

# MONEY

---

# MATTERS

---

---

---

## *Monica Townson*

*Pendant des siècles, on ne s'attendait pas à ce que les femmes s'occupent des affaires d'argent. On a même dit qu'une explication possible à la pauvreté dans ce pays, est que la moitié de la population a grandi avec l'idée que c'était l'autre moitié qui devait administrer le budget.*

*Les conséquences de cette attitude peuvent se voir dans la situation financière des Canadiennes d'aujourd'hui. L'écart de salaire entre la paye des hommes et celle des femmes est plus grand maintenant que ce qu'il était il y*

*a 50 ans, au plus mauvais moment de la dépression. Même quand hommes et femmes font exactement le même travail, la plupart du temps, la femme a un salaire moindre. A l'encontre du mythe populaire, les femmes ne contrôlent pas la richesse de ce pays. Mais il est heureux de voir qu'elles se rendent enfin compte que l'argent est synonyme de puissance et que si elles ne comprennent pas les questions d'argent, il ne leur sera pas possible de changer leur situation financière.*

*Monica Townson, conseillère et auteure d'un best-seller: The Canadian Women's Guide to Money,*

*nous explique que selon les idées reçues, il n'est pas féminin de se préoccuper de questions financières. La législation en vigueur au Canada veut qu'à travail égal, il y ait salaire égal. En fait, on se rend vite compte qu'en ce domaine, la loi est très rarement appliquée. Au plus mauvais moment de la dépression, le salaire d'une femme n'était que 60% celui d'un homme. En 1979, il tombait à 58%. De nos jours, 22% de familles vivent du seul salaire de l'homme. Bien que plus de 6.600.000 femmes aient fait une déclaration d'impôts, 55% d'entre elles n'ont pas eu d'argent à déboursier car leur salaire était trop bas.*



*Photo: Bernie Leroux*

**B**ACK in the sixteenth century, everybody knew that while the four-and-twenty blackbirds were being baked in the pie, 'The King was in his counting house counting out his money, the Queen was in the parlour eating bread and honey.' We cannot help wondering if she thought of taking a look into the counting house to see what was going on. Probably if she had, she would have been told not to 'worry her pretty little head about it.' This has been the usual response down through the ages to any woman who wanted to find out where the money came from and

where it was going.

Men, of necessity, have to concern themselves with money in order to feed their families — at least that is what we are taught to believe. But for a woman, unless she has the misfortune to be poor or without a man to take care of her, being concerned about money is often thought of as not only unnecessary, but somehow unfeminine too.

In the past, women themselves may have accepted this line of argument, and of course, it was very handy that they did. They could then be expected to work for

low wages, or even no wages at all, without complaining. The consequences have been disastrous. The likely explanation for much of the poverty in Canada, said the National Council of Welfare in its 1979 report on Women and Poverty, is that 'one-half of the population of this country is brought up on the assumption that it will always be financially taken care of by the other half.'

The assumption, of course, is totally unrealistic and the statistics underline the extent of the myth. More than half a million families, or about nine per cent of all the

families in Canada, are single-parent families headed by women. Only 22 per cent of all families where there is both a husband and a wife are supported by the income of the husband alone. Almost half of all married women in Canada are now in the paid labour force. Sixty per cent of younger married women, in the age group from 20 to 44 years, are working outside their homes — and this is just the age when we might have expected them to be at home raising children. The typical married woman in Canada today is no longer a full-time homemaker.

Yet the image of the male breadwinner, providing for his dependent wife and children, still prevails in many quarters. Government policies and employers' attitudes are still largely based on a perception of married women as secondary earners whose right to a job and to protection against loss of employment is somehow less than that of other workers. Those who insist on keeping married women in a state of dependency within the family unit need not wonder that women are poor when there is no longer a man around to take care of them.

**M**ANY EMPLOYERS rely on the labour that women in the paid labour force supply, but they often react in horror when it is suggested they should pay a fair wage for it. 'We'd go out of business if we had to give women equal pay,' they say. Of course we would not let them use such an argument in favour of paying members of a particular racial group less than other workers, but we still let them do this to women.

Usually they can get away with it. Although there is equal-pay legislation in all the Canadian provinces, not much effort has been made to enforce it, and in any case, there are plenty of loopholes. Except for the province of Quebec and for employers under federal jurisdiction, the laws say that in order to get equal pay a woman must be doing the same or similar work as a man. Most women in the paid labour force are not doing the same work as men.

## ... CONCERN FOR MONEY IS 'UNFEMININE,' A HANDY IDEA THAT EXCUSES PAYING WOMEN LOW WAGES, OR EVEN NO WAGES AT ALL...

Although women have gone to work outside their homes in ever increasing numbers, they are still confined to relatively few occupations. Eighty-two per cent of all working women in Canada are found in only six broad occupational groups: 34 per cent are doing clerical work, 18 per cent are in service occupations, 10 per cent in sales, 8 per cent in medicine and health, 6 per cent in teaching and 6 per cent in manufacturing and assembly work.

This segregation of working women into ghettos of low-paying jobs is one of the reasons why women's wages are so low in comparison to men's — and also one of the reasons why many women's groups are now lobbying for laws specifying equal pay for work of equal value instead of equal pay for equal work. The federal Human Rights Act and Quebec's Charter of Human Rights already have this clause. It allows women to claim equal pay if their work is estimated to be of the same value as men's work, even if the jobs are not exactly the same.

**A**S WOMEN become more vocal in demanding better pay and working conditions, many people wonder what the fuss is all about. There seems to be a widely held belief that because such a high percentage of women are now working for pay, they must be doing well financially. The facts prove otherwise.

In 1931, at the height of the depression, the average earnings of a woman worker in Canada were

about 60 per cent of the average earnings of a man. By 1979, the percentage had dropped to 58 per cent. A woman who worked for 50 to 52 weeks in that year averaged \$10,465, while men's earnings averaged \$18,021.

Those figures include part-time workers, but the comparison is probably a fair one. It represents what the average woman worker can expect to earn if she has a permanent commitment to the labour force. Many women have to work part-time because that is all their duties in the home will allow. Others would no doubt choose to work full-time if adequate daycare facilities were available. A comparison of full-time workers in 1979 showed women's earnings averaged 63 per cent of men's. Women who worked full-time in that year earned an average of \$11,741.

Even where men and women workers are doing exactly the same job, men are getting higher wages in most cases. Figures published by Labour Canada for 1979 show that bakers' helpers got \$4.72 an hour if they were women, but \$7.01 an hour if they were men; garment inspectors in the hosiery and knitting industries were paid \$3.98 an hour if they were women, but \$6.35 an hour if they were men; sewing-machine operators working on women's clothing got \$4.72 an hour if they were women, but \$7.08 an hour if they were men; and bindery workers in the printing industry were paid \$5.65 an hour if they were women, but \$7.97 an hour if they were men.

**A** CROSS-CANADA survey of average weekly salary rates in various office occupations, carried out at the same time showed average weekly wages of women order clerks in Halifax were \$173. Men who were doing the same job were making \$256 a week. In Toronto, average weekly wage rates for senior bookkeepers were \$259 a week for women and \$339 a week for men. And in Winnipeg, junior systems analysts averaged \$247 a week if they were women, but \$372 a week if they were men. Out of twenty different office jobs

surveyed in St. John's, Halifax, Montreal, Ottawa-Hull, Toronto, Winnipeg, Edmonton and Vancouver, women earned the same as or more than men in only six instances.

There is not much reason to hope that the situation has improved since 1979. The practice of giving percentage wage increase means that the dollar gap between men's and women's wages is actually increasing. As more and more women go to work outside their homes to help support their families, those who are left at home as full-time homemakers are still not really expected to give much thought to money.

After all, as they were told by Margaret Birch, cabinet minister in the province of Ontario (1977), 'they have virtues which are surely more valuable than a salary,' and their reward is the love of their children. It was not explained how this 'reward' could be used to pay for the groceries or to keep the family going if the father should leave. There have been many estimates of the value of the unpaid labour of women who work in their homes serving their families. One of the most recent calculates that the average Canadian housewife, with two children between the ages of 7 and 12, works 49 hours a week. The going rate for the various tasks she performs averages out at \$3.82 an hour, which translates into an annual salary of \$9,742.64. Married men whose wives stay at home as full-time homemakers get the benefit of these services without paying for them and are also given a tax break by the government. Families who do not have a full-time wife or mother to provide these free services are not treated so generously. And of course, the homemaker herself rarely receives any pay, has no pension and no job security either.

**I**N A SOCIETY which values everything in monetary terms, a job which has no pay has no status, although of course those who give their services for nothing have to be encouraged to continue

## **... AT THE HEIGHT OF THE DEPRESSION, THE AVERAGE WOMAN'S EARNINGS WERE ABOUT 60% OF A MAN'S. BY 1979, THEY DROPPED TO 58%...**

to do so, and so we are often told how noble it is to be a mother or to work as a volunteer. Many of our social services rely on the unpaid work of women volunteers, yet most employers do not take into account a woman's experience as a volunteer when she re-enters the paid labour force and applies for a full-time job.

It has always seemed strange that, while women's work is usually poorly paid or not paid at all, we have been led to believe that 'women control most of the wealth of this country.'

The people who think this is true have presumably been told that women live longer than men and therefore may be expected to inherit large amounts of money. In actual fact, rich widows do not form a very large percentage of the Canadian population, nor do they control very much of anything.

Women are indeed the major beneficiaries of life-insurance policies. They were named as beneficiaries in about 62 per cent of all the policies under which death benefits were paid in 1979. But 68 per cent of all policies which paid death benefits were for an amount less than \$5,000. Women got about 708 million dollars from this source in 1979, which hardly seems significant when it is set against their total income from all sources of \$50 billion.

**T**AXATION statistics published each year by the Department of Revenue give a very clear picture of how much money Canadian women have. Their total

income from all sources in 1979 was \$50 billion. In the same year, men who filed tax returns reported a total income of \$127 billion. Just over 6.6 million women filed tax returns in 1979, but almost 55 per cent of them had incomes so low that they did not have to pay any tax. Because of the child tax credit, introduced in 1978, many women, who previously would not have had to file tax returns because they had no income, now have to do so to claim the tax credit.

Women were paid just under \$36 billion in wages and salaries in that year, which was 27 per cent of all wages and salaries paid. (Women made up 39 per cent of the labour force.) They received just over \$6 billion, or about thirteen per cent of their total income, from investments, including dividends, interest on bank accounts and bonds and income from trusts and annuities. Almost eight per cent of women's total income came from government transfer payments such as family allowances, old-age pensions and unemployment-insurance benefits.

In the same year, men received more than \$9 billion in investment income, or about 7.4 per cent of their income from all sources. The only kind of investment income that women received in larger amounts than men was income from trusts, where women got about 70 per cent of the total paid out. But the income women received from this source was only \$281 million, or about 0.6 per cent of their income from all sources. The Royal Commission on the Status of Women examined the question twelve years ago, and it came to the following conclusion:

Quite clearly most of the economic power is in the hands of men. Traditionally the economy has been a man's world and practice today perpetuates that tradition. Such a world provides fertile ground for nourishing the belief that women's inferior financial position is synonymous with an incapacity to make important financial decisions. And one of the unfortunate consequences of such long-standing belief is that women themselves fall victim to it. It

is not surprising then that many women lack confidence in their ability to handle financial affairs or to play a useful part in setting corporate policies.

Since the Royal Commission issued its report in 1970, there has been a significant increase in Canadian awareness of the position of women. And this growing awareness has meant that women themselves want to take responsibility for their own lives, including responsibility for their financial affairs. Interestingly enough, a survey carried out by *Ms Magazine* found that 'the couples who fought over money the most were those in which the wife was not earning a salary and was economically dependent on her husband.' (May 1978) It seems clear that women are now starting to question their dependent status, particularly in view of the ever increasing incidence of divorce, which forces women to be economically independent whether they like it or not.

It is gradually dawning on the public that the financial situation of many Canadian women, especially if they are old or single parents, is unacceptable. Proposals are now being discussed that would provide better retirement incomes for women and pension coverage for those women who work in their homes as full-time homemakers. And recognition is growing that women in the labour force need a better deal. There are even signs that some provinces may start enforcing the equal-pay laws they have had on their books for so long.

**H**UMAN-RIGHTS laws at both the federal and provincial levels guarantee equal access to 'services,' and government officials make no secret of the fact that this is intended to include financial services, such as credit. Provinces have adopted 'equal credit guidelines' which are designed to ensure that women are no longer discriminated against by credit-granting institutions. And banks and life-insurance companies are finally waking up to the fact that women are a major market which they can no longer ignore.

Women themselves are beginning to realize that their money talks. Money is power — and that means not just that those who have money also have some power over their own lives, but also that without an understanding of money, women will be powerless to change their financial situation.

How will women deal with their increased financial awareness? They have been conditioned to believe that they do not have much ability for figures and that financial affairs are far too complicated for them to handle. It still comes as a shock to find that there are plenty of married women who have no idea how much money their husbands are earning. And we know that women's lack of confidence in their ability to deal with financial matters means that those women who have money often allow the men in their lives, whether they are their husbands, lovers, bankers or stockbrokers, to make the decisions about what to do with it. And when these trusted advisors bring forth the financial gobbledy-gook, a woman might almost think it is a plot designed to keep her in blissful ignorance. But it does not have to be that way, as we hope this book will show. You can come to grips with money matters, whether it is understanding how to establish credit history, providing for your retirement, or becoming an investor.

**T**his book is intended as a guide to money for Canadian women. We hope that you will be able to use it to help you gain control of your own finances, whether you are a woman alone or whether there is a man in your life. It is just over 50 years since a decision of the Privy Council of England ruled that Canadian women were 'persons' in their own right under the law and longer had to be classed with lunatics and children, not responsible for their actions. Accepting responsibility for your own financial affairs means asserting your 'person-hood.' The psychological rewards of self-determination can be enormous, and the financial rewards may not be insignificant either. Good luck!

## For The Record

- 41.4 per cent of British Columbia's labour force is female
- the participation rate of married females increased by 37 per cent between 1971 and 1976
- 50 per cent of all women of working age participate in the work force
- 90 per cent of the total female labour force works in four major occupational groupings: managerial, professional and administrative; clerical,; sales; and service
- females earn 58 per cent of the average male wage
- women constitute over 70 per cent of all part-time workers in B.C.
- as of June 1981, 7.4 per cent of the indentured apprentices in B.C. were female. If the 754 women registered in barbering and hairdressing are removed from this total, the remaining apprentices constitute 2.8 per cent involvement in all other trade areas.

Courtesy *Women & Work: Changing Times*, Women's Office, Ministry of Labour, B.C. V2N1, 1982

fireweed *n*: a hardy perennial so called because it is the first growth to reappear in fire-scarred areas; a troublesome

## REDEFINING

FEMINISM IN ART AND  
ART IN FEMINISM.  
FIREWEED PUBLISHES  
WORK THAT'S TOO  
OUTRAGED, OUTRAGEOUS,  
THEORETICAL, POLITICAL,  
PERSONAL TO FIT INTO  
MAINSTREAM MEDIA.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

Personal  \$10 Institutional  \$15  
Out of country  \$12  
Start  Renew  my subscription  
Send more information

A FEMINIST QUARTERLY  
**FIREWEED**

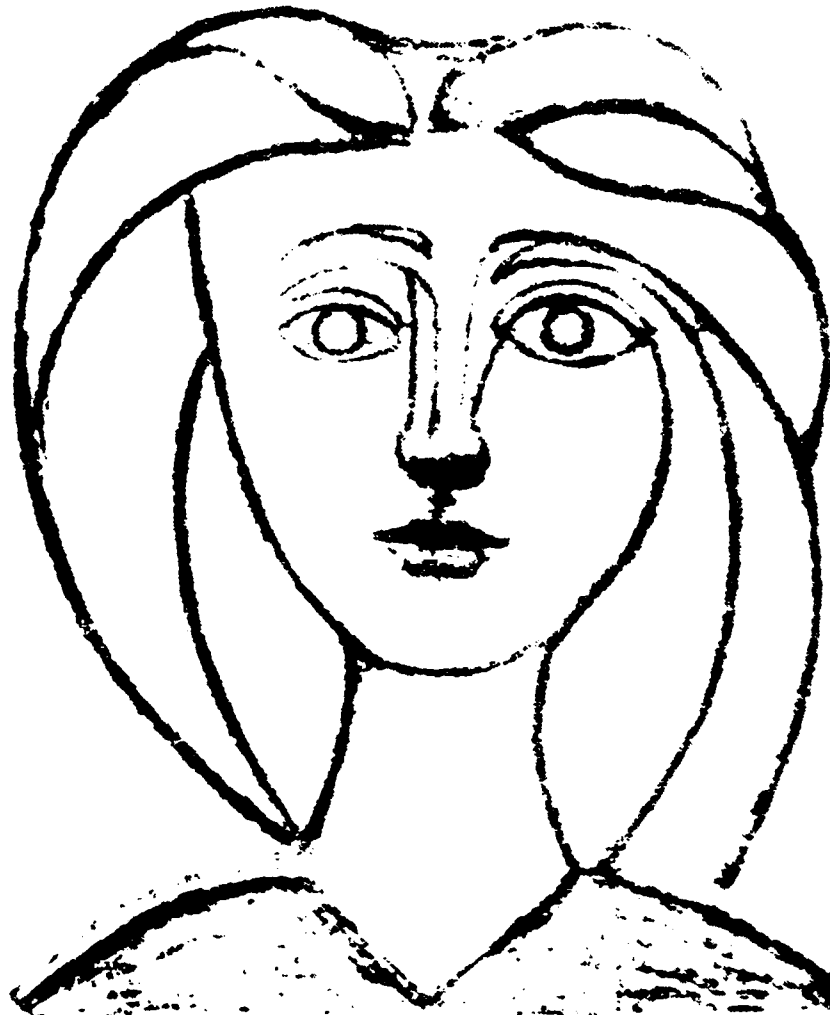
P.O. Box 279, Stn B, Toronto, Ont M5T 2W2

# A FEMINIST ISSUE

**event** will be collecting material —  
poetry, prose, fiction, short plays,  
reviews, graphics and photography — for  
a special issue on the theme of feminism.

We invite submissions from women and  
men both, and we are interested in work  
that examines the lives of women (and  
men) from a feminist perspective. We will  
be accepting material until **December  
31, 1982.**

Send submissions to:  
**event**  
Kwantlen College  
PO Box 9030  
Surrey, B.C.  
Canada V3T 5H8



Drawing: Picasso