

Getting to Work: The Challenge of the Women Back Into Stelco Campaign

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Article abstract

In 1978-79, the ad hoc Women Back Into Stelco Committee launched a campaign to force Stelco management to end twenty years of sexist hiring practices. The campaign succeeded in winning public and legal recognition that Stelco had practiced discriminatory hiring and it forced Stelco to begin hiring women. This paper reviews the campaign and explores what happened when the women entered the formerly all-male workplace. It assesses the implications of such campaigns for the sex/gender division of labour the organization of work, and the politics of the women's movement and the labour movement.

Getting to Work:

The Challenge of the Women Back Into Stelco Campaign

Meg Luxton and June Corman

Introduction

IN 1979-80, AN *AD HOC* "Women Back Into Stelco Committee", supported by the United Steelworkers of America (USWA) Local 1005, had five women file a discrimination complaint with the Ontario Human Rights Commission and conducted a major public campaign to make the Steel Company of Canada (Stelco) hire women for production jobs at the Hilton works in Hamilton, Ontario. The five won a favourable verdict from the provincial human rights commission, and Stelco began hiring women. This campaign was significant for several reasons. At the time, Hilton works, a steel manufacturing plant, was one of Canada's largest industrial sites. It offered the best-paying and most-prestigious industrial jobs in Hamilton. However, in taking on Stelco, and winning, these women challenged not only a major capitalist employer, but also the sex/gender division of labour fundamental to contemporary capitalist societies and the ideologies of femininity and masculinity which reflect and reinforce it. The women's struggle to get work at Stelco was part of a larger fight to transform the organization of work, the location of women in the economy, and prevailing ideas about "femininity".

The sex/gender division of labour and its accompanying gender ideologies, according to which women and men do different work, has had serious social and economic consequences. Ideologies of marriage and family have assumed that most women, as wives and mothers, are supported by breadwinner husbands, thus justifying lower wages for women. Because women earn significantly less than men, it is difficult for women to be economically self-supporting — especially if they have children. This situation creates an economic compulsion for women to marry and to remain in marriage. The sex/gender division of labour thus results in a general impoverishment of women and feminizes poverty. It also reinforces

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broader patterns of male dominance and female subordination and particularly within marriage.¹

Women have challenged this division of labour primarily by increased participation in the labour force. As married women have become more involved in paid employment, they have struggled to get their husbands to participate more actively in domestic labour, effecting a partial redistribution of work in the home.² In the paid work-place, women have challenged the disparity between women's and men's earnings by demanding increased pay in so called "women's jobs" (that is, equal pay for work of equal value), and by trying to unionize women workers so that they, too, can win greater job protection and better benefits.³ Since the late 1970s, there have also been many instances where women have actively challenged existing patterns of labour force segregation by demanding women's access to so-called "men's jobs."⁴

The sex/gender division of labour, however, is embedded in powerful ideological constructs which define female and male, feminine and masculine. Central to these ideologies is the notion that women and men are profoundly different and that their differences are rooted in biology. Such biological distinctions mean that women and men "naturally" must do different work. In particular, ideologies of "familialism" assume that women and men should marry and have children and that women are primarily responsible for child care while men are primarily responsible for earning the money needed to support the family.⁵ Any challenge to the sex/gender division of labour is a challenge to the ideologies that support it. Proponents of the existing division of labour are quick to mobilize these often deeply-held beliefs about what is "natural," "appropriate," or "right" for women and men to do. The struggle to get women hired in so-called "men's jobs" is at once a struggle to redefine the characteristics of those jobs and to eliminate the notion that there are such things as "women's jobs" or "men's jobs." Consequently, such initiatives also are a challenge to familialist ideology as they question the validity of the sex/gender division of labour and the concepts of "feminine" and "masculine."

The movement to get women hired in "non-traditional" jobs has been multi-dimensional. Prodded by the women's movement, government and educational institutions have begun to offer special training programs to encourage women to

¹Pat Armstrong and Hugh Armstrong, "The Conflicting Demands of 'Work' and 'Home'," in Karen Anderson, *et al.*, *Family Matters: Sociology and Contemporary Canadian Families* (Toronto 1987).

²Meg Luxton, "Two hands for Clock: Changing Patterns in the Gendered Division of Labour in the Home," in Meg Luxton, Harriet Rosenberg, Sedef Arat-Koc, *Through the Kitchen Window: The Politics of Home and Family* (Toronto 1990).

³Linda Briskin and Lynda Yanz, eds., *Union Sisters* (Toronto 1983).

⁴M.L. Walshok, *Blue Collar Women; pioneers on the male frontier* (Garden City 1981).

⁵Meg Luxton, "Thinking About the Future," in Anderson, *Family Matters*; Michele Barrett and Mary McIntosh, *The Anti-Social Family* (July, 1987).

enter nontraditional jobs. For example, in Winnipeg in 1977, Women In Trades (WIT) organized industrial-skills courses at the local community colleges.⁶ In Ontario in 1978 Introduction to Non Traditional Jobs (INTO) courses were initiated, cosponsored by Canada Manpower and the community colleges. In some classes, participants spent four weeks preparing to be the only women on the job.⁷ Women's groups, particularly in the labour movement, pressured the federal government to impose affirmative action hiring policies. As a consequence, a voluntary affirmative action program was implemented in April 1979.⁸

Some of the women who set up and participated in such programs formed self-help groups to provide personal support for women attempting to break into all-male jobs, to campaign for more public support for their endeavours, and to initiate further educational and agitational efforts. In September 1980, the Winnipeg WIT group organized the first national Women in Trades conference.⁹ While encouraging women to believe they can do nontraditional jobs, and creating a public climate sympathetic to the women doing them are important aspects of such efforts to change the division of labour, the most central effort involved actually getting women hired on.

Efforts to secure nontraditional jobs for women occurred on two levels. First, there was a widespread yet spontaneous and diffuse movement, especially in one-industry towns where the general lack of employment for women made discrimination on the part of the major employer very visible. Initial victories occurred in such settings where individual women succeeded through their own persistent efforts, sometimes supported by a local union and the general community.¹⁰ A second aspect of attempts to get women hired into formerly all-male workplaces took the form of organized campaigns. These campaigns were mounted in larger cities, and were usually well-organized, high profile efforts which targeted the discriminatory hiring practices of major companies in key industries.¹¹ For example, the USWA-backed campaign resulted in INCO Sudbury hiring 100 women. The union local at Fleet Industries in Fort Erie supported women laid off by another plant in their campaign to get a 10 per cent quota of women hired. A difficult struggle opened the doors for women at CN.¹²

As a result of these attempts, women have been hired in many industries such as mining, logging, petroleum, steelmaking, auto and aircraft production, rail and

⁶Gloria Geller, "Women in Trades," *Resources for Feminist Research*, 10 (July 1981), 71.

⁷In a six-year period (1978-1984), Algonquin College graduated 300 women from these courses. Drop outs were rare. *Ottawa Review*, (12 September 1984), C2-8.

⁸OFL Women's Committee, *Our Fair Share: Affirmative Action and Women: A Discussion Paper* (Toronto, 1982); Rosalee Abella, *Equity in Employment* (Toronto 1984).

⁹Geller, "Women," 72.

¹⁰Jennifer Penney, *Hard Earned Wages: Women Fighting for Better Work* (Toronto, 1983).

¹¹(Revolutionary Workers' League) *Socialist Voice*, 24 December 1979.

¹²Wendy Johnston, "Women's Struggle for Non-Traditional Jobs," *Resources for Feminist Research*, 10, 2 (1981), 16-7.

construction. In Ontario, the number of women employed in processing occupations increased only 2 per cent during 1961-71, and jumped 49 per cent from 1971-81, but rose only 3 per cent during 1981-86. The number of women in product fabrication, assembling, and repair rose 30 per cent during 1961-71; 51 per cent during 1971-81, and 7 per cent from 1981-86. The number of women in construction increased 73 per cent during 1961-71, 126 per cent during 1971-81, and 41 per cent during 1981-86. In relative terms, the proportion of women to men changed very little in this 25 year period: processing (+4 per cent), product fabrication (+3 per cent) and construction (+2 per cent).¹³ It is difficult to evaluate the movement of women into nontraditional jobs, as there is no way of knowing how many women applied for such jobs, how many actually were hired, or how long any of them worked once hired. This information has been made even more difficult to assess because many women were laid off with onset of the recession.

One of the best examples of the public organizing campaigns was the "Women Back Into Stelco" campaign where, in 1979, a group of women took on and won against Stelco in Hamilton. This paper examines the emergence, development, and outcome of that campaign. It is based on in-depth interviews with the five women involved in initiating the campaign, male members of the union leadership, 23 women employed at Stelco, 20 male steelworkers and 20 women married to steelworkers. It is supplemented by a structured interview of 196 randomly-selected men employed at Stelco and their spouses, as well as another structured questionnaire given to 234 laid off steelworkers. The paper describes and assesses the significance of this form of women's challenge to the existing sex/gender division of labour.¹⁴

Most existing studies of women in nontraditional jobs have considered situations where women were hired during the early-to-mid 1970s at the tail end of a period of economic expansion when hiring was freer.¹⁵ Few of these contributions have considered directly the immediate economic context in which such hiring took place. The "Women Back Into Stelco" campaign occurred at a time of protracted economic stagnation and profound technological change. The North American

¹³*Occupational Trends, 1961-1986* (Ottawa 1988).

¹⁴The men employed at Stelco and their spouses were selected randomly from the Local 1005 membership list. Because this random selection only turned up two women, we did further interviews with all the women steelworkers we could locate who were willing to participate. Quotations in the text indicate male steelworkers (M), female steelworkers (F), and spouses of male steelworkers (S). Each person interviewed was assigned a number for record keeping purposes and it is this number which follows each quote.

¹⁵See for example, Kay Deux and Joseph Wilman, *Women of Steel: Female Blue-Collar Workers in the Basic Steel Industry* (New York 1983). For a study of the women's employment in heavy industry during the 1974-75 boom and the reduction of female employment during the post boom period, see Cathy Rakowski, "Women in Steel: The Case of Ciupac Guayana, Venezuela," *Qualitative Sociology*, (1987), 3-28.

steel industry was facing severe international competition and technological rationalization. As a result, the relationship among the economic situation in steel, the women's campaign to challenge Stelco hiring practices, and the long-term entry of women into the paid labour force was posed particularly sharply. There is a painful irony in writing about this campaign ten years later, for massive layoffs at Stelco have eliminated virtually all the women employed in production. Nevertheless, the Women Back Into Stelco campaign and the experiences of those women who were employed at Stelco were significant in the history both of the women's movement and the labour movement in Canada, and raise important questions about ways of organizing for change.

The Economic Background

THE EFFORT BY WOMEN to break into the highest-paying industrial jobs occurred when it did largely because of the particular economic circumstances of the 1970s. The type of jobs available for the labour force in Hamilton-Wentworth was changing from jobs in manufacturing and construction to service-sector jobs. Jobs in manufacturing and construction dropped from 57.7 per cent in 1951 to 39.6 per cent in 1986; service-sector jobs rose from 38.0 per cent to 59.0 per cent during the same period. Shrinking job opportunities in the traditionally male occupations in manufacturing and construction pushed men into competition for "women's jobs" in the service sector.

Within traditional female areas, competition for employment increased, keeping wages low. The expansion of the state sector which had provided thousands of jobs for women in the 1960s began to slow down to correspond to cutbacks in social services. Thus, with the participation rate for women increasing, the ratio of female to male earnings in Hamilton-Wentworth had only increased from 42.5 per cent in 1970 to 47.6 per cent in 1980.¹⁶ If women wanted to earn comparable incomes they had to confront job-ghetto barriers by seeking a wider range of jobs.

As one of the largest manufacturing plants in the country, Stelco's Hilton Works in Hamilton was a likely target. While other manufacturing jobs in the area were declining, Hilton Works had constantly expanded its labour force during the 1970s from 10,895 in July 1971 to 12,809 in August 1979.¹⁷ Although the labour force shrank by 2 per cent per annum over the next two years, Stelco continued to hire new people to replace most of the people who retired, quit, or were fired, and also to fill summer-help positions. The availability of employment at the Works resulted in thousands of applications from both men and women in the 1970s.

Unionized in the late 1940s by the Steelworkers Local 1005, the relatively high wages and benefits at Hilton Works made it one of the most desirable workplaces

¹⁶Cziernick, Reid and Cain, Winsome, *An Overview of the Impact of the Recession on Women in Hamilton-Wentworth* (Hamilton 1985).

¹⁷Data provided by Local 1005, calculated on the basis of deductions from payroll for contributions to the building fund.

in the city. For the most part, the production labour force has been entirely male. During the World War II, women were employed to replace male workers who had joined the army; after the war almost all those women were fired. During 1946-61 a few women were hired occasionally but by 1961, all of them were employed in one particular work site — the tin mill. During 1961-77 no women were hired (although about 30,000 women applied for jobs during those 19 years). By 1978, there were 28 women working in the tin mill; the rest of the production workers (about 13,000) were men.

For most of the women who got hired on after the campaign, money was the main reason for working at Stelco.

If you want to make something out of your life and to have the good things in life then you have to go where the money is.... The pay - you can't beat it. (F3)

The majority of women who did get hired at Stelco doubled their wages from \$4-5.00 per hour to \$8-10.00 per hour with even higher long term prospects.

I wanted to get an industrial job on account of the money. It was more money than if I was doing women's work. (F24)

I worked at Burger King. I was making \$3.50 an hour and I went to Stelco and I was getting over \$10.00. (F4)

The need to earn more is particularly pressing for those women who, because they are self-supporting, have difficulty getting by on "women's wages". Twenty-one of the 28 women interviewed either were self-supporting or single parents for whom the higher wages of industrial work were especially attractive.

Changing Industrial Work

WOMEN WERE STRUGGLING for the right to jobs in the steel industry around the world in the 1970s. In the United States, nine major steel companies and the Steelworkers agreed to establish an affirmative action program for many "male" jobs.¹⁸ In Australia, women launched a lawsuit claiming that a steel company had

¹⁸Kay Deau, and Joseph Ullman, *Women of Steel: Female Blue-Collar Workers in the Basic Steel Industry* (New York 1983). For Canadian examples, see Kate Braid, "Women in Trades in British Columbia," in M. Fitzgerald, C. Guberman and M. Wolfe, eds., *Still Ain't Satisfied: Canadian Feminism Today* (Toronto 1982), 222-5; Canada Employment and Immigration, Patricia Carson, Canada Employment and Immigration Commission, "Women in Non-Traditional Jobs," *Canadian Vocational Journal*, (1979), 12-48; Lean Cohen, "The barriers to women seeking non-traditional jobs," *Canadian Women's Studies*, (1981), 40-63; Debbie Field, "Rosie the Riveter meets the Sexual Division of Labour," in Fitzgerald, *Ain't Satisfied*, 210-21.

discriminated unlawfully against them during 1977-80.¹⁹ Motivated by the desire to earn the highest possible wages, women in Hamilton also were willing to confront both the ideologies and the realities of work in heavy industry. For some, the challenge of a new type of work was interesting.

Office work never appealed to me... I don't know, it just didn't seem interesting...it wasn't for me. (F11)

It was a result of a decision I had made about a year and a half back to change my career path from the traditional office type worker into a non-traditional ... a non-traditional job in the industrial work force. (F21)

For a few, the challenges of the job were even more important than the money.

It is good money but still when your kids start going to school all day and being at home all the time you get fed up. (F2)

A few women who had lengthy experience in industry pointed out that the physical requirements demanded of women in so-called "women's" factory jobs are often no greater than those of "men's jobs". Other women claimed that working at Stelco required less of them than either their former jobs, such as waitressing where they regularly had to move stock around, or the routine activities of domestic life.

[the personnel man asked] could I carry around a 50-pound bag of cement? I said I carry a 40-pound kid around the shopping malls, why couldn't I carry around a bag of cement? (F8)

Workplaces which once relied on physical strength and endurance increasingly are being transformed as new machines provide power and workers give up their hand tools to become machine operators. As a result, large size and or physical strength are no longer as critical. Furthermore, some women are increasingly willing to challenge the notion that physical strength is limited to men. One steelworker noted: "I've never seen a job I couldn't do or any other woman couldn't do." (F7) Even where jobs still actually require strength or are assumed to require it, women sometimes like the challenge and enjoy work that demands physical strength. One commented: "I like the physical work." (F6) Another said: "The physical part of it was wonderful...it was a real challenge to my body." (F21)

The Influence of the Women's Liberation Movement

THE INFLUENCE OF THE women's liberation movement in challenging existing gender stereotypes has strengthened women's critique of sexism. This has raised a

¹⁹"Australian Women Fight for Steel Jobs," in *Women and Work*, Canberra, Vol. 7, 1, (May 1985).

public discussion about whether or not men are better suited than women for certain jobs, and has given increasing numbers of women the confidence that they can do "men's jobs." The women's movement has also given voice to, and legitimized, women's complaints about traditional "women's jobs" and their desires for better jobs and pay. For example, one of the initiators of the campaign had previously worked for a major union as the equal opportunities coordinator. When she resigned to try to get a job at Stelco, she wrote in the union newsletter:

My time as OPSEU Equal Opportunities Co-ordinator has convinced me that women will never achieve equality in the workplace until we break out of the traditional female job ghettos, and are represented in industrial jobs by industrial unions.²⁰

Other women articulated the ideas of the women's liberation movement in more personal terms: "I wanted to do something that 'men do'." (F3)

Women are becoming more forward, more pushy. It has taken a lot of years for us to come forward and speak our minds. I think these feelings are there in every woman but they just haven't known what to do, you need help to bring it out. (F25)

The women's movement also provided organizational experience that The Women Back Into Stelco Campaign was able to draw on. In fact, several of the key leaders of the campaign had previous experience in both the women's liberation movement and organizations on the left. The campaign was widely publicized and in itself appeared interesting to some women.

I wanted to try something different... I was reading about [the campaign] in the paper and I thought it was a pretty exciting thing that was going on and why not me. (F7)

Personal Experiences and Motivations

ALTHOUGH THE LARGER socio-economic context was obviously very important, many of the women had particular personal experiences which prompted them to consider working at Stelco. It may be that certain types of prior work experience predispose women to be attracted to heavy industry. While most of them had experience in "women's jobs," the majority also had been employed in jobs which were either clearly dead-end, such as waitressing, or were in light industry where they gained some confidence that they could do industrial work. Twelve of the 29 women interviewed had earlier industrial experience, although all had so-called women's jobs (for example, on the line in a glass-bottle manufacturing plant, or canning paint in a paint factory) and most of the industries were relatively small. Six women had worked as waitresses, five in poorly-paying clerical jobs in small

²⁰OPSEU News, 14, 9 (October 1979).

offices, one was a bus driver, another a gas station attendant, and one worked in a beauty shop.

Personal contact with Stelco workers also predisposed some women to seek employment there. Ten of the 28 women interviewed had fathers who worked at Stelco and an additional five had other close male relatives employed there. One had an aunt who had worked there during the war. Other women (who were not interviewed) had husbands working in the plant. For some, their father's child-rearing practices encouraged a familiarity with machinery, construction, and repair work.

My father had a lot of machines around here, so you know, you kind of feel at home so I was kind of used ...Half the machines they had in the shop at work, we had in our garage on a smaller scale so...It actually worked out kind of good. (F15)

For others, their personal relationship with their father (or other relatives) resulted in a familiarity with Stelco and the desire to work there.

I was daddy's little girl growing up and daddy was a steamfitter/pipefitter in steam generation. And I knew almost everybody in the department...And my father would come home and he loved his work and he really liked to talk to somebody about it...So ever since I was a little kid who hung on daddy's every word, it, he could talk to me about it. So by the time I was old enough I knew different things. (F8)

Some families and friends readily accepted the woman's decision to work at Stelco; other women faced confrontation by family and friends. One woman explained that although her father worked at Stelco, he wanted her to have a middle-class occupation and was disappointed and unsupportive when she hired on. Thus, not only did women have to justify their claim to the company and their coworkers, but some also had to do so as well among their family and friends.

The Women Back Into Stelco Campaign

THE STRUGGLE TO GET WOMEN into Stelco production jobs went through two stages. The first, the fight to get hired, was directed primarily toward management, which because it controls access to jobs, had to be forced to change its hiring policy. Union officials supported the effort, and organized to win support from the general membership. In fact, from the union's perspective, the campaign was a progressive one not only because it was antisexist, but also because it challenged a fundamental management prerogative - control of access through hiring and represented a union-sponsored transformation of the labour force.

Once that part of the struggle was won and women were hired on, the second stage of the campaign sought to legitimize women's presence and reduce sexism. This involved improving management treatment of women employees, struggling

with many coworkers to improve relations between the sexes on the shop-floor, and working with the union to increase union support for gender issues.

The Women Back Into Stelco campaign was shaped by at least two distinct, though related, currents. The first was a general tendency in the organized labour movement in Canada to promote women's employment. During the 1970s, the combination of more women entering the paid labour force and organizing drives in predominantly female sectors, especially the public service, resulted in a dramatic increase of women in the labour movement. Simultaneously, feminism grew as a major force to be reckoned with inside the movement.²¹ As a result, by the late 1970s, all levels of the labour movement had implemented new policies concerning women. A generalized consciousness of "women's issues" had permeated much of the labour movement. For example, at the Steelworkers' 1977 Canadian Policy Convention, the Steelworkers' union adopted a resolution on women's rights which read:

This conference invites all working women to join the labour movement so that their liberation as employees will be brought about sooner.²²

By 1981, Steelworkers policy — shaped by the active participation of feminists — had moved beyond this general invitation to a more concrete articulation of support for women's employment through specific demands for equal pay, parental leave, child care, affirmative action in the workplace and the unions, and measures against sexual harassment and sex discrimination of any kind.²³ Local 1005 was part of a union and a union movement which was beginning to play an active role in supporting women's rights.

The second current to shape the Women Back Into Stelco Campaign emerged from a general growth of left-wing politics during the 1970s. In the early 1970s, some activists in the New Left movement turned to Marxist-Leninist organizations, whether by joining already-existing ones such as the Communist Party or the League for Socialist Action, or by forming new ones such as the Workers Communist Party or the Revolutionary Marxist Group.²⁴ The Revolutionary Workers League/Ligue Ouvriers Revolutionnaire (RWL) — formed in 1977 out of a fusion of two previous groups, the League for Socialist Action/Ligue Socialiste and the Revolutionary Marxist Group/ Groupe Marxiste revolutionnaire — played a key part in the Women Back Into Stelco Campaign. The RWL was a very small group, but had branches in most major cities in English Canada and Quebec and was

²¹Briskin and Yanz, *Union Sisters*; H.J. Maroney, "Feminism at Work," in Maroney and Luxton, *Feminism and Political Economy*. (Toronto 1987).

²²Resolutions and Policy Statements adopted by the United Steelworkers of America, Canadian Policy Conference, Toronto, October 1977.

²³Canadian Policy Conference United Steelworkers of America Policy Statement Equal Rights for Women, 1981.

²⁴Norman Penner, *The Canadian Left: A Critical Analysis* (Scarborough 1977).

committed to working-class politics. In 1979 at the organization's second convention, the group adopted resolutions intended to ensure that the majority of its members were employed in industrial jobs and, where possible, in jobs which were unionized, particularly in the steel, rail and auto sectors.²⁵

Prompted by their political commitment, and responding to generalized demands by women for access to formerly male jobs, women in the RWL played key roles as activists in a number of "Into" campaigns. Two RWL members were among the initial group of women who formed the Women Back Into Stelco committee and laid charges with the human rights commission. Other RWL women became actively involved as the campaign progressed.²⁶ These women brought to the campaign a political dedication, an analysis of the campaign's importance beyond their own personal need for a job, and well-developed organizing skills such as how to run a meeting, organize a rally, and intervene in a union meeting. RWL intervention, and the leadership provided by some of its women members, clearly were an important part of the Women Back Into Stelco Campaign.

The immediate events which set the campaign in motion began in spring 1979 when Stelco management hired a new female company doctor, Dr. Lily Chung. A number of the male workers protested at having to report to a woman doctor. However, the union executive reacted by complimenting the company for its nonsexist action, and then attacked it for not hiring more women production workers. Noting that Stelco had a different hiring policy for management than for hourly-paid employees, union president Cec Taylor stated publically that he "wished Stelco would take a more enlightened approach to employing women production workers."²⁷ This incident allowed the union executive to raise the issue of hiring women. Taylor went on to declare that the union would support women's efforts to get hired:

Stelco does not hire women production workers in Hamilton but female applicants have never complained about it. We can't fight their cause for them if they don't complain and come and see us.²⁸

Eight women responded to Taylor's statements; according to one of them:

I saw in the paper that Stelco had hired a woman doctor and Cec Taylor said this was good and there should be more women at Stelco and my boyfriend said "Now there's a man who might help you get in" so I went down to see him.²⁹

²⁵*Socialist Voice*, 5 November 1979.

²⁶The RWL's, *Socialist Voice*, (24 December 1979) reported: "In Edmonton and Hamilton, members of the RWL are playing a prominent role in campaigns by women to force Stelco to hire women as production workers."

²⁷*Hamilton Spectator*, 16 August 1979.

²⁸*Hamilton Spectator*, 16 August 1979.

²⁹*Hamilton Spectator*, 11 October 1979.

After discussing the issue with these women, Taylor took it to the union membership at the 10 October 1979 general membership meeting. This generated considerable debate and resulted in a 197-to-3 vote in favour of launching a campaign in support of forcing Stelco to hire women.³⁰ As a first move, Taylor laid charges with the human rights commission on behalf of the women who had been discriminated against. The formal complaint was filed 25 October 1979 under section 13 which applies to the implementation of special "equal opportunity" programmes. The complainant may seek: "the implementation of a special programme designed to relieve hardship or economic disadvantage or to assist disadvantaged persons or groups to achieve or attempt to achieve equal opportunity."³¹ This union support was crucial. As one woman acknowledged: "It would have been a very different campaign without the backing of the union".³²

However, the key actors in the campaign were the five women who themselves laid charges and organized the struggle.

...the strength of the campaign was that we did everything ourselves. [27]

These women formed a committee called "Women Back Into Stelco":

"Back Into Stelco" signified that there were women in there once. Women had been pushed out of jobs at Stelco since the war, and now we wanted back in.³³

This committee of about 20 active members included some who actually wanted employment at Stelco and others who understood the importance of the struggle for women generally:

...at that time women who wanted to become involved in nontraditional jobs realized that political action had to be taken. (F21)

Most of the committee were not women who actually wanted to work at Stelco. One of the crucial people ... was a white-collar worker, a clerk typist ... she really saw the importance of the campaign and we couldn't have done it without her. So we had women like that on the committee, women who supported the women's movement.³⁴

The committee decided to direct their efforts toward both the Human Rights Commission and a public campaign.

³⁰*Hamilton Spectator*, 11 October 1979.

³¹Ontario Human Rights Commission, 1981, 13:1.

³²Debbie Field, cited in Penney, *Hard Earned Wages*, 195.

³³Jeannette Easson, cited in Penney, *Hard Earned Wages*, 193.

³⁴Debbie Field, cited in Penney, *Hard Earned Wages*, 194.

We decided collectively that the best way to get at Stelco would be by charging them through the human rights commission. It wouldn't cost us a lawyer, it would be all very legal, and it would look good to the public.³⁵

On 28 October 1979, five women filed charges against Stelco under section 4(1) which states: "Every person has a right to equal treatment with respect to employment without discrimination because of...sex."³⁶

The day after laying charges, the committee called a press conference to launch the campaign. They released a key piece of information which throughout their campaign gave them lots of mileage. Between 1961 (when the last woman was hired) and 1978, Stelco had received approximately 300,000 job applications and had hired about 33,000 men. Of the applications, about 10 per cent or 30,000 were from women and not one of them had been hired. This, they argued, proved systemic discrimination. Stelco never refuted the figures.

The committee's idea was to keep the issue alive through activities which would encourage others to join them and which would generate press coverage.

We were in the newspapers about once a week I think, for about two and a half months...We had a demonstration of about twenty people one day in a snowstorm in December in front of the Stelco towers.³⁷

In an attempt to defuse the issue Stelco hired two women in November 1979, although a company official maintained:

...the hirings were not tied to the complaints. The women had been hired because they brought with them the qualifications needed for the jobs.³⁸

The union continued to provide support, allowing the committee to use union facilities and raising the issue in the labour movement. Cec Taylor brought the issue to the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) convention at the end of November 1979 when he moved the following motion, which passed after some debate:

Whereas Stelco in Hamilton has hired 33,000 men since 1961 and not one woman[,] Therefore be it resolved that...the OFL support Steelworker Local 1005's efforts to compel Stelco to hire a minimum of 10% of women in the Stelco workforce.³⁹

The committee decided to use formal political channels as one way to exert indirect pressure on Stelco and generate continued publicity. They contacted

³⁵ Jeannette Easson, cited in Penney, *Hard Earned Wages*, 195.

³⁶ Ontario Human Rights Commission, 1981, 4.1.

³⁷ Debbie Field, cited in Penney, *Hard Earned Wages*, 195.

³⁸ *Hamilton Spectator*, 1 November 1979.

³⁹ Ontario Federation of Labour Convention Proceedings, 1979.

various Hamilton parliamentarians and both senior governments' labour departments. Hamilton East MLA, Bob MacKenzie of the NDP, raised the matter in the Ontario Legislature, by asking:

...will the premier indicate whether he agrees with the comments by a Stelco spokesman that the reason not one of the 30,000 female applicants was hired for industrial jobs at Stelco since 1961 was that the 33,000 male applicants hired were all more qualified?⁴⁰

Conservative Premier William Davis replied:

I haven't the foggiest idea. I don't know what qualifications are required. I don't know exactly what type of employee they are looking for.⁴¹

A week later, MacKenzie challenged the government's practice again by asking Labour Minister Robert Elgie:

Could the minister tell us where the ministry has been in view of the 30,000 applications by females for employment at Stelco? Some 33,000 workers have been hired there since 1961 but not one of these 30,000 women applicants was hired until within the last few days.⁴²

Provincial officials dodged the issue by referring all inquiries to the human rights commission. Similarly, federal officials, when approached by the Women Back Into Stelco Committee, ignored the issue or offered platitudes instead of action. The federal labour department refused to make any statement at all. Lincoln Alexander, Tory MP for Hamilton West, wrote in response to the committee's letter seeking federal intervention by insisting that:

The employees of Stelco are subject to provincial rather than federal legislation, and for this reason I believe it would be inappropriate for me to take a partial stand, and that I must maintain a position of neutrality.⁴³

However, Alexander added a hand written post script:

I want you to know that I have said and I say now: "That within the ranks of women there is a skill bank from which there have not been sufficient withdrawals."⁴⁴

The committee reproduced Alexander's letter and circulated it at various press conferences and rallies, while pointing out that Stelco received significant tax

⁴⁰Ontario legislative debates, 30 October 1979.

⁴¹Ontario legislative debates, 30 October 1979.

⁴²Ontario legislative debates, 6 November 1979.

⁴³Lincoln Alexander to Debbie Field, 7 December 1979.

⁴⁴Lincoln Alexander to Debbie Field, 7 December 1979.

deferments from the federal government and arguing that if the federal government would legislate affirmative action, women's chances for equal opportunities at Stelco would be improved. They made it an issue in the January 1980 federal election campaign.

In March 1980, committee members used the campaign as a focus for organizing a celebration to recognize March 8, International Women's Day. This was the first time in many years that International Women's Day had been celebrated in Hamilton; the theme of the day's observances was: "We Need Jobs, Decent Wages Too! Stelco hire 10% Women". The poster promoting the event displayed a 1943 photo of women welders with a caption which demanded: "You hired us during the war, why not now?" The highly-successful rally actually capped the end of the campaign, for about a week later the human rights commission arranged a negotiating meeting with the committee and Stelco. Almost immediately, Stelco began to hire women.

Negotiations with Stelco

IN THE SECOND WEEK of March 1980, after more than six months of active campaigning, the five committee members who had filed formal charges started negotiating with Stelco in Human Rights conciliation meetings. Their demands were:

1. a job in production at Stelco; 2. retroactive pay and seniority effective from the first hiring period after the application; 3. personal and moral damages of \$3,000.00 each; 4. assurance of affirmative action practices according to section 6A of the Human Rights code; 5. that Stelco include a minimum of 10% women in future hirings.⁴⁵

At the first meeting, four of the five women were offered jobs to start within the month and retroactive pay settlements in excess of \$7,000.00. All four accepted the jobs, but only one accepted the back-pay settlement. The others held out for a better settlement including back-dated seniority. By the end of March 1980, Stelco had hired all five complainants and about 30 other women; by summer, Stelco claimed to be hiring about 13 per cent women. In this limited sense, the campaign to force Stelco to hire women was a success.

Changing Hiring Practices at Stelco

LOCAL 1005 AND THE WOMEN BACK INTO STELCO COMMITTEE raised the central argument that since 1961 no women had been hired by Stelco for production jobs, although during 1961-78 about 30,000 women had applied for work. They directed this message legally to the Human Rights Commission and politically in all their speeches and leaflets. It is not possible to determine the actual figures as Stelco

⁴⁵Women Back Into Stelco Committee press release, 26 March 1980.

management has consistently refused to release them, while steadfastly denying that there was ever any discrimination in hiring policies. But the experiences of many women applicants suggests differently. At their first press conference, committee chairperson Jeannette Eason outlined the committee's analysis:

The committee is fighting for the right of all women to jobs at Stelco. It's fighting for the 30,000 women who have applied at Stelco in the last 18 years and have been turned down. And it is fighting for those thousands of women who never applied because they know the "unwritten rule that Stelco doesn't hire women".⁴⁶

The fact that during the campaign the number of women applicants increased from about 10 per cent to about 18 per cent (or to about 3,600 women applicants) gave credence to the committee's contention that many women never applied who otherwise might have applied for work failed to do so just because of the "unwritten rule."

Unlike some Hamilton companies, such as National Steel Car or Stanton Pipes, which simply refused outright to accept applications from women, Stelco always accepted women's applications. However, several women maintained that during their own interviews they had seen women's applications being filed separately from men's.

While I was sitting there [the personnel officer] pulled open a drawer and put my application in it. Then someone walked in with a file from a guy who had just applied and [the personal officer] opened a different drawer. So I asked why he had put my file in a different drawer and he said "Oh, we keep all women's applications in here." So I said "why do you keep men's and women's applications separate?" and then he just stared talking very fast about something else. I think it was just pretense, interviewing women. I think they kept our files separate because they never intended to hire us. (F21)

When women applied for work, Stelco management often assumed that the applicant wanted office work or cafeteria work. If the applicant insisted that she wanted production work, company officials maintained that the only openings for women were in the tin mill.

I said: "I understand you are hiring now". She said, "We are but there are no openings in the tin mill as we have less of a turnover there now." And I answered that I wanted any kind of job in production. She said, "but we don't hire women in production." (F24)

One of these women had applied at Stelco in 1962 when she was 18. They of course said did you want office work or full-time factory work. I said I preferred factory work but would take office work if it was available. I don't think it would have been quite as bad as applying

⁴⁶*Socialist Voice*, 5 November 1979.

then as it has been in the last few years because then there was still the odd woman being hired. (F25)

When she applied again in 1979, having qualified as a welder, she felt personnel officials offered her fewer choices:

When I applied they said: "for office work." I said "not for office work, for production," and I thought no more fooling around with "I'll take office work if it is available." No, I'm a welder now and my application was full of qualifications." (F25)

While Stelco management tried to avoid discussing hiring practices, maintaining only that the firm had the right to hire as it wished and did not discriminate, occasionally a personnel officer would let something slip. One applicant described a receptionist's response when asked why Stelco did not hire women. "And when I asked why, she blurted out: 'There's no facilities.'" (F22) When pressed by the media to explain company practice, one official claimed:

Just because the company has not hired female workers at Hilton Works for some time does not mean that Stelco had a deliberate policy of turning down women.⁴⁷

After Stelco began to hire women, the personnel officers appeared to change their tactics. They no longer accepted women's applications only to file them away separately. Instead, they followed up on them and appeared to use the interview to try to discourage women. A number of women reported feeling intimidated by the way personnel officers kept reminding them about how difficult it would be working at Stelco.

I applied at Stelco in January 1980. I had just completed the manpower retraining programme. By April I had applied to 17 other companies in the city. Some told me they just didn't hire women. By June my unemployment [insurance] had run out and I was about to apply for welfare when I got an interview at Stelco. They asked me if I really knew what I was getting into; if I had made special arrangements for my two children; did I know the job would involve shift work. They said I wouldn't have much time with my children. So I asked them if they asked male applicants those questions. That's different they said. Then they said "you realize if I hire you you'll never have another statutory holiday or weekend off". He said "can you lift 50 pounds?" I said "Yes, but I understand 40 pounds is the legal limit." It sure didn't feel like he was just making the job clear for me. It sounded like a warning. Like he was thinking I don't think a woman can do this job. (F22)

The women most active in the campaign were all convinced that once Stelco was forced to hire them, management placed them in jobs it felt would either punish

⁴⁷*Hamilton Spectator*, September 1979.

them for demanding access or discourage them so they would quit. In this lengthy quote, one of the committee leaders describes what happened to each of them:

T., a former priest, this was his ball-park in personnel. T. is well trained in human relations he was doing his best at slotting us into departments that would intimidate us, not do us well. S., for instance, they felt S. was innocuous. She was no threat whatsoever, so she gets the good job in the tin mill where she had to work with women who were all 35 years older than her, and she was just 18 at the time. Also in a boring department. When you're 18 you don't want a boring department. They could have put her anywhere and I'm sure she would have been happier.

J. They knew she was politically involved. They felt a five-year apprenticeship would tie her up. If you are fired during an apprenticeship or if you decide to get out of it, you lose your job from Stelco. So she would be tied to it. It was a good way of putting the thumbs on J.

D. got coke ovens. We laughed because in this speech I'd said "What do you have to do to work in the coke ovens?" I had made jokes. Well, they turned it around -- we got the worst of the jokes.

And me, he offered me the blast furnace. Well I had said in my speech that my aunt had worked in the blast furnace during the war and I sure would like the chance to take on my aunt's old job. So they offered me the blast furnace. So they kind of got their own back by giving us the worst possible jobs and making sure we didn't get to work together. I think they hoped we would hate the work so much we would quit and then they would have won. (F27)

Once the campaign activists had been hired, Stelco management appeared to temper its approach to women. Most of the women interviewed who applied to Stelco after March 1980 describe their interviews and placements as being satisfactory. Between March 1980 (when Stelco had agreed to hire a minimum of 10 per cent women) and August 1981, when the union went out on strike for six months and the plant closed down, Stelco hired about 200 women of whom about 45 were part-time temporary summer help. By comparison, 1,650 men were hired during that same period.

On The Job

THESE WOMEN ENTERED what had been a virtually all-male preserve. Many of them were assigned to what were considered the roughest jobs in the plant — for example, coke ovens, blast furnaces. For most, this was their first experience with "nontraditional" jobs and masculine work cultures. None of them had previous experience in heavy industry. The sights, sounds, and scale of the workplace were impressive and brought home to them the uniqueness of their presence:

It was such a big place I felt that I would never know where I was going. And a lot of fear because the equipment is so large.....It seemed like there was no sun. It's dull, like it's a musty place. (F4)

...the flames shooting up and all that. And all the sirens going off. And I was really in awe of it. (F21)

At night I would see the beauty of the plant. The power of it. There was only me between a mistake and a clean job. (F24)

All of the newly-hired women were very conscious that Stelco was an all-male workplace, an awareness that shaped how they felt when they started work. It was much more than just the usual first day on-the-job jitters:

I didn't know what to expect. And I was scared....there was just me and I was the first girl to get hired in that shop since World War II so I was a little bit nervous. (F3)

A combination of events made the women steelworkers highly noticeable on the job. Extensive coverage by the media had made the campaign highly visible in the community. The campaign had been extensively debated at union meetings and a fact-sheet had been circulated at work. Male steelworkers were very aware of the issues and discussed them at length in the workplace, in their homes, and in the community. Thus each woman was immediately noticed and targeted as out of the ordinary.

It was a strange feeling. Like you were always being stared at, you were always being watched. (F11)

A man explained:

Probably 400 men to maybe 10 women (in my department)... You know they are there for sure. (M89)

Since there were so few women, being a woman created problems. It was impossible for the women simply to be workers. They were always women first, women working in a male workplace. Some women felt disadvantaged because they could not complain about the working conditions to male coworkers without being advised to quit. Others explained:

I wish there were more women working at Stelco because they wouldn't make such a big to-do about me. A lot of men still are shocked when a woman walks by and they make a big deal about it. And I just wish it wasn't like that. That I could just go to work, get my work done and not be hassled by anyone. ... I always wish that as soon as I punched in, poof — I was a guy — and as soon as I punched out, I was back to my old self. (F3)

Unfortunately you are in a position where you have to watch every move. We were the forerunners. Maybe once they get three or four hundred women in there, it won't be the same. We are the first and we have to watch it and every little thing is going to be used against you. (F21)

Since Stelco management had never anticipated hiring women, Hilton Works was not equipped for these workers. At every turn, women confronted this reality. Their everyday job-experiences reminded them that as far as management was concerned, women were not welcome. When they first showed up and went to get their safety equipment, many of them could not get their own size.

...my size they didn't have... I had to take the men's shoes and that is the hardest. I had a lot of blisters. (F16)

Occasionally women would encounter built-in evidence of the assumption that workers were men. One woman became a hot-bed hooker at Stelco, a job title which was taken for granted by men but which raised all sorts of comments when applied to a woman.

What a title. My kids get a bang out of that. They tell all their friends: 'oh my mother's a hooker at Stelco — a hot bed hooker.' (F4)

Another irritant, the source of constant struggle between the women and both management and male workers, was Stelco's change rooms and toilet facilities. At the outset of the campaign, Stelco management had used the lack of facilities as one reason to justify the refusal to hire women. What facilities were available to women varied. In some areas, where men and women shared the toilets, management simply built partitions around the urinals and put temporary walls up the middle of the changing rooms. In other areas, women used the men's change room and toilet, but had to ask the foreman to check that the room was empty and to stand guard while they used it. Sometimes women had to use trailers located a considerable distance from their work site, which meant they had to walk long distances through all male work sites every time they needed the toilet. The women were unanimous that lack of facilities made their work very difficult.

Many of the women believed that Stelco's refusal to provide change-rooms and toilets was part of a strategy to get rid of women:

Stelco's tactic is to hire us and then hope that we would quit. (F27)

The lack of women's facilities also exacerbated tensions with the men, who resented the intrusion of women in their toilets and change rooms and were embarrassed when women inadvertently caught them undressing. Also men had complained for years about change-room conditions, and resented management providing the women with new facilities when men needed the same consideration.

Where I change I have got a chain. Your clothes hang on a chain from the ceiling and when the women came they put a little special change room. It has got couches in there, mirrors

and little tables to put their hairblowers on. Like it is... Well, we need some windows... They treat them differently. (M89)

They've got lockers they've got nice tables.. we've got nothing. (M97)

Even wives of male steelworkers were aware of the tension:

I remember one thing, it was about the washroom facilities. That there had to be separate facilities for these women... That was a big thing. (S42)

The women's most difficult challenge was to figure out how to handle being a woman in what had been "a man's world." The women confronted a confusing array of reactions ranging from wholehearted support to vicious hostility.

There are the men who think it's great that women are getting into Stelco and doing that type of work. There are men who feel that I am taking another man's job who might be raising a family. There are men who feel that I should be at home with my daughter and not working in a place like that. And then there are the men who... are just there to bug you because you are a woman.... (F3)

Some of the men who supported the employment of women recognized the importance of women's rights and endorsed the union's position.

They have as much right to work as anybody else and there's quite a few jobs down there that they can perform... We had quite a few in our department. They're alright. There was nothing wrong with them. They went in, they did their work. And there was no problem as far as I was concerned. There's no reason why they shouldn't be in there, if they wanted to be. (M29)

Others had previous experience working with women at other jobs and so did not find them an intrusion at Hilton Works.

I do not mind working with women. I worked as a foreman for 15 years in textiles. (M90)
I had no problem... I worked with women selling shoes. The old guys (Europeans) would say: 'I worked with women years ago in the old country and it makes no difference.' (M61)
And the foreman really liked women cause he worked there during the war when all the women were there... He said it was great they were bringing the women in. (F15)

Many of the men had never worked with women before, and consequently were deeply immersed in the male workplace culture at Hilton Works. Women were outsiders, foreigners, and not readily accepted. The generalized hostility to women generated by large, all-male industrial settings is demonstrated by the behaviour of Stelco men, prior to the campaign, toward the women who worked in company cafeterias. It was regular practice to call the women names, to hurl insults, particularly of a sexual variety, at the women. These women were also often subject

to physical sexual harassment. Despite widespread notions that women should not witness food-throwing in the lunchrooms, the male practice of throwing food at the women finally became so widespread that management installed glass partitions to protect the women. These women worked in a clearly defined "female job ghetto" and were known to be very low paid. How much more challenging were women who were actually doing the same work for the same pay.

Thus, even when the men in the immediate work area were supportive, women's experience was still difficult.

I was the only female in there. I was the first one since the war so when I got there they didn't know what to do with me. But it was all male. (F15)

The workplace was emphatically a male sphere and male workplace culture was hegemonic.⁴⁸

You have to be really aware that you are an outsider, somebody new coming in...you have to adjust to being in an atmosphere of men. ...it can be lonely. (F12)

A steelworker's wife explained:

I think a lot of the men didn't think that was the way it should be (women in the workplace). And the men felt they couldn't be men. (S42)

The everyday behaviour of men on the shopfloor was predicated on the assumption that coworkers were male. Furthermore, the majority of men assumed that such behaviour was not acceptable in front of women. Even when the women did not object to the behaviour, the men became aware of it and often defensive about it.

It is really noticeable that the women are there. The men watch their language. ...you have to kind of watch a little about the way you talk and that. (M89)

You automatically try to prevent coarse language. When I am at home I don't swear, but as soon as I walk in that gate, something happens and you start swearing. It is just a natural thing. Because you figure, oh well, there is all guys here. I think you find two different personalities. I just say everybody, almost everybody, two different personalities. (M126)

Women told endless stories about men swearing on the job, then thinking they should not swear in front of women and being shocked when the women swore. Women realized that some of the men resented their presence.

⁴⁸Stan Gray, "Sharing the Shop Floor," *Canadian Dimension*, (June 1984), 18 (2), 17-32; Sandra Albrecht and Paul Goldman, "Men, Women and Informal Organization in Manufacturing," *Social Focus*, 18, 4 (October 1985).

The guys were used to flopping things around and laying down on the benches and having a nap and saying all kinds of neat things while they played cards....Some of the guys weren't too pleased about us taking over the lunchroom. And it was quite the shock when a woman walked into the lunchroom for the first time. (F8)

There were lengthy debates about pin ups and graffiti.⁴⁹ The common practice of throwing food around the lunchroom and of never cleaning lunchrooms was generally considered by most men to be something women should not witness. Some men appreciated the presence of women, hoping that behaviour they found objectionable would disappear. Other men were very defensive about their rights to speak and behave as they wished and expressed hostility to the Work's invasion by women.

And a lot of guys said: 'We were here first. This is what we call steel language and if you don't like it there is the door you can go eat your lunch somewhere else. You can stand over there, you don't have to stand here with us.' (M90)

They (foreman) tell you to watch yourself and you get a few women complaining, too. There is only the one lunchroom and the men and the women use it. We have got a few women complain because guys are swearing. They will go in there and raise hell and they will say it is tough. Some men say: 'I was here before the women and if they don't want to hear it they can go upstairs and sit in their change house.' Myself, I don't mind them. I just don't like to have to be any different down there because of a woman... (M89)

The male workplace culture generated unintended actions and unconscious reactions by the men toward women on the job. This unthinking speech and bodily reaction made the women feel uncomfortable even if the men were not aware that their behaviour was offensive to women.

It's hard to have that medium there where you can be one of the guys yet a woman. ...being a woman doesn't really help because they like to bug a little bit more...just joking...But after eight hours of hearing this it does get to you a little bit. (F3)

It took some adjusting to, their language and their attitudes towards women...I don't like their attitudes towards women...Sometimes I hate men's attitudes towards women. I get really angry. I'd say that I've become more aware of it since I started working at Stelco. ...I always thought I was men's equal...and then I realized that a lot of guys just don't see you that way. (F7)

One of the men explained:

The guys get kind of carried away sometimes. You know when you are walking down the street, the guys will stand and gawk and look like idiots. You will see a lot of that. Some of

⁴⁹David Livingstone and Meg Luxton, "Gender Consciousness at Work: modification of the male breadwinner norm among steelworkers and their spouses," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, 26 (May 1989).

these guys down there, they act like they have never seen a woman before... You are going to get five or six guys standing there. They may be whistling or saying something to you. Normally they would never do that or if their wives were standing beside them, they would never do that, that is for sure. They act childish sometimes. (M89)

Because often such behaviour was not deliberate on the men's part, the women had difficulty expressing their anger, often feeling that it was misplaced. In order for women to be fully incorporated into traditional male workplaces, these unconscious reactions, habits, and stereotypes that reproduce the oppression of women must be considered unjust and their perpetrators must be required to change.⁵⁰

Some of the men expressed their hostility to women by conscious, deliberate action: overt sexual harassment. Twelve of the 31 women interviewed said they had personally experienced some form of overt sexual harassment ranging from explicit graffiti in the washrooms, which named individuals and described their sexual behaviours, to physical assault.

"He pulled me behind shed and grabbed my breast saying There's only one thing women are good for...If you're gonna work here, you'll do what women are supposed to do. (F21)

In 1985, six years after starting to work at Hilton Works, one woman launched a sexual harassment complaint to the Ontario labour relations board, citing 62 incidents of sexual and other harassment, as well as health and safety problems and inadequate working conditions at Stelco. Her brief included complaints that a foreman repeatedly made inappropriate physical contact with her upper torso, that she was threatened with suspension if she did not clean the men's change house, and that a foreman shouted at her: 'I hate women.'⁵¹ She also charged that the lack of nearby toilets forced her either to break the Ontario Engineers Act by leaving equipment unattended too long, or damage her health by "forced retention." When the Human Rights Commission finally ruled, three years later, that equal rights in the workplace included having equal access to washrooms, the woman was awarded \$5,000 compensation, and Stelco finally installed a women's washroom in the central boiler station.⁵²

Such sexual harassment is a serious, widespread experience for women in "non-traditional" jobs. M.L. Walshok reports that one-third of the women in her study reported sexual harassment. L. Bjorn and J.E. Gruber found that sexual harassment was widespread among auto workers. They noted that younger women,

⁵⁰For a discussion of a concept of justice which incorporates unconscious behaviours see Iris Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton 1990).

⁵¹Linda Hossie, "Stelco worker charges sexual harassment," *Globe and Mail*, 17 September 1985, 17.

⁵²Stan Gray, "Fight to Survive — the case of Bonita Clark," *Canadian Dimension*, May 20 (3) 1986, 15-20.

divorced or single, are more likely to be harassed than married women. They also found that such harassment was disproportionately initiated by foremen.⁵³

Studies of masculine shopfloor culture have described the meaning and pleasure that men extract in the midst of often boring and alienating work situations.⁵⁴ Such studies show why male camaraderie is important and why the men are often threatened if their culture is challenged (for example, by the presence of women). Central to that culture is an ideological acceptance of the notion that women and men are physically and emotionally different and that those sex-based differences account for a sex/gender division of labour in which many jobs are clearly designated appropriate to one sex and not the other. A female steelworker explained:

They, some of them, just cannot handle women being in their line of work. ...a lot of them just won't have anything to do with me. (F6)

Some men objected to women working at Hilton Works because they had a very idealized notion of the appropriate behaviour for women. Male steelworkers explained:

I do not like to have women at Stelco. It is a male preserve and let us have it that way. I see working at Stelco as a male thing to do. I can see women going into the post office. That is a more female-type job. (M15)

I do not like to see women working at Stelco. It is dirty. The work is too heavy. Women deserve better. At 18, in Holland, I had to go to work on a fishing vessel. I was at sea for weeks on end. My mother walked to the boat with me the first day. I was fighting back tears of missing her and trying to be a man...I loved my Mother. Women should have the best." (M31)

Other men objected to women working at Hilton Works because as part of the masculine shop floor culture they assumed that men are suppose to be primarily responsible for earning the money necessary to support a wife and children. The very presence of women threatened the premises of that culture. One woman was asked repeatedly why she did not get married instead of working at Hilton Works. A man explained that his daughter, who was hired as summer help at Hilton Works, was making the same money as he was, and he had 25 years experience. She was also making more than a salaried man who had a much more responsible job. He did not think that this was appropriate. A young male steelworker explained:

⁵³M.L. Walshok, *Blue Collar Women*; L. Bjorn and J.E. Gruber, "Awareness of Sex Discrimination and Sexual Harassment among Women Auto Workers: Some Preliminary Findings," Unpublished manuscript, University of Michigan, 1981.

⁵⁴Paul Willis, "Shop-floor culture, masculinity and the wage form," in J. Clarke, *et al.*, eds., *Working Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory* (London 1979), 185-98.

The fellows were older and they were always bugging her if she didn't do the work right. They were telling her to work all of the time...I don't think the older guys really liked it too much. (M187)

Most often the men themselves were unclear and ambivalent about their reactions. For example, most men interviewed (70 per cent) agreed that women should have equal opportunities in the workplace, thus demonstrating a formal acceptance of the principles of gender equality. Simultaneously, some showed a marked resistance to working with women in actuality, insisting that most women do not need jobs.

I know of probably 15 women that work down there, and only one of them needed a job. Like she was a working mother, with no husband. The other 14, their husbands all worked at Stelco. They got jobs in there because somebody said: 'Hey, women have rights too.' So they applied to Stelco. I know one of them personally who went up and said: 'Hey, if I don't get a job, I'm gonna scream.' And she got a job. She was gonna holler discrimination. (M108)

Because openings at Hilton Works levelled off at the same time as the Human Rights ruling and then dropped drastically with the steel-market slump, the male workers at Stelco did not envision a women's mass entry into the plant. However, a frequently expressed fear of male workers was that women were taking jobs away from men. Over half of the men interviewed (52 per cent) insisted that in times of high unemployment, men should have priority for jobs. A wife explained: "The women bumped people from other departments and the men were annoyed." (F80)

Often their anger at what they perceived to be a violation of appropriate behaviour for women was expressed in sexual terms. Female steelworkers explained:

Either you shouldn't be here because you are taking a man's job or you shouldn't be here, you're a slut. (F12)

So she was talking away and her knees ...kind of banged the guy a bit...He says listen, don't you go touching me. I don't want to go home smelling of any Stelco slut. All the women just turned around. They couldn't believe that this man would say it... The humiliation was just...I don't know how she...I am a woman and he meant it about me too, but he said it directly to her. (F13)

Some men felt that the foremen treated the women differently than the men because some foremen were apprehensive that the women would use discrimination as a defense against disciplinary action.

Some foremen treated them like they should, like they treat everybody. And others, I felt they were scared with the women being in there. If they did something wrong, the woman would turn around and say discrimination or something. Like they just laid back and almost were scared of women being in there. (M15)

Our shift foreman was hardly concerned. They reacted just normally. The women were there. They put them on the jobs that they needed them on and that was it. I think maybe at first they were a little bit scared of some and I quite honestly agree with them. They have to be a little bit cautious with them. They can't talk to them the same way they talk to the men. They naturally had to be a little more careful, cautious. But once they were in there for awhile, it was just normal. Nothing wrong. (M29)

Some men felt that the foremen gave women less-demanding jobs.

I think they (foremen) gave them maybe the lighter jobs. The guys down at our work though are younger guys that don't really mind. I think the foreman kind of treated them pretty well the same, except for certain jobs. (M187)

This perception, whether accurate or not, created resentments. A male steelworker explained:

The foreman would never hand out the jobs on an equal basis. If there was a fairly soft job and a difficult job, there was no question who was going to get which job...which is a form of sex discrimination. They give all the good jobs, all the soft jobs to the women and all the heavy and meaningful jobs to the men. (M149)

If women did not receive preferential treatment and did the same day's work as the men, many men were ready to accept them.

Lots of women are sole support families so they should be able to work there. But they should have to do the same work and go up the same pecking order. On my line, there were no women because the lowest order job consisted of putting zinc blocks (60 pounds) in a vat...block after block all day long. On the other lines, a machine did this task so women worked on those lines. (M78)

They don't bother me as long as they do a good job and I don't have to be there to help them out. (M97)

If they get a job and as long as they do their job and I don't have to carry them, I don't care. (M61)

Other men conceded them a job at Hilton Works but remained hesitant:

Some jobs at Stelco, a woman can do and I have nothing against that, but some jobs not...I do not want to go on a job with a woman and do extra work that she does not want to do...One day, I was lucky. There were not too many guys and she came in and she didn't complain. I was lucky that time. It was not bad...They can do any job they want. I really don't mind. If they can do it and they can handle it, they can have it. (M4)

Well, they weren't there very long. I don't know, I didn't like it, really, too much. I didn't mind as long as they did every job that we had to do to get where we were. Then I didn't care. But they weren't there very long so, I never really had much run in with them. (M109)

Some men realized that there were also men who were not strong enough to do every job or who tried to get out of the tough jobs or shirked their responsibilities.

You had your good ones that were working and you had the other ones that were just like the men, that didn't want to work. Nothing different there. (M29)

Some of them pulled their weight but some of them sucked up and tried to get a job that way. That was just the way it was, I guess...Some of them pulled their weight and did their jobs, and others got around it the easier way...Like some of the guys were just as bad as the girls. (M109)

There are some pretty small guys down there, too... I can't see any job the girls couldn't do, if they wanted to. I understand they had one that did her nails in between her breaks and stuff like that. But she still did her job. Like she was one of them. I think they can do just about every job...Some of these girls are pretty big. (M61)

Many men explained that the women did a fair days work.

In my mill, women are doing physical work and some are good at it. (M31)

There is a lot of lifting at Stelco. Lots of work I cannot do. In response to 'Have women had trouble'? He said: "NO." (M15)

We never had none on our shift. But talking to the other guys, it didn't seem to matter. The girls came in and they did the job just like everybody else does. (M61)

After a time, the novelty wore off and most of the women proved their competence as workers. The women explained:

But most of them I think are used to me; they know that I can do the work. (F3) I found everyone pretty good to work with. (F2)

Reaction of the Wives

THE REACTION OF STEELWORKER'S WIVES towards women working in the plant was just as varied as their husbands'. A homemaker felt that "if they pull their own load it does not bother me." (S51). Others said:

I think it's great if women can handle the work. It's the best money the women can earn. My husband heard stories from the guys in the plant before the women came in about the women during the war and they were really something. I think women should get those jobs if they can. The pay is really good. My girlfriend is working at Dofasco and she really likes it. She is getting lots of dates with guys and it's great for her. (S69)

Yes, I thought the campaign was great. I went down and applied as soon as I heard about it. It's great for women. That was before I was living with him. He tells me about some of the women he works with. He calls them Amazons. He says that they work really well, most of them. I don't care that he works with them. It's great they are there. (S181)

A nurse was very clear that integrated workplaces, in general, were a good idea.

I think it's good. I don't think there's anything wrong with that. I feel it should be shared, no matter, anywhere. We just have hired a male nurse..it's the first male nurse that we've ever had at the hospital. It's really a big change. It's great. Plus they have minds, there's nothing the matter with their minds. Surely if they got through nursing school, they're just as smart as we are.. It's just so silly. So I really can't see that it would be any problem down there. If there's girls that can do the work, why not? (S42)

Other women resented the fact that the women at Stelco received better washroom facilities than their husbands.

[speaking to her husband:] You were there when they put in all those new washrooms (for the women) when you had all those dirty old crummy washrooms for years. (S97)

Some women felt that female steelworkers were taking jobs from men who should enjoy preference in times of high unemployment. They explained that men were responsible for supporting families and needed the jobs at Hilton Works:

I do not think that women should work in Stelco. It is a man's world traditionally and they are the breadwinners. (S78)

Even employed wives often thought women should hold other types of employment rather than working as steelworkers:

...I think there's enough jobs for women...other kinds of jobs for women to do. (even single mothers). I still think there's jobs which a woman with 2 kids can do rather than work on a line. There are jobs at Westinghouse. It's a plant, a factory. They have assembly lines and I've worked on assembly lines in England. In the summer when I was over there I worked in a factory. But it was old women. It wasn't in a plant where one person was a man and the next person was a woman. It wasn't heavy work. If they want to work in a plant, there are plant jobs to be had. Now its hard. There's a great shortage of jobs. In a mill, there's a lot of heavy work that I don't think women need to work in a steel company. (S97)

Impact of Working at Stelco

LIKE ANY JOB, working at Stelco required that women juggle their paid employment with household and childcare responsibilities. Women with children found that their rotating shifts made arranging childcare much more difficult.

It's really tough for single women who have children to work shifts because of babysitting arrangements. (F3)

Shiftwork was very hard for me. I did not have a mother or any close relatives that I could work something out with the children... I did have access to day care but there is no 24-hour day care. (F21)

Women without small children varied in their perception of the impact of shiftwork just as men did. For some, the three rotating shifts were positive:

I have more time working shifts for everything else than if I work straight days. (F1)

For others shift work disrupted everything:

You are always exhausted and you don't have much of a social life with three shifts. (F14)

Alternating weekly between days, afternoons and evenings off, the Stelco women found themselves isolated from their friends who worked regular day jobs. Forming new friendships at work was difficult. They were unable to make new women friends at the works since the women were scattered throughout the plant. This left some women socially isolated because they found making friends among male coworkers impossible. A woman explained:

I had no one to communicate with except all these men and they are totally impossible to communicate with (F6).

Others tried to integrate into the male steelworker culture off the job, even though after-hours socializing with male co-workers was complicated. Circumstances kept reminding the women that while their presence on the shopfloor was becoming more acceptable, they were still violating existing norms of appropriate behaviour for women. For example, men who were comfortable with them on the job became uncomfortable when they met off the job. Many men did not want their wives to know they worked with women and denied their friendships with female coworkers when their wives were around.

He was very outgoing. He used to kibitz....At one dance he just absolutely about had a fit: 'Don't talk to me my wife is looking.' (F17)

There's guys down there who won't tell their wives that they work with women. Their wives don't know I exist. (F6)

[Ever] lurking underneath the acceptance and conviviality was the recognition that women were not able to socialize after work with their mates as easily or unselfconsciously as men:

I always made sure I took my own car, that is I had my own escape. (F21)

Sometimes I would go to the bar with the guys after the 11 p.m. shift. I just wanted to be one of the guys. There was one man, in particular, he always insisted on buying my drinks... Making a social life was hard. (F24)

All of the women insisted that their work at Stelco experiences changed them deeply and permanently. They unanimously affirmed that the work itself and their ability to do it increased their self-confidence.

When you put on your equipment and work at the back of the furnace you feel powerful. (F21)

I felt more independent all round. (F7)

It's give me a hell of a lot more confidence in myself. (F5)

The challenge of walking into an all-male workplace and succeeding despite the hostility gave them a sense of pride.

I knew I was a minority and I felt very proud about it. (F8)

It seems like at first it is a big challenge but once you get over it you feel proud of your accomplishments and it does a lot. (F11)

It has given me more confidence in myself, I think, because it's like you're being thrown into a pack of wolves and you have to learn to survive. So I think I've learned a lot working there. (F3)

For some, the experience taught them they could work like men:

It's one of the most powerful [experiences] I've ever been in contact with.... I had a real sense of pride doing some of those jobs. (F21)

and with men:

I've found out it was easy to work with men. (F1)

For others the experience was bitter and fostered distrust of men:

I don't trust men. And I'll tell you something. I doubt if I'll ever get married. The way those guys talk about their wives; it's incredible the things they do behind their backs. ...I'm finding that men are not what they are cracked up to be....I don't need this aggravation that I'm getting from these guys. (F6)

For a few, the political experience was profound:

It changed my whole life. And not because of Stelco, it is because of the union and the women I met down there. It changed everything. (F13)

Women in the Union

ALL LEVELS OF THE UNITED STEELWORKERS OF AMERICA formally supported the principle of fighting for the hiring women in nontraditional jobs. The "Women Back Into Stelco" campaign was initiated in part by, and certainly had the official

support of the union. However, the hiring of women had a number of unexpected consequences for the local union. First, it involved the union in a new and unusual form of negotiation with management. Unions, having learned that innovations introduced by management are rarely in labour's direct immediate interests, have generally supported economic reforms in the workplace while resisting innovation in the labour force and on the shop floor. In this instance, the innovation to restructure the labour force was proposed by potential workers outside the workplace; the union supported it and fought to make management accept the innovation. Secondly, the presence of women introduced new union structures (for example, the Women's Committee) and new bargaining issues (for example, nonsexist contract language and maternity leaves).

Like male steelworkers, many of the women hired had no interest in union activities:

I was at Stelco to make some money, to do my job and get out. I was not there to go gung-ho on all these committees. I have other things. I have a family at home; I have friends. (F8)

Yet, it was clear to the women involved most directly in the campaign that they would not have succeeded without the support of the local. For them, their whole experience of working at Stelco was tied up with involvement in the union and many of them remained involved after they were hired. Furthermore, once hired, the discrimination against women working at Stelco continued from both management and co-workers and the union provided the organizational base from which the women could continue their struggle. However, despite its formal support of their efforts, the Steelworkers' local itself, like most unions, was profoundly male-dominated so the women were engaged in a double effort both to work with the union in all its activities, and to struggle within the union to make it and its structures more sympathetic to women.

For those women experienced in the organizational forms of the women's liberation movement, a women's caucus within the local was absolutely necessary. Such a caucus offered a place where women could meet together to identify their own issues, discuss tactics and strategies for winning support for those issues, and to extend aid to each other. Many union members opposed such a caucus, arguing it was unnecessary or discriminatory in that it would exclude men.

Forming a women's group only separates you from the workers. (F8)

Eventually, a women's committee was formed and played an important role in pushing for women's rights both within the union and in the Steelworkers' relations with management. For the politically active women, the committee was vitally important and they gave a lot of time and energy to it.

It's a good idea to have a women's committee within a union, see things from a woman's point of view. (F7)

For woman less-committed to political struggle, the women's committee was less important; for some, it was to be avoided because of its radical orientation:

I stayed right away from them. I didn't want to be branded a troublemaker. (F5)

The fellow who approached me [to attend women's committee meetings] belonged to the communist party [actually, the Revolutionary Workers League], and so did one of the girls who was supposed to be the founder of this committee, so I wanted no part of that. At the time, I thought [Local] 1005 was good enough, to have a union... And I didn't want to get involved with people like that. (F14)

As time passed and the women increasingly emerged both in the union and on the floor as individuals and workers rather than just "women," many began to feel they had won acceptance and to think that the ideology of "men's work" was disappearing.

But most of them I think are used to me; they know that I can do the work (F3)

But during the crisis engendered by the 1981 strike, women realized just how tenaciously ideas about the sex/gender division of labour were held. The women's committee was asked by some of the men to make sandwiches for the picketers. For many of the women on that committee, the demand was enormously insulting:

When I first started at the strike, the guys asked us who was going to make the sandwiches. The women's committee make the sandwiches. ...those god damn sandwiches. You assholes! Boy, you never take us seriously, you guys....We have got to be recognized for something more than god damn sandwiches, right! ...we have worked in the mills together. I'm a 1005er; I am not a wife or a girlfriend. (F13)

The women met together and agreed that while making sandwiches and providing general picket-line support was a necessary part of the strike action, they did not want the women's committee to have full responsibility for that. They wanted the committee to play a more political role.

We don't mind making sandwiches, if the men want to come in and put shifts in, them too, eh, but we don't want to be noted for making sandwiches. So that is when we gave off this idea that we would have a march. It would be the women from Stelco and all the women who support 1005-ers, which would be their wives and their girlfriends. (F13)

They organized the march and it was an overwhelming success on all fronts. All sorts of women -- Stelco workers, wives and girlfriends of Stelco workers, and feminists who supported the general struggle marched together through the factory

district collecting money for the strike support fund from steel workers at other plants.

It was the biggest march ever in the city of Hamilton. Women came out with their kids in strollers or backpacks. It was incredible -- 1500 to 2000 women showed up at the gate. We went down through Dofasco and got the biggest collection from Dofasco ever in Canadian history. (F13)

The march ended with a rally where women from the Sudbury Wives Supporting the Strike Committee spoke to the crowd about their experiences and Madeleine Parent spoke too.⁵⁵

She gave a speech to end all speeches. It was just incredible. Women's involvement, wives and girlfriends, and even a woman that worked at Stelco... She didn't have a big voice, it was what she said that was big. (F13)

For the women steelworkers of the women's committee, this rally reflected the important lessons they had learned during their years at Stelco. If women are to succeed in eliminating the sex/gender division of labour, they have to fight an explicitly political struggle with the government, in the labour force, in the unions, in their homes and on the streets, and this struggle has to unite women and men from all those sectors.

After The Strike

STELCO'S MANAGEMENT strategies after the settlement of the strike profoundly undermined the capacity of those women to continue organizing together. After the strike, Stelco called back 10,730 people and issued layoff notices to 1,657 workers in December 1981.⁵⁶ In 1982, Stelco issued 3,276 additional layoffs of over thirteen weeks and issued another 1,685 in 1983. A pattern of short- and long-term layoffs and recalls continued during the next few years.

Women were especially hard hit because, as specified in the contract, vulnerability to a layoff depended largely on seniority. The systematic gender bias, which was built into Stelco hiring decisions, was reflected in seniority entitlements. Thus the reliance on seniority magnified already-existing gender-based divisions among workers, ensuring that women would be among the first to be laid off. In March 1982, two years after the successful hiring campaign, 97 per cent of the women hired had been laid off and their recall rights were due to expire in December 1982.

⁵⁵This experience of female Steelworkers on strike recalls that of other women doing strike work with predominantly male unions. For example, Meg Luxton, "From Ladies Auxiliaries to Wives Committees: Housewives and the Unions," in Meg Luxton, *et al.*, *Through the Kitchen Window*. Madeleine Parent is a well-known labour organizer.

⁵⁶Employment Adjustment Branch, Ministry of Labour, Province of Ontario.

In 1984, when women began to suspect that Stelco was systematically discriminating against rehiring women who had lost their recall rights, they organized a protest picket of the Stelco Tower. Whether this protest prompted Stelco to once again hire women is difficult to discern, but by summer 1984, Stelco had begun to call back women who had not worked there for three years. In summer 1984, a male steelworker estimated that 5 of the 200 people employed in the plate mill were women and 10 out of 400 in the strip mill were women.⁵⁷

The union executive had supported women's right to work in the plant, had eased the entry of women into their jobs after the Human Rights ruling and, in subsequent negotiations, had won the elimination of sexist language from the contract. But when the initial layoffs took place, the union's priority lay with the 12,000 men, not with the few hundred women. Neither the executive nor the male membership were prepared to push for a formula which would have eased the impact of the layoffs on the less-senior women.

Constructive seniority would have given the women who suffered from discrimination in the past an advantage by enforcing separate seniority lists to maintain the proportion of women in the plant.⁵⁸ This solution is not politically expedient because unions are, by and large, opposed to tampering with the seniority principle. Also, white male workers often are not prepared to sacrifice their jobs because of their employer's discriminatory hiring practices.⁵⁹

Inverse seniority is a more realistic alternative, as it gives senior men the option of a short-term layoff with job guarantees while a less-senior woman keep working.⁶⁰ This strategy is more likely to be acceptable to male-dominated unions as it leaves basically intact, although women with low seniority are given preference over men with low seniority. USWA local 1005 did not have any such plan, however, so that there was no protection for women.

A June 1984 telephone survey of 234 steelworkers who were laid off during the first eight months of 1982 provides information on the experience of twelve of the woman who had taken jobs at Hilton Works.⁶¹ They ranged in age from 24 to 55 with a median age of 29. Seven had accumulated only one year's seniority, while four had two years, and only one had three years' seniority. Their unemployment experience ranged from 3 to 34 months, with an average of 21 months.

Unemployment had serious ramifications for these woman and their families. Although all of them collected unemployment insurance benefits, 83 per cent

⁵⁷Interview M89.

⁵⁸Ivar Berg, Marcia Freedman, and Michael Freedman, *Managers and Work Reform: A Limited Engagement* (New York 1978).

⁵⁹Ben Fischer, "Seniority is Healthy," *Labour Law Journal*, 27, 8 (1976), 497-503.

⁶⁰Robert Lund, Dennis Burnstead, and Sheldon Friedman, "Inverse Seniority: Timely Answer to the Layoff Dilemma?," *Harvard Business Review*, 53, 5 (1975), 65-72.

⁶¹Out of 550 attempts, 234 people consented to a 15-minute interview. Only 36 people refused. The others were impossible to contact. This survey was funded in part by McMaster University.

dipped into their savings, 42 per cent went into debt, and 33 per cent received social assistance. They used numerous strategies to make ends meet: 58 per cent turned to other people for help; 33 per cent did their own repair work; 92 per cent stopped purchasing major items, 92 per cent cut back on entertainment, and 42 per cent cut down on groceries. Layoffs hit women harder than men. Women were 14 per cent more likely to go into debt, 17 per cent more likely to collect social assistance, 16 per cent more likely to cut back on big items, and 19 per cent more likely to cut back on entertainment.

Two and one half years after the first series of layoffs, six women were currently on callback at Hilton Works, one was unemployed, and five had found other employment. All five of the women at other jobs received lower pay. Two reported jobs demanding a lower skill-level, and none held jobs requiring a higher one. Only one worked in a unionized workplace.

The women who had returned to Stelco had only been back for one or two months (coinciding with the Stelco Tower rally). Four of the woman had waited 28 months for their first callback, one had taken two callbacks during that period, and one had taken three callbacks. Job insecurity for the women back at Hilton Works had not ended by summer 1984 because the summer relief positions lasted only until the fall. Most of the woman likely received layoff notices because the Hilton Works labour force dropped 1,200 by summer 1985. According to Bob Milbourne, Stelco general works manager, only about half a dozen women worked at Hilton Works in fall 1985 out of 10,000 employees. Because the union does not have access to records of the sex of people laid off, recalled, or hired, it is not possible to know how many woman are currently employed as production workers. But the numbers are miniscule.⁶²

In general, industrial work remains predominantly male work in the Hamilton-Wentworth area. In 1983, few women were found in a sampling of Hamilton-Wentworth industrial employers: DOFASCO (753 females/10,363 males), Inglis (178/528), International Harvester (1/933), National Steel Car (1/612), Reid Dominion Packaging (47/216), Slater Steel (0/619) and WABCO (32/137).⁶³ Little change had occurred at any of these industrial plants in the preceding five years.

Throughout the Hamilton-Wentworth area, women lost their nontraditional jobs during the recession. In the five-year period from January 1976 to January 1981, the number of female industrial employees rose 15.6 per cent, climbing steadily from 30,700 to a peak of 36,400. With the onset of the recession and the resulting layoffs, the number of female industrial workers dropped to 27,300 by January 1983 — a drop of 25 per cent in only two years.⁶⁴ After the recession,

⁶²Linda Hossie, "Stelco worker charges sexual harassment," *Globe and Mail*, 17 September 1985, 17.

⁶³Reid Csiernik, and Winsome Cain, *An Overview of the Impact of the Recession on Women in Hamilton-Wentworth* (Hamilton 1985).

⁶⁴Statistics Canada, *Employment, Earnings and Hours* (72-002) 1970-1983. Further data of this type is unavailable due to changes in reporting methods.

women comprised a smaller percentage of the industrial workforce than they had prior to 1976. The recession hit women hard, and further confined them in less-remunerative occupations.

Conclusions

IT IS DIFFICULT TO ASSESS the success of the Women Back Into Stelco Campaign. On the one hand, given the fact that so few women are currently employed in production, the campaign might be deemed unsuccessful. It appears most unlikely that the steel industry will undergo any significant upturn which would result in increased hirings. In fact, following the settlement of the 1991 strike of close to 6,000 workers, only 1,300 were recalled immediately. And even if there is increased hiring in future, there is no way of knowing whether women would be hired in proportion to their applications, nor whether more women would apply. It is certainly much easier to attain enduring affirmative-action goals in a period of rising employment opportunities.

On the other hand, the campaign did succeed on at least two counts: it won public recognition that the Steel Company of Canada had indeed practiced discriminatory hiring, and it forced Stelco to change its practice. The five women who launched the campaign received compensation and jobs, while others applied immediately afterward also got jobs which would have been denied them without the campaign. Furthermore, the women themselves had the satisfaction of doing "male jobs" — and doing them well. Their male coworkers experienced working alongside women and saw for themselves that women were able to do the work. These experiences may contribute to new appreciations about the capacities of women and may make the individuals involved more sympathetic to other efforts to change the existing sexual division of labour. A laid-off woman steelworker noted the importance of those lessons for the future of women in the labour force:

I still get staggered when I look at the whole picture. ...It gets me angry in a certain way. Those women who worked so hard. ...The next layer of women who because of this fight, now they can work there. Hey pal, take a look behind you. Read some books. If it wasn't for a lot of dedicated women, you wouldn't have a job here working for ten bucks an hour. I am kind of mad because someone has to keep carrying on. Someone has to keep telling them what happened. (F13)

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