances (Anna).

You have some of them that had husbands that had executive positions with companies and they were embarrassed that their wives had anything to do with



this. They were ashamed of them. The women had to put up with constant harassment at home. One of the gals had to make a pact with her husband that they would never discuss the union in the house and certain things had to be done by her before she could go on the picket line type of thing. In the sense of domestic things, if he came home for supper, it had to be there, it(picketing) was not to interfere (Mark).

A lot of them were getting shit from their husbands (Daniel).

Problems such as these at home led to many women returning to work, but in others it led to separation and divorce. Others worked around this resistance.

Many built character out there. We had one lady who used to sneak out to picket because her husband wouldn't let her picket and then another woman her mom was against her. She used to go home and her mom would have an Eaton's bag on the table. This was hard on people and it was difficult to fight that kind of resistance. So it was affecting every aspect of their life. Not just work, but home life (Luke).

For all of the strikers, their home life had a significant impact on the nature of their political activity. It is clear that the overwhelming response from families was negative. To be on a picket line was not a thing that "ladies", "wives", "mothers" do. It was on the basis of what constituted traditional "feminine roles" that the women's families resisted their political activity causing them considerable stress and in many cases aborting their activity.

The strikers, on the whole, were very responsive to the differences among people and their lives that constrained their political activity. Traditional strike activity makes a clear-cut distinction between the strikers and "scabs". Scabs are those people who cross the picket line and go back to work. This distinction was very different in the "women's strike". There were so many different situations among the women that forced them back to work. The other strikers understood this and did not see it as betrayal. The feeling was that you did what you could.

When I refer to scab I think of those who joined and then didn't have the guts to go out. They are not strong people. They are very weak (George).

We lost a lot of people. People who were certainly with us but that couldn't stay out that long. We had a couple of young men who had new babies. They had to go out and get other jobs....There was one man in particular who walked with us and went back after four months and I don't feel bad about him because he was under a lot of pressure from his wife. I feel very sorry for him. I can't look at him as a scab (Sarah).

She almost started to cry. She said, "I have to go back in." I guess things were bad. Her husband ended up having to go out and get a loan. Things have a way of breaking down and sometimes you just don't have the extra \$500 or \$600 dollars sitting in a bank account doing nothing (Aemilia).

They would call me to tell me before they went in. Like, they'd call on a Friday night and say, \_\_\_\_\_ my husband's going to divorce me. I have to go back. I'm having a nervous breakdown. Like, what are you going to say? You scab? Like I mean you are out there and you're on strike and you see how hard it is on yourself and you hear stories of like, god, I don't know how I am going to pay the

rent and you know. So when someone calls you and tells you that they have to go back to work, I mean you kind of come down to what's more important to her. You know, your family or your job. And she had to make that decision and I respect her for making that decision. I mean, I'm not going to force anybody to stay out on strike if they can't (Lucy).

For the strikers, the scabs were those people who went back in after those first two days. They saw them as weak people, who went along for the ride during the organizing drive and with the excitement during the first day of the strike. Those who crossed over the picket line during the course of the strike were seen as having to do so because of personal or financial reasons and not as a betrayal to those left on the line. They felt a considerable amount of solidarity with these workers.

#### **CONCLUSION: FEMINISMS**

There are many different representations of women's resistance and empowerment which took place in the context of this struggle. One woman shovelled snow for money so that she could feed her kids rather than ask her anti-union husband for financial help. Other women sneaked out of the house to go and do their turn on the picket line. Others stood up to the RWDSU Spokesmen and went back into the store

after being on the picket line for many months - not as anti-unionists, but explicitly as anti-RWDSU, which I read as anti-patriarchy. Others formed a group to get rid of the Union and reinstate Eaton's management as their "leaders". However, returning to Eaton's patriarchal regime was simply switching forms. Patriarchy is embedded in the very fabric of our society.

The process of women's individual resistance and collective action "is" political engagement which creates change, regardless of the outcome. The case of Eaton's has shown that women's resistance and political action contains components that traditional politics do not explain. For these women had their own personal issues that shaped and guided their actions - not the traditional ones of money and benefits, but rather trust, honour, status, respect. In other words, women's lives are shaped by their family experiences, and family ideology or familialism is the context in which they operate, not the fast-paced, often violent hierarchal organizational context.

The commonalities and differences among the women in terms of their family and their working lives determined the extent and duration of their political activity. All of the women strikers understood this and said it as a matter of life rather than with bitterness and the attending

derogatory term of "scab". The notion of women participating in their own or other women's oppression and the related notion of women as passive victims are dependent on traditional political models to explain women's behaviour. Understanding the importance of constraints, limitations, and, similarly, of support received by one's family, illuminates the diversity among women and their actions of consent or resistance depending on their membership characteristics.

Finally, we have a recognition of a specific kind of leadership of "centerpeople" that is integral to the nature of women's political struggles. Once again, the power-base for these leaders comes from exemplifying "familistic values" and operating from the web rather than hierarchy. Having all the spokesmen behaving like "husbands" reinforces patriarchal dominance, the purpose of which is to oppress and force submission. This, of course, is antithetical to feminism and the rising of women.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### CONCLUSION

The findings of this case study of women, work and trade unionism at Eaton's strongly support Sylvia Walby's major thesis that "the concept of 'patriarchy' is indispensable for an analysis of gender inequality" (1990:1). It was demonstrated in the literature review in Chapter two that the concept of patriarchy has been central to the feminist debates over sources of gender inequality. However, in the course of debate, the validity of the concept of patriarchy, both in relation to its analytical precision and its definitional usage, has been thoroughly and convincingly called into question. Thus the concept has been abandoned by many feminist theorists as not being useful; however, the quest continues for a conceptual scheme that can account for all the different aspects of women's subordination. The position taken in this thesis is that all research avenues which provide a conceptual scheme for gender inequality through theorizing patriarchy have not yet been exhausted.

The argument presented in chapter two is that further exploration of the concept of patriarchy in the direction of examining it as a separate yet parallel system to capitalism was warranted, most importantly, in light of the recent work by Walby (op.cit.) who proposes a way of theorizing patriarchy that promises to overcome most of the concerns with the earlier conceptualizations. Indeed, convincing evidence was found in this case study for the major assumptions of her proposed theoretical model. It is important to bear in mind at this point that Walby's model comprises six structures of patriarchal relations, only one of which - patriarchal relations within paid work - is discussed in any detail in this thesis.

This thesis contributes to research efforts that seek to provide a theoretical model of patriarchy to explain gender inequality by showing the applicability of Walby's model to a single case study of women working and unionizing at Eaton's department stores. Chapter three detailed the methodological assumptions guiding this research and the practical approach. It was argued that methodological techniques are not inherently sexist as is argued in much of feminist scholarship. Rather, biased conceptualizations invalidate methodologies. A distinctive feminist methodology is argued to be "doing methodology as feminists". In other words, the methodological approach

formulated for this study was coherent with the feminist theoretical perspective.

In delineating the practical aspects of the methodology used in this thesis, it was maintained that a feminist conceptualization of the research process was necessary to guide the investigative work. Evidence for this claim is apparent in an example in chapter five. The women working at Eaton's claimed not to want to undertake the much higher paid men's commissioned saleswork because, among other reasons, they had no interest in doing this work. Aspects of this same claim were substantiated in the United States Court system in 1986 when the Equal Opportunities Commission pursued a discrimination case against the Sears Roebuck Company for not allowing women into commissioned sales jobs. It is argued that the feminist approach to this question, which placed the women's accounts of their experiences and perceptions of the world at the forefront of the analysis led to a very different finding i.e. an organized system of patriarchy that served to keep women out of these jobs. A strong case is made in chapter three and throughout this thesis for a methodological approach that holds to the tenets of feminist scholarship in order to understand and explain gender inequality; such inequality is argued to be perceived and experienced differently by women and by men.



Chapters four, five and six provide the data supporting the principal components of Walby's model. Three major aspects of the model were examined: the delineation of the forms and degrees of patriarchy; the assertion that women's paid work has been more influential in shaping women's position in the class structure than previously assumed; and the claim that patriarchy is an autonomous yet parallel system to capitalism (Walby,1986;1990).

Chapter four outlines proof for the public form of patriarchy that Walby argues has gradually replaced an earlier more private form. Public patriarchy is characterized by the dynamic interaction of patriarchal relations in sites other than the household (1990:24). Evidence for this type of patriarchy was found by examining the history of the Eaton's firm and management practices of control. Specifically, the evidence showed that historically the crises of management control and the gendering of work were inextricably intertwined. The two systems of capitalism and patriarchy were in conflict, particularly during the crises constituted by the unionization events of the late 1940's and the 1980's.

Chapter five provides further evidence for paid work as a site of gender production. Detailed testimony by the

Eaton's workers in both time periods outlines the historical social construction of the patriarchal division of labour. There are "men's jobs" and "women's jobs" at Eaton's. Walby's model in distinguishing between the forms and degrees of patriarchy is particularly apt in explaining how a gendered division of labour could occur in the 1980's within the same job of salesworker. While the forms refers to a particular "type of patriarchy", degrees relate specifically to the "intensity of oppression on a specified dimension" (1990:174).

The testimony of the workers at Eaton's clearly indicated a lessening of the degrees of patriarchy on items such as wages and hours of work; however, a lessening of overall oppression is more apparent than real for the women. It was found that the women were subordinated in new ways in the 1980's relative to the 1940's. For example, it was shown that in the 1980's, the women's saleswork had become more deskilled, encompassing more "housekeeping tasks", and women were performing the major proportion of all of the increasing new part-time positions. Overall the intensity of oppression in women's paid work at Eaton's increased over time and in relation to men's work.

Moreover, Walby's argument that the public sphere of paid work is more important than previously thought in

shaping women's labour force participation (1986;1990) is solidly supported in this chapter. First of all, the women's accounts attested to the importance of paid work in their lives. Second, the public sphere of paid work was shown to be crucial to maintaining patriarchy. This latter point was further substantiated in chapter six by examining the major strategies of public patriarchy.

Chapter six forcefully argues for Walby's (Ibid) most contentious assumption of the separate but parallel relations of patriarchy and capitalism, through evidence of the dynamic social construction of the gendered wage form. In the 1940's, men's and women's jobs were separated on the basis of gender. By the 1980's, the major distinction between men's and women's jobs was the wage form. Commissioned saleswork had become an intrinsic part of the definition of men's work and salaried work for women's jobs. Focusing on the period of the unionization events of the 1940's, this chapter details the patriarchal strategies of segregation and subordinate job grading, argued by Walby to be characteristic of the public form of patriarchy (Ibid).

The dynamic interactions of these strategic relations shaped the gendered wage form as a compromise between the conflicting forces of capitalist and patriarchal

relations. The result was a new pattern of the gendered division of labour. The illustration of this struggle strongly supports the independence of gendered relations from those of capitalism. In doing so it provides further evidence for the importance of the work sphere in shaping women's position in the class structure. The crisis that precipitated the change in form was the union organizing drive; however, the force that upset the balance between capitalist and patriarchal relations was the feminist political movement for equal pay for equal work.

In the final chapter, women as a political force were examined in detail. Walby has credited the first wave of the women's movement with being instrumental in forcing the change from a private to public form of patriarchy (1990:191). Her argument of the underrated power of the movement led us to an examination of the processes of the women's resistance and empowerment at Eaton's during the 1980's organizing drive and strike. On the one hand, this chapter clearly illustrated the extension of workplace patriarchal relations onto the site of the trade union structure which necessitated a broader theoretical approach to this study. On the other hand, the chapter provided strong support for feminist methodology by drawing extensively on the testimony of women to understand their experiences and perceptions of resistance and empowerment

which were found to be qualitatively different from those of the mens'.

The case of Eaton's has shown that women's resistance and political action contain components that traditional politics do not explain or acknowledge. The issues that moved the women to action were based on those experiences that were at the forefront of their lives. The commonalities and differences among the women in terms of their family and working lives determined the extent and duration of their political activity. Traditional political models do not take this into account. This chapter argues that the women involved in this dispute were neither passive victims nor participants in their own and other women's oppression. As Bookman and Morgen (1988:3) have underscored, women have different ways of resisting and of empowering themselves that are specified by their location and position in society, their race and class, and the general activities of their daily lives as women.

In summary, Walby(1990) has proposed a powerful model with which to understand and explain the position of women in society. This thesis examined her major assumptions, but did so only in terms of the one structure of paid work in a model that consists of the six structures of patriarchal relations and many more sites of

oppression within these structures. This account only hints at some of the powerful forces of the other structures, in particular the state and aspects of sexuality. However, this thesis has proved that the model is cogent and that it is worthy of further research. It is contended that patriarchy is a powerful concept for understanding women's oppression.

## APPENDIX ONE:

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The interviews were open-ended and unstructured. I did however guide the respondents to discussing three areas. I) their personal and family background; II) their working life; III) the unionization events. When they were talking about the union, I tried to get them to follow a chronological order beginning with 1) organizing drive; 2) certification process; 3) the strike; 4) the aftermath of the strike; 5) the decertification process.

The respondents were told that I was studying the relationship between women, work and trade unionism in that I was interested in their feelings, perceptions and experiences of their work and the unionization events. I also told them that I felt that what they did in the home, their class, family and ethnic lives, were connected to how they experienced and perceived their work and trade union lives. Hence, I was also interested in discussing these areas. They were asked permission to tape the interviews and I offered them a signed confidentiality form.

The following schedule is an exact reproduction of the one I used during all interviews. Under each category I listed a number of questions that I wanted the respondents to address. Mostly, I just let the respondents talk after asking the general question and when the section was completed I check the schedule to see if they had addressed all the questions I had listed.

As the interviewing process proceeded, various themes began cropping up that were not on the original schedule. I would note them on my schedule for the next interview. These are indicated in the following schedule in "bold" to emphasis them as later additions.

## SCHEDULE

SECTION I. Personal and family background

SECTION II. Work

SECTION III. Union - Group A.1984-86 - union  
Group B.1984-1986 - non-union  
Group C.1948-52

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PERSONAL AND FAMILY BACKGROUND

Name:  
Address:  
Telephone number  
Date of Interview  
Store location

SECTION I. FAMILYCAN YOU TELL ME SOMETHING ABOUT YOURSELF, AND YOUR FAMILY HISTORY?

LOOKING FOR:

- where they were born;
- residential history;
- age;
- marital status;
- number of children and ages;
- childcare arrangements;
- education background;
- companion's occupation, work characteristics and history;
- family history i.e. mother and dad's occupation - did they belong to a union; if so, were they active members;
- do any friends or relatives belong to a union; if so are they active members;
- are you active in any social or community groups;
- can you tell me what you feel about housework; who does it; how much time do you spend doing it; how much time does your partner spend doing it;
- do you have any dependents;
- does your companion work full or part time; work steadily;



## SECTION II. PAID WORK

### CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT YOUR WORK?

#### LOOKING FOR:

- work history; where they worked; characteristics of the work; skill required; pay hours worked;
- work at Eatons - how long have you worked at Eaton's; how many hours do you work each week; are you full or part time; how much are you paid; what kind of benefits do you have; how have the work and benefits changed since you have been at Eaton's; what is your job title; can you tell me what you do on a day to day basis ie. main duties and activities; do you work for a straight hourly rate, salary or commission; do you work overtime, do you get paid for overtime; what qualifications, skill or training was necessary for you to obtain your job; can you tell me about your co-workers, are they male or female, what is your relationship with them; what about your supervisors; what is your relationship with your customers; How much control do you feel you have over your work; are you satisfied with your work; what about the working conditions; do you aspire for a different or better position; why are you working for pay; have you always had the same job at Eaton's; why did you decide to work at Eaton's; do you know most of the people that you work with; are there jobs that are clearly for men ie. if a women applied she would not be considered, or do women apply for these jobs at all;
- tell me about the Eaton Image;
- what was your connection or feeling to Eaton's prior to the drive;
- (I noted that I wanted to pose work questions as applicable to before the drive and then same questions for after the drive.)
- do you like your job at Eaton's;
- do you like your work;
- what are the relations like between full and part-time employees;
- have you worked in the same department since you began at Eaton's;
- have you worked in the same Eaton's store since working with the company;
- how many departments have you worked in all together; why so many; why do they move you from department to department;
- are there any indulgency patterns;

- can you tell me about the changing nature of the work over time; what about the changes in the store;
- were you discontented with the working conditions prior to the organizing drive; how was this expressed;
- was there ever any talk of union at the store;
- has your workload increased;
- are there differences between the stores; what about how they organized;
- when the names were changed from saleshelp to sales associate ect. how did your responsibilities change; what was the purpose of the change;
- do you have chances for mobility, for a better job, within the company;
- what about children at work

### SECTION III. UNION

#### CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS, PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES WITH THE UNION ACTIVITY AT EATON'S

- LOOKING FOR:
1. ORGANIZING DRIVE
  2. CERTIFICATION
  3. STRIKE
  4. AFTERMATH
  5. DECERTIFICATION

#### GROUP A - UNION

##### 1. Organizing drive

- did you ever belong to a union before;
- how did you feel about unions in general;
- how did you first hear about the union;
- can you tell me about the organizing drive;
- did you sign up right away; what about your friends and coworkers; what did they do, what was their reactions;
- how did you feel when you got the vote; did you think things would change;
- did you have any problems getting out to union meetings or finding the time to participate.
- was the idea of a union ever discussed at Eaton's before the Brampton certification;
- sexual harassment;

##### 2. Certification

- what was happening at Eaton's after the vote and before the strike;
- how did management treat you; how about the workers that did not want to be certified;

- what was happening at Eaton's during the negotiations;
- tell me about the recession, what effect did it have on the store;
- did you ever think you might go out on strike;
- what did you think about the video "No Small Change";

### 3. Strike

- how did you feel when you discovered you were going on strike;
- had you ever participated in a strike before;
- how did you feel on the picket line;
- did you consider yourself a feminist; what about now;
- how did you feel about the women's movement;
- did you participate in the stress workshops;
- were you a picket captain, or on the bargaining committee;
- how did you feel about the union; what was the relationship between the workers and the union; did this relationship change in any way;
- did you stay on the picket line until the end;
- how did you feel about the union president ratifying the contract;
- would you have voted for or against the contract;
- how did you feel about the union at the end of the strike;
- what were your feelings about unions in general;
- do you feel the union addressed the needs of the women;
- do you think a different union might have done a better job;
- do you think the union made any critical mistakes;
- how did your family and friends react to you being on strike; were they supportive;
- how did you manage financially;
- did the help that the women's movement gave during the events give them credibility for you;
- had you heard prior to organizing about the 1948-52 drive;
- what did you personally go on strike for;
- what did the employees feel about the cancelling of the Santa Claus parade;
- why do women join unions; what factors facilitate it; what prevents them from joining;
- do you think the union kept you well informed throughout the strike;
- did you get a seven percent increase before the strike;
- did you get a percentage off merchandise;

### 4. Aftermath

- how did you feel after the strike;
- what was it like going back to work;
- has anything changed in the past year;

- any changes in organization of work; nature of work; amount of work you are expected to do;
- how are your relations with other workers;
- how did you feel about the labour board ruling - re: bargaining in bad faith;

#### 5. Decertification process

- can you tell me about the decertification petitions;
- have you signed it, if so would you still want a union but just not RWDSU;
- do you think it will be successful;
- what is the feeling around Eaton's right now;
- what similarities or differences do you see between this drive and 1948-52;

#### GROUP B: NON-UNION

##### BEGIN WITH QUESTIONS ASKED OF GROUP A

- how did you feel when you lost the vote;
- why do you feel the vote was lost;
- is there a chance that the store may be unionized in the near future;
- how strong is the anti-union feeling;
- how do you feel about the activities at the striking stores and their subsequent contract;
- do you have maternity or paternity benefits;
- what are the characteristics of the anti-union people as a group;
- what would a perfect employee be like for Eaton's.

#### GROUP C: 1948-52

- can you tell me about when you first discovered the organizing drive was happening;
- what was your first reaction;
- what was your reaction to Eileen as a women organizer;
- were you convinced that the union was going to improve the working condtions;
- what was your primary interest in the drive - was it a personal issue;
- what were your general feelings during the drive;
- was it difficult to work with co-workers and managers who did not support the drive; how did they treat you;
- how did you participate in the drive;

- did you have problems finding the time to participate; what about for your co-workers; was it primarily men who actively participated;
- did your family support you;
- what were the major issues for you;
- was there a visible women's movement that you were aware of in your day;
- how did you feel about the outcome of the vote;
- can you tell me about your relationship with the union;
- were you hassled in any way for supporting the union;
- who were easier to convince to join the union, the men or women;
- what were the reasons that people gave for not joining;
- what was the general societal attitude toward working women;
- why were women working outside the home;
- did the women primarily work part-time or did men work part-time as well;
- do you have any criticisms of how the drive was handled on the whole;
- did you ever have any personal contact with the union organizers or representatives from RWDSU or the Central Organizing Committee people;
- what was the support of the media and the community like;
- can you tell me what it was like to be a woman in 1948;
- were the women involved in the drive for themselves to get better working conditions or for the men or what;
- did your male co-workers have any difficulty accepting Eileen as the organizer, or did she deal primarily with the women, and the male organizers with the men;
- did your working conditions change in any way during the drive;
- how did you feel about the second attempt to organize;
- have you been following the recent drive;
- how do you feel about it;
- do you feel that because the workers asked to join the union this time rather than RWDSU coming in to organize, had an affect on the outcome relative to your time period;
- do you see any differences now;
- has the work that you did at Eaton's in 1948-52 changed much;
- did the women feel that they had a skill;
- can you tell me about the women that did get involved in the drive, did they have more spare time, did they have union backgrounds, were they somewhat more financially secure, did they have children;
- what have you been doing since 1948;
- are you active in any unions;
- did the drive change your life in any way;
- has anyone contacted you about the recent drive or for information;

- do you think women are different now in any way than they were in 1948;
- do you have any contact with co-workers from that period;
- what do you think are the major barriers that women face in joining unions;
- do you think that Eaton's management exerted more control over the women as opposed to the men;
- why do you think it took 30 years for a new organizing drive.

Final comments: Did you keep any personal records, files or pictures. Would you like me to send you some results of the study.

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