Labour
Journal of Canadian Labour Studies
Le Travail
Revue d'Études Ouvrières Canadiennes

Waitresses in Action
Feminist Labour Protest in 1970s Ontario

Joan Sangster

Volume 92, Fall 2023

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1107943ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2023v92.003

See table of contents

Publisher(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (print)
1911-4842 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this article

Sangster, J. (2023). Waitresses in Action: Feminist Labour Protest in 1970s Ontario. *Labour / Le Travail*, *92*, 13–52. https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2023v92.003

Article abstract

In the 1970s, women in Toronto created the Waitresses Action Committee to protest the introduction of a "differential" or lower minimum wage for wait staff serving alcohol. Their campaign was part of their broader feminist critique of women's exploitation and the gendered and sexualized nature of waitressing. Influenced by their origins in the Wages for Housework campaign, they stressed the linkages between women's unpaid work in the home and the workplace. Their campaign eschewed worksite organizing for an occupational mobilization outside of the established unions; they used petitions, publicity, and alliances with sympathizers to try to stop the rollback in their wages. They were successful in mobilizing support but not in altering the government's decision. Nonetheless, their spirited campaign publicized new feminist perspectives on women's gendered and sexualized labour, and it contributed to the ongoing labour feminist project of enhancing working-class women's equality, dignity, and economic autonomy. An analysis of their mobilization also helps to enrich and complicate our understanding of labour and socialist feminism in this period.

ARTICLE

Waitresses in Action: Feminist Labour Protest in 1970s Ontario

Joan Sangster, Trent University

Abstract: In the 1970s, women in Toronto created the Waitresses Action Committee to protest the introduction of a "differential" or lower minimum wage for wait staff serving alcohol. Their campaign was part of their broader feminist critique of women's exploitation and the gendered and sexualized nature of waitressing. Influenced by their origins in the Wages for Housework campaign, they stressed the linkages between women's unpaid work in the home and the workplace. Their campaign eschewed worksite organizing for an occupational mobilization outside of the established unions; they used petitions, publicity, and alliances with sympathizers to try to stop the rollback in their wages. They were successful in mobilizing support but not in altering the government's decision. Nonetheless, their spirited campaign publicized new feminist perspectives on women's gendered and sexualized labour, and it contributed to the ongoing labour feminist project of enhancing working-class women's equality, dignity, and economic autonomy. An analysis of their mobilization also helps to enrich and complicate our understanding of labour and socialist feminism in this period.

Keywords: waitress organizing, second-wave feminism, Wages for Housework, minimum-wage laws

Résumé : Dans les années 1970, les femmes de Toronto ont créé le Waitresses Action Committee pour protester contre l'introduction d'un salaire minimum « différentiel » ou inférieur pour les serveurs servant de l'alcool. Leur campagne faisait partie de leur critique féministe plus large de l'exploitation des femmes et de la nature genrée et sexualisée de la serveuse. Influencées par leurs origines dans la campagne Wages for Housework, elles ont souligné les liens entre le travail non rémunéré des femmes à la maison et sur le lieu de travail. Leur campagne a évité l'organisation des chantiers pour une mobilisation professionnelle en dehors des syndicats établis; elles ont utilisé des pétitions, de la publicité et des alliances avec des sympathisants pour tenter d'arrêter la baisse de leurs salaires. Elles ont réussi à mobiliser un soutien, mais pas à modifier la décision du gouvernement. Néanmoins, leur campagne animée a fait connaître de nouvelles perspectives féministes sur le travail sexué et sexualisé des femmes, et elle a contribué au projet féministe syndical en cours visant à renforcer l'égalité, la dignité et l'autonomie économique des femmes de la classe ouvrière. L'analyse de

Joan Sangster, "Waitresses in Action: Feminist Labour Protest in 1970s Ontario," *Labour/Le Travail* 92 (Fall 2023): 13–52, https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2023v92.003.

leur mobilisation contribue également à enrichir et à compliquer notre compréhension du féminisme ouvrier et socialiste de cette période.

Mots clefs : syndicalisation des serveuses, féminisme de deuxième vague, salaire au travail ménager, lois sur le salaire minimum

Over the 20th century, waitressing became a well-established occupation for women, though they faced stringent prohibitions and regulations specifying if and where they could serve alcohol. When the last moralistic restrictions on their employment were removed in Ontario in the late 1960s and early 1970s, women had access to more bar and restaurant work, but they soon found their wages under attack.[1] In 1975, a Conservative government implemented a lower minimum wage specifically for servers of alcohol, often referred to as the "tip differential."

This minimum-wage rollback did not go unchallenged. The Waitresses Action Committee (WAC) was founded in 1976 to stop its implementation and, in the process, offered a searing critique of the treatment of women service workers, particularly waitresses working in bars and restaurants. With its origins in the local Wages for Housework (WFH) campaign, the WAC stressed the links between women's unpaid domestic labour and their feminized workforce labour: "serving," the committee wrote, is seen as "women's work" that comes "naturally"; waitressing was perceived to be an extension of women's private care for husbands, children, and friends and was thus undervalued, just as housework was.[2] While the WAC argued for a higher minimum for all servers, it concentrated its critique on the specific exploitation and oppression of waitresses. Though similar observations had been voiced in the history of waitress organizing, the WAC enhanced and sharpened feminist perspectives on women's gendered and sexualized service labour.

This article traces the WAC's origins in the Wages for Housework campaign, its understanding of women's oppression, organizing strategies, and the successes and weaknesses of the tip differential campaign. Excavating the legacy of the WAC reveals the necessity of posing questions about both the material context and the changing ideological forces that shape movements of resistance. The action committee's existence owed much to the creeping austerity of the late 1970s and efforts by business and governments to reign in labour gains and social spending. Its development also reflected new feminist theories about sexual oppression that were emerging in the late 1960s and the

1. For many years, women could not serve alcohol. In 1944, they could do so in "ladies and escorts" rooms of bars if they had a "medical certificate" showing they were "free of disease." Slowly, gender restrictions were removed, and by 1971, they had been abandoned. "Segregation in the Sault. It Was a Thing," *Sootoday*, 28 February 2021, https://www.sootoday.com/columns/remember-this/segretation-in-the-sault-it-was-a-thing-3465048.

2. "Brief on the Minimum Wage and a Tip Differential" (hereafter Brief), box 101, file 31, 3, Waitresses Action Committee fonds (WAC), University of Ottawa Archives (UOA).

https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2023v92.003

1970s, as well as a reinvigorated labour feminist project focused on advancing women's equality, dignity, and economic autonomy.[3]

The WAC's brief life revealed the promise and the pitfalls of organizing women workers in this period. After the mid-1960s, women's unionization increased significantly, as did their autonomous feminist organizing within unions; however, gains in the public sector outpaced those in expanding service, clerical, and personal work in the private sector.[4] Organizing waitresses was difficult: only about 10 per cent of all servers in Canada were unionized, and most waitresses were spread across small workplaces, doing shift and part-time labour, moving in and out of jobs.[5] A gender hierarchy within serving work consigned waitresses to lower-status venues and positions, with lower tips, leaving them especially reliant on a decent minimum wage and more vulnerable to employer pressure, harassment, and layoff. Their vulnerability was also related to expectations that they should "put out" extra emotional and sexual labour; depending on the serving environment, that could mean flirting or selling one's body and attitude – "always acting compliant, gracious, coy [as if you are] sweet, smiling and pleasant by nature," as *Smile Honey*, a WFH May Day pamphlet put it.[6]

The WAC provides a small but significant window into the history of Canadian feminism and labour activism as intertwined movements, sometimes operating in productive alliance but also in tension, even in conflict. Indeed, the WAC revealed a gap between some moribund trade unions and

3. Labour feminism is often associated with trade union and labour movement organizing, though it may overlap with socialist feminism, which had a more concerted anti-capitalist point of view. Linda Briskin, "Socialist Feminism: From the Standpoint of Practice," *Studies in Political Economy* 30 (Autumn 1989): 87–114; Joan Sangster, *Demanding Equality: One Hundred Years of Canadian Feminism* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2021), 238–339. Little historical writing on waitresses in Canada in this period exists, though there is a major US study: Dorothy Sue Cobble, *Dishing It Out; Waitresses and Their Unions in the Twentieth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991). Unions are mentioned briefly in Craig Heron, *Booze: A Distilled History* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2003), and there is far more contemporary work on the hospitality sector: for example, Steve Tufts, "Emerging Labour Strategies in Toronto's Hotel Sector: Toward a Spatial Circuit of Union Renewal," *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 39, 10 (2007): 2383–2404; Rachel Brickner and Meaghan Dalton, "Organizing Baristas in Halifax Cafes: Precarious Work and Gender and Class Identities," *Critical Sociology* 45, 4–5 (2017): 485–500.

4. Leah Vosko, *Temporary Work: The Gendered Rise of a Precarious Employment Relationship* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); Julie White, *Sisters and Solidarity: Women and Unions in Canada* (Toronto: Thompson Education, 1993); Linda Briskin and Patricia McDermott, eds., *Women Challenging Unions: Feminism, Democracy and Militancy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993).

5. Marjorie Cohen, "Below the Minimum," newspaper clipping, box 101, file 34, WAC, UOA.

6. Ellen Agger, "Smile Honey," in *Wages for Housework: Women Speak Out*, Toronto May Day Rally pamphlet, 1975, 25–27, accessed 27 October 2022, https://riseupfeministarchive.ca/activism/organizations/wages-for-housework/wagesforhousework-maydayrally-booklet-ocr/.

feminist organizing outside of them. Faced with some unions' indifference, the WAC sought support from feminists, sympathetic politicians, and social service, legal, labour, antipoverty, welfare rights, gay and lesbian, and immigrant groups. These endorsements were intended to bolster the committee's anti–tip differential campaign, but the WAC also sought political connections with groups similarly concerned with women's low-wage labour, poverty, and oppression, including the "compulsory heterosexuality" associated with the patriarchal, nuclear family.[7]

The WAC story also underscores the need for a critical perspective on the discourses that have defined feminist theory and activism. As feminist literary scholar Claire Hemmings shows, by the 1990s, one dominating narrative in feminist theoretical writing portrayed the 1970s – often referred to as a period of "second-wave" feminism – as a time of limited, narrow, "essentialist" feminist thought that was thankfully superseded by more progressive and inclusive feminist theories.[8] The WAC is one more challenge to this linear "progress" narrative. Labour historians have similarly challenged views of the 1970s as predominantly a time of retreat and retrenchment.[9]

Finally, the short-lived but vibrant WAC reminds us how important it is to study history's disappointments and lost causes. As E. P. Thompson suggested in a much-quoted passage, working-class history is enriched by an understanding of people and movements that failed, were replaced, or were overtaken by other movements. Locating fleeting labour and socialist feminist "histories from below" similarly offers insights into our understanding of capitalism and resistance to it.[10] Despite the WAC's transitory existence, it

7. Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs* 5, 4 (1980): 630–660. On Wages Due Lesbians, see Becki Ross, *The House That Jill Built: A Lesbian Nation in Formation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 53–54; Christina Rousseau, "Wages Due Lesbians: Visibility and Feminist Organizing in 1970s Canada," *Gender, Work & Organization* 22, 4 (2015): 364–374.

8. Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 38.

9. Lane Windham, *Knocking on Labor's Door: Union Organizing in the 1970s and the Roots of a New Economic Divide* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017). Canadian writing has often focused on women's organizing; see, for example, Meg Luxton, "Feminism as a Class Act: Working-Class Feminists and the Women's Movement in Canada," *Labour/Le Travail* 48 (2001): 53–88; Julia Smith, "An 'Entirely Different' Kind of Union: The Service, Office, and Retail Workers' Union of Canada (SORWUC), 1972–1986," *Labour/Le Travail* 73 (2015): 23–65.

10. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963), 13: "I am seeking to rescue the poor stockinger … from the enormous condescension of posterity." Jesse Lemisch coined the term "history from below," referring to writing histories of "common" or marginalized peoples, especially workers, the poor, the criminalized, racialized workers, and immigrants. This history drew on the sensibilities of E. P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, and Herbert Gutman. See also Marcus Rediker, "Jesse Lemisch and History from the Bottom Up," [1997], accessed 2 November 2022, https://www.marcusrediker.com/articles-

https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2023v92.003

nonetheless had an impact on feminist labour organizing, which was always a cumulative process of trial and error, of ideological insight and experimentation, of successes and failures, all of which inevitably left trace elements within the character of Canadian labour feminism.

Origins in Wages for Housework

The Waitresses Action Committee emerged from and remained linked to the Toronto WFH campaign, established in 1974, and its subgroup Wages Due Lesbians. Wages for Housework was associated primarily with a demand for wages for unpaid domestic labour, rather than workplace organizing; however, the WAC's existence underlines the range of WFH interests – beyond the demand for wages for housework – and the importance feminists attached to understanding the connection between paid and unpaid work. Without transforming both, they believed, emancipation was not possible.

Inspired initially by European activists Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James' 1972 pamphlet, *Women and the Subversion of the Community*, WFH quickly became a transnational phenomenon. Dalla Costa and James were seasoned activists in Italian and British-American Marxist working-class movements – James in American and British labour, anti-colonial, and anti-racist work, and Dalla Costa in the Italian autonomist Marxist tradition that stressed the self-activity of the working class, untethered from established unions.[11] Silvia Federici's writing on the expropriation of women's unpaid labour, including her positive characterization of lesbianism as a form of anti-capitalist "work refusal," also shaped the activism of WFH and Wages Due.[12] Together, these three women formed the WFH International Feminist Collective in 1972, with groups affiliating in Italy, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada.

---

and-opinions/jesse-lemisch-and-history-from-the-bottom-up/; interviews in MARHO, ed., *Visions of History* (New York: Pantheon, 1983).

11. Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1972); Selma James, *Sex, Race and Class: The Perspective of Winning: A Selection of Writings, 1952–2011* (Oakland: PM Press, 2021). On the Canadian WFH, see Louise Toupin, *Wages for Housework: A History of an International Feminist Movement, 1972–1977* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2018); Jacinthe Michaud, *Frontiers of Feminism: Movements and Influences in Quebec and Italy, 1968–80* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2021); Christina Rousseau, "Housework and Social Subversion: Wages, Housework and Feminist Activism in 1970s Italy and Canada," PhD diss., York University, 2016; Wendy McKeen, "The Wages for Housework Campaign: Its Contribution to Feminist Politics in the Area of Social Welfare in Canada," *Canadian Review of Social Policy / Revue canadienne de politique sociale* 33 (1994): 21–43.

12. Silvia Federici, "Capitalism and the Struggle against Sexual Work (1975)," in Silvia Federici and Arlen Austin, eds., *The New York Wages for Housework Committee, 1972–1976: History, Theory, and Documents* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2017), 144–146; Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (Berkeley: Autonomedia, 2004).

Each WFH group, as Montréal activist and historian Louise Toupin notes, had its own "unique alchemy."[13] Depending on the country and city, WFH also had subgroups, including Black Women's Wages for Housework and Wages Due Lesbians (often called Wages Due), and specific campaigns relating to social services, domestic workers, mothers on welfare, immigrant women, students, and sex workers. Transnational political discussions and the presence of Black Wages for Housework, former members claim, encouraged discussions of race and racism – which is not to say that fissures based on race were never apparent.[14] The movement also created a welcoming space for lesbian activism, which set it apart from some feminist groups where homophobia was expressed, and yet was also distinct from lesbian separatist organizing.[15]

Most WFH groups shared an analysis of women's domestic labour as invisible and undervalued, even though that labour produced "value" for capitalism. In the Italian autonomist tradition, housework was part of the larger "social factory" of capitalism, a form of unpaid reproductive work encompassing both material and non-material labours, the latter including emotion, sex, and affection.[16] Similar kinds of undervalued, invisible labour extended into the work that women did for pay. Domestic labour was also implicated in coercive heteronormativity; the heterosexual household was a form of social discipline that sanctified heterosexual coupling and denigrated lesbianism.

The 1970s provided an auspicious political environment for WFH. Even liberal feminist groups, including the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, were challenging the idea that homemaking was a natural and inevitable choice for women and arguing that domestic labour contributed to the gross national product (GNP) and gross domestic product. In 1977, the government-appointed Ontario Advisory Council on the Status of Women (ACSW) commissioned a study of "the housewife," which emphasized the contribution of domestic labour to the GNP and criticized the denigration and discrimination associated with homemaking.[17] Discussion about wages for housework

13. Toupin, *Wages for Housework*, 2.

14. Ellen Agger and Dorothy Kidd, conversation with the author, 24 March 2022. For an example of an antiracist article, see "Is Abortion the Right to Choose?," *Wages for Housework Campaign Bulletin* 2, 1 (Fall 1977).

15. Beth Capper and Arlen Austin, "Wages for Housework Means Wages against Heterosexuality: On the Archives of Black Women for Wages for Housework and Wages Due Lesbians," *GLQ: Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 24, 2 (2018): 445–446.

16. Sean Antaya, "The New Left at Work: Worker's Unity, the New Tendency and Rank-and-File Organizing in Windsor Ontario in the 1970s," *Labour/Le Travail* 85 (2020): 76; Gary Kinsman, "The Politics of Revolution: Learning from Autonomous Marxism," *Upping the Anti* 1 (2009), accessed 2 November 2022, https://uppingtheanti.org/journal/article/01-the-politics-of-revolution.

17. Penney Kome, "About Face: Towards a Positive Image of Occupation Housewife," commissioned by the Ontario Advisory Council on the Status of Women, July 1977, Ministry of Labour (ML), Ontario Status of Women file, RG 7-92-0-2905, Archives of Ontario (AO).

https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2023v92.003

also made it into the mainstream press, not least because WFH made a point of participating in public debate.[18]

On the left, feminist theoretical projects in the 1960s and 1970s were exploring connections between capitalism and patriarchy, including the political economy of domestic labour.[19] Canadian Marxist-feminist Margaret Benston kickstarted this theoretical debate in 1967 with her article "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation," which both unsettled and inspired left-wing movements trying to reconcile Marxism and feminism. A voluminous international debate about reproductive labour ensued, with Canadian writing playing a significant role.[20] Selma James' "galvanizing" 1973 tour of Canada promoting WFH had an impact, as one Montréal activist remembered: "theoretically, I thought the questions she raised were important; strategically, I did not agree with the Wages for Housework strategy."[21]

WFH was part of this international debate, though it developed its own distinct analysis of the gendered and racialized hierarchy of waged and unwaged labour that emerged with global capitalism. While women's work in the home was ideologically constructed as a "labour of love," WFH countered that it represented a system of gendered coercion and economic subservience intrinsic to the "capitalist wage bargain." Demanding money for housework (not housewives, they stressed) was subversive to capitalism and would develop women's power as they resisted their subordination. This campaign also challenged the foundations of heteronormativity such that "wages for housework" was simultaneously "wages *against* heterosexuality."[22]

WFH also emphasized the importance of grassroots, self-active, autonomous anti-capitalist organizing that was not limited to the employed working class.

18. "Panel Split on Pay for Wives," *Toronto Star* (hereafter TS), 15 February 1979. Occasionally, an economist's analysis supported the GNP argument: "Housewives Work Estimated to be Worth a Third of Canada's Gross National Product," *Globe and Mail* (hereafter GM), 26 September 1976. More often the press was unsympathetic: "Hot Stove League Wages Pay War," GM, 3 May 1975; "Women Plotting to Gain Wages for Housewives," TS, 16 October 1975.

19. Juliet Mitchell, *Women's Estate* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971); Zillah Eisenstein, *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979); Lydia Sargent, ed., *Women and Revolution: The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981).

20. Margaret Benston, "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation," *Monthly Review* 21, 4 (1969): 13–27; Bonnie Fox, ed., *Hidden in the Household: Women and Their Domestic Labour under Capitalism* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1980); Meg Luxton, *More Than a Labour of Love: Three Generations of Women's Work in the Home* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1980); Susan Ferguson, "Canadian Contributions to Social Reproduction Feminism, Race and Embodied Labour," *Race, Gender and Class* 15, 1–2 (2008): 42–57.

21. "Voice 1" interview in Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin, and Margaret McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change: The Contemporary Women's Movement in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), 69.

22. Quoted in Capper and Austin, "Wages for Housework," 449.

Nonetheless, the Toronto WFH situated itself within socialist "worker" traditions, symbolized by its choice of May Day for a rally at city hall in 1975. Over 200 attendees listened to WFH speeches, while members distributed leaflets in English as well as "immigrant" languages – Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese. WFH speakers challenged the distinction between women's private and public labour by pointing to women's shared oppression: "Eight of us spoke from different locations. As nurses. As waitresses. As office and factory workers. As welfare mothers. As lesbians. Each of us linking ourselves to one another" and connecting "wages for housework to the rest of the working class and to the self-activity of women internationally."[23] A WFH May Day event the following year made the point that "serving" labour, taught to women "from childhood," and "bound up with our identities," needed both recognition and payment.[24]

Other than Intercede, a later campaign organizing domestic workers, the waitresses' mobilization was the Toronto group's only foray into workplace organizing, and it lasted only two years, which is likely why it is mentioned but not explored in depth by other scholars.[25] Yet it was a significant example of WFH's understanding that they had to address women's paid as well as unpaid labour and the connections between the two.[26] The Toronto group's other initiatives also touched on women's low-wage labour, poverty, lack of social power, and the oppression occasioned by the patriarchal, heterosexual family.[27] It supported the preservation of Nellie's, a Toronto hostel for women, and led a campaign, "Hands Off Family Allowance," to protect the federal family allowance paid to mothers after it was frozen in 1976. A Ryerson Polytechnical Institute initiative, recalls WAC member Dorothy Kidd, drew together white and racialized students, including single mothers, who fought for better funding for women's continuing education. The Toronto WFH group sponsored speakers who addressed "hookers and housewives" *as* workers and staged a protest against the rising number of "rapes which begin at home" and were never reported as they were committed by a "father, brother, uncle or husband."[28] A key legacy of WFH was the Lesbian Mothers' Defence Fund,

23. "May Day in Toronto," Wages for Housework papers (WFH), box 101, file 1, UOA.

24. Agger speech at Toronto Rally, 11 March 1976, typescript, box 101, file 80, WFH, UOA.

25. The other campaign involving paid serving labour was the domestic workers campaign; see "INTERCEDE for the Rights of Domestic Workers, Caregivers, and Newcomers," n.d., *Rise Up: A Digital Archive of Feminist Activism*, accessed 31 October 2022, https://riseupfeministarchive.ca/activism/organizations/intercede-for-the-rights-of-domestic-workers-caregivers-and-newcomers/?highlight=Intercede. For mention of the WAC, see Toupin, *Wages for Housework*, 164–168.

26. Dorothy Kidd, conversation with the author, 24 March 2022.

27. Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality." On Wages Due, see also Ross, *House That Jill Built*, 53–54; Rousseau, "Wages Due Lesbians."

28. "Women's Groups Protest Rise in Number of Attacks," *TS*, 15 November 1977.

https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2023v92.003

which provided aid to lesbians fighting legal battles for child custody, at a time when courts were largely unsympathetic to their claims.[29]

Some feminist circles were open to the ideas promoted by WFH. An editorial in *The Other Woman*, a feminist newspaper sympathetic to lesbian organizing, reminded its readers that housework was literally everything women did to serve men: "housework is getting coffee for your boss, making love, grocery shopping, going to the movies, serving others, changing your baby's shitty diaper, looking attractive, being a 'mother' to a coop house." Echoing a stance taken by Selma James, the editorial added, "it is not the money [of a household wage] itself which will give women power, but the struggle to get the wage."[30] A swift response by WFH clarified its point of view and offered a different definition of lesbianism, but it was not hostile. Whether women were fighting for welfare for single moms or control of their bodies, the letter noted, they were engaging in anti-capitalist struggles, since "money is power" and capitalism "harnesses our bodies, our time, our very personalities" for profit.[31]

Other feminists were not sympathetic. Grappling with women's domestic labour may have been in the political air, but WFH's call for a wage for housework was rejected by many feminists in Canada and beyond, and some claimed WFH was dogmatically "obstructionist" in its organizing style.[32] Feminist antipathy reflected important material and ideological changes in women's lives at the time. More and more women, especially those with families, were working for wages: feminists thus prioritized equality in the labour force and challenged the popular image of domesticity as the primary, appropriate, and desired role of all mothers.[33] Many feminists identified this hegemonic, moralizing opinion as a problem, as did some progressive unions, which understood that this ideological construction of domestic femininity propped up an outdated male breadwinner ideal.[34]

29. See, for example, "Hands Off Family Allowance," *Wages for Housework Bulletin*, 1, 1 (1976); Ellen Agger and David Gibson, "Lesbians Fight to Keep Kids," *Body Politic*, 29 (1976–77): 3. On custody, see Sharon Dale Stone, "Lesbian Mothers Organizing," in Stone, ed., *Lesbians in Canada* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1990), 198–208; Katharine Arnup, "'Mothers Just Like Others': Lesbians, Divorce, and Child Custody in Canada," *Canadian Journal* of *Women and the Law* 3, 1 (1989): 18–32.

30. "Wages for Housework: Strike While the Iron Is Hot," *The Other Woman* (TOW), December 1976.

31. "Wages for Housework Committee Responds to Editor," TOW, March 1976.

32. Kay Macpherson, *When in Doubt, Do Both: The Times of My Life* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 163–164.

33. In 1976, for instance, 75 per cent of Canadians polled believed women with children belonged "in the home." Meg Luxton, "Familiar Constraints: The Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women and the Challenge of Unpaid Work in the Home," *Labour/Le Travail* 89 (Spring 2022): 172.

34. Joan Sangster, *Transforming Labour: Women and Work in Postwar Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), chap. 7. All three Québec trade union federations

Wages for housework was perceived as a retrogressive demand, returning or "chaining" women to the home, perpetuating their oppression. Opponents could point to Selma James' *own* writing, which asserted that women's integration into the labour force was not a viable path to emancipation.[35] Black and socialist feminists had specific critiques: in the latter case, they emphasized the need to socialize, not "privatize," work associated with domestic labour.[36] Feminist opponents raised a slew of objections: Who would pay? If the state, would women be beholden to state surveillance? Would this discourage collective social services? And so on. When the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) refused membership to WFH in 1979 because their platforms clashed, the ensuing debate was heated.[37]

This contentious climate is important to the story of the WAC as it struggled to widen its political support. A singular focus on WFH's demand for wages for housework, however, risks overshadowing other elements of its analysis. WFH's insights about the (hetero)sexualized demands of women's service work, its critique of women's low wages within capitalism, and its emphasis on the importance of organizing women, from the ground up, to secure recognition for their "invisible" work all shaped the waitress campaign. Moreover, former participants recall that the WAC was not completely siloed. Its members were part of left-wing and feminist "networks" of the time, based on multiple points of intersection: progressive acquaintances, cooperative living arrangements, friends from "free" high schools in Toronto, socialist parties, the New Democratic Party (NDP), and labour movement campaigns.[38] The growing number of lesbian community spaces (bookstores, dances, etc.) was also important to Wages Due.[39] This plethora of political networks was characteristic of 1970s feminist organizing. "Women's liberation" was increasingly channelled into multiple, even divergent, campaigns involving political choices and conflicts; nevertheless, personal and political histories remained significant threads connecting feminist organizing.

(Fédération des travailleurs du Québec, Confédération des syndicats nationaux, and Centre de l'enseignement du Québec) opposed wages for housework. See Toupin, *Wages for Housework*, 4.

35. Selma James, "Women, the Unions and Work, or What Is Not to Be Done," in *Sex, Race and Class*, 60–76.

36. The critique by Black women was evident in the United States and United Kingdom. See, for example, Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (New York: Random House, 1983), 222–244.

37. Toupin, *Wages for Housework*, 4; Macpherson, *When in Doubt*. Macpherson was president of NAC when WFH applied for membership. For a critical view of NAC's decision, see Margaret Hillyard Little, "'An Unexpectedly Significant Finding': Poverty and the Royal Commission on the Status of Women," *Labour/Le Travail* 89 (Spring 2022): 203–214.

38. Agger and Kidd conversation.

39. Agger and Kidd conversation; Ross, *House That Jill Built*; Ann Enke, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2023v92.003

Aside from these networks, the Toronto WAC could count on endorsements from WFH chapters abroad and strong support from the local WFH group: they discussed their organizing with other WFH members, who offered feedback based on their understandings of women's needs and oppression. When the WAC reached out to waitresses, often responding to their inquiries, it often enclosed copies of the *Wages for Housework Campaign Bulletin*, hoping to popularize the WFH perspective. Both WFH and the WAC, it explained, wanted the same thing: "more money in women's hands."[40] Yet the WAC's organizing notes show it had to overcome the anxiety of potential allies concerning its ties to WFH. One textile union labour organizer urged the action committee to secure more widespread waitress support to give itself more "credibility," showing it went "beyond" the WFH members who made up the core of the organization; other minutes note that certain newspapers and potential supporters stated firmly that they "did not want to hear about the [WFH] campaign."[41]

The Political Economy Context: Business Lobbies for a Differential

The WAC originally emerged in response to the tip differential, but this issue was related to economic shifts in the mid to late 1970s. In Ontario, there had been ongoing debate between political parties about the appropriate minimum wage, which was a pressing issue as a result of recession, high inflation, lagging wages, and the contentious federal wage and price controls instituted in 1976 and opposed by trade unions and the NDP. Inflation in the mid-1970s reached a whopping 10 to 11 per cent; however, the federal controls led to wages falling far more than prices, despite strikes of organized workers to keep pace with the cost of living. High unemployment rates of 6 to 8 per cent added to economic uncertainty and the sense of working-class grievance that only workers were paying the price for inflation. Unionized workers could at least argue about raises with the federal Anti-Inflation Board; precarious workers like waitresses were far more vulnerable.[42]

The Conservative government in Ontario, led by Bill Davis, was also moving toward a "market-oriented austerity" agenda.[43] An anti-cutbacks movement emerged in response, formed from an array of social movements objecting to

40. Agger, draft letter to *Northern Woman*, box 101, file 34, WAC, UOA.

41. Log, box 101, file 30, WAC (hereafter Log), UOA.

42. Paul Staudohar, "Effects of Wage and Price Controls," *Relations industrielles/Industrial Relations* 34, 4 (1979): 688; Sylvia Ostry, Gerard Dion, and Paul Weiler, "Industrial Relations after Wage and Price Control: Panel Discussion / Le decontrole et les relations industrielles: Table ronde," *Canadian Public Policy/Analyse de Politiques* 4, 4 (1978): 421–442; Leo Panitch and Donald Swartz, *From Consent to Coercion: The Assault on Trade Union Freedoms*, 3rd ed. (Aurora, ON: Garamond, 2003).

43. Wendy McKeen, "Work Incentives for 'Welfare Mothers' in 1970s Ontario: Screening Out the Political," *Labour/Le Travail* 85 (Spring 2020): 91–126.

clawbacks in social services, welfare, and education. Many WFH campaigns in the 1970s, remembers Judith Ramirez, "invariably" arose from governments' increasing attacks on women's economic security and prospects.[44] WFH activists responded with defensive campaigns that simultaneously exposed the underlying, systemic oppression they believed framed women's poverty and lack of power.

In March 1976, a slight increase in the Ontario minimum wage to $2.65 was accompanied by a freeze on the minimum wage for those serving alcohol at $2.50. This fifteen-cent differential, in essence a rollback, was a concession to lobbyists like the Canadian Restaurant Association, which insisted publicly it could "not afford [any] minimum wage rate" hike or restaurants would "price themselves out of the business."[45] This cabinet decision had been made in late 1975, following entreaties from Tourism Ontario, an umbrella lobby for restaurants, hotels, and resorts. That group's internal bulletin crowed that the government's adoption of "their" policy was proof they were being "heard" by the government.[46]

Servers in restaurants and bars were alarmed when Claude Bennett, Minister of Industry and Tourism, publicly announced at an Ontario Motel Association meeting in November 1976 that the government was considering further lowering the minimum wage for servers, widening the differential, and even extending it to other hospitality service workers. The WAC was formed in response and immediately pressed the government for clarification. The action committee's concern that a lower minimum for waitresses would become policy by stealth was warranted: not only was the government seen to be a mouthpiece for business, but minimum wages were administrative, regulatory decisions. No legislation was needed.

Bennett's announcement, said the WAC, was a sop to the tourism industry's "crying about the loss of profits."[47] This was quite right. Tourism Ontario's brief to the government insisted the industry was in crisis, due in part to competition from the United States. Unless the minimum was frozen, businesses would suffer, even fold, leaving people unemployed. Serving work, the lobby group argued, was "low profitability" labour that left small margins between costs and profits; other hospitality workers, such as valets and chambermaids, also in this category, should be included in the tip differential. For these employers, the "very concept of the minimum wage" was "open to question,"

44. Judith Ramirez, conversation with the author, 5 April 2022.

45. "We Can't Afford Any Increase, Restaurants Say," *TS*, 13 March 1976; "Basic Wage Held Down for Those Serving Drinks," *TS*, 17 March 1976.

46. A Tourism Ontario bulletin to members, 9 March 1977, made clear "*we* obtained the tip differential" [emphasis mine]. "Policy, Employment Standards, Minimum Wage, 1977–78," file, ML, RG 7-1, AO.

47. Ellen Agger, "Ill-Paid Waitresses Can't Afford to Sit Still, Action Group Says," *GM*, 23 March 1977.

https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2023v92.003

as were various rights such as paid statutory holidays and benefits, which they also wanted abrogated.[48] Claiming competition blues, they pointed to legal jurisdictions, such as Québec, which already had a tip differential for waiters and waitresses.

Internal disagreement between Ontario government ministries soon became clear. The Minister of Labour, Bette Stephenson, presented research to cabinet from her policy experts recommending slightly larger increases in the minimum wage without a widened differential, but ministers from Tourism and Industry, Food and Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Treasury Board parroted the business lobby's call for a brake on wage increases. Two ministers tried to dissuade Stephenson by claiming a higher minimum would create an "inflationary" effect on wages (disproved by the Ministry of Labour's research) and would make it difficult to find cheap, temporary harvest labour. In the vanguard of neoliberal ideology, treasurer Darcy McKeough opposed all minimum-wage increases, urging Stephenson in late 1977 to "stand firm," despite government statistics showing that lower-wage workers were falling badly behind.[49] Frank Miller, Minister of Natural Resources, had no shame in sending a lobby letter to Stephenson on his ministry's letterhead, complaining that he had told her multiple times about the profitability "problems" and "unfairness of some of the rules" in tourism based on "his lodges" that he ran in northern Ontario.[50] Papering over internal government differences, Stephenson resorted to an evasive, bureaucratic-speak announcement that "inter-ministerial discussions" were underway.[51]

While NDP members of the legislature castigated the Minister of Labour for constantly studying the minimum wage but never delivering a better one, there was an element of truth to these "studying" claims. Labour Ministry policy researchers were embroiled in internal discussions, including which economists should assess the minimum wage, how to measure its impact, and whether to have a public inquiry. Still, their policy recommendations outlined rationales for raising the minimum wage gradually, taking inflation into account, and using the average hourly wage in manufacturing as a benchmark: the minimum should not fall below 42 per cent of this average. They were hardly radicals. The minimum wage, they reasoned, was not meant just to prevent exploitation but also to keep business competition fair, to

48. "Brief and Submissions" file, Minister's Papers, ML, RG 7-1, container B 214291, AO.

49. Darcy McKeough to Bette Stephenson, 20 September 1977, Employment Standards Branch Policy file, 1977–78, ML 7-1, box 214273, AO.

50. Frank Miller to Bette Stephenson, 25 April 1977, "Minimum Wage Brief and Submissions" file, ML 7-1, box 214291, AO.

51. Margaret Birch to Bette Stephenson and Claude Bennett, 15 September 1977; Margaret Birch to Lynne Gordon, chair of OSWC, 1 October 1977 (Birch responding to an inquiry from the ACSW, which passed a motion that the differential not be widened further), both in "Minimum Wage Tip Differential" file, box 214294, ML 7-1, AO.

allow workers to live at "subsistence" levels, and to keep wages above welfare rates so low-wage earners would stay in the workforce. They pointed out that minimum wages usually "followed" but never led price increases and that the current "deteriorating" rates were diminishing workers' purchasing power, leaving more families below the poverty line.

Ministry of Labour civil servants tried to use hard data to make their case for more substantial minimum-wage raises. First, they mentioned that the fifteen-cent differential was devised quite "arbitrarily" since there was no existing research on tip amounts to measure its impact.[52] Second, an increased minimum would provide tangible benefits to business: less staff turnover, an incentive for workers to avoid welfare, more money circulating in the economy, and so on. While they conceded that increases would impact the tourism industry more than others, their research contradicted Tourism Ontario's claims that wages were destroying profitability. A higher minimum wage would only add about 2 per cent to the total operating costs for these businesses, and other costs, such as rising gas prices, were actually at the heart of their economic problems.[53] Their argument did not convince the cabinet. When the government finally raised the minimum wage, it was still lower than the Ministry of Labour's very modest suggestions, and cabinet also ignored the ministry's recommendation on the differential. Clearly, Miller and McKeough were more persuasive, representing Ontario's neoliberal future.[54]

Waitresses Mobilize

Claude Bennett's public claim, echoing business, that service workers should accept "lower" wages because "huge sums" of money were accrued in tips was the spark that created the WAC.[55] Waitresses were incensed; this false picture of their income simply spurred on their organizing. A core group of about eleven WFH activists and supporters, many with waitressing experience, established the WAC to counter business and government plans, though their aim was also much broader: to nurture feminist resistance to women's oppression originating in the link between their unpaid domestic labour and undervalued paid labour.

Recent changes in the gender makeup of the waitress workforce made this issue especially prescient. Past prohibitions on hiring women to serve alcohol

52. "Policy, Employment Standards, Minimum Wage, 1977–78" file, box 214294, ML 7-1 AO.

53. These figures are from "Submission to Cabinet, 21 July 1977," "Policy, Employment Standards, Minimum Wage, 1977–78" file, box 214294, ML 7-1 AO. Even the pro-business *Globe and Mail* suggested at the time that other economic factors, such as gas prices, were at the root of tourism's economic problems. See "Tipping the Scales," *GM*, 29 November 1976.

54. These discussions were extensive. Much of it is found in the file "Policy, Employment Standards, Minimum Wage, 1977–78" file, AO.

55. "We Can't Survive on a Basic Wage, Hotel Workers Say," *TS*, 24 November 1976.

https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2023v92.003

The WAC argued that many women were "lunch counter" servers with lower tips and wages.
Courtesy of Toronto Public Library, Toronto Star Photograph Archive, photographer Doug Griffin.

had been recently swept away; by the 1970s, not only were more women being hired in bars, but more restaurants had liquor licences. Despite these changes, most waitresses still worked in smaller, less expensive family- or proprietor-owned bars and restaurants. While men laboured in "high-end venues," women were "lunch counter" servers.[56] Unionization was very limited, so few women enjoyed even the most basic protections of a collective agreement. Many women had no choice but to accept irregular hours or part-time work, and they were required to "tip out" to others before taking their share; these "kickbacks," as the WAC called them, were identified as another subsidy to employers who did not pay everyone a decent wage.

Moreover, as the WAC constantly emphasized, women had to "hustle" to make tips, using their sexuality or perhaps adopting a maternal pose, selling themselves in ways male waiters did not.[57] Women were pressed to "show cleavage … smile a lot and use sexual innuendo … act coy and alluring" and to accept physical advances and verbal abuse from men without complaining.[58] The tip differential would intensify pressure to perform this extra

56. Brief, UOA. This was a persistent issue in the workforce long after the 1970s; see Elaine J. Hall, "Waitering/Waitressing: Engendering the Work of Table Servers," *Gender and Society* 7, 3 (1993): 329–346.

57. Brief, UOA.

58. "No Raise Called Blow to Waitresses' Wages," *GM*, 22 February 1978.

emotional and sexual labour for bigger tips, in order to compensate for the lower minimum wage.

There were other opponents to the differential, including some unions and the NDP, but the WAC took the initiative, creating a spirited, public protest. One factor behind the committee's success in making the differential into a political issue was the feminist commitment of the small group of WFH and Wages Due activists involved in the WAC, particularly Ellen Agger, who did much of the correspondence and public speaking. Agger's organizing ingenuity and articulate promotion of the waitresses' cause was invaluable, though others were involved in brief writing and speaking. Twenty-four at the time, Agger worked as a waitress in 1973 and 1975 in jobs characterized by arduous labour and sexism. It was "brutal" on one's feet, she remembers, and working the lunch hour entailed intense time pressure to deliver meals, yet small tips for lower-priced orders. At all five workplaces, she "got into trouble" for objecting to bad conditions. At one, she took the owner to small claims court (and won) for their illegal paycheque deductions for food; in many others, she experienced routine sexual harassment from both customers and other staff that women were expected to tolerate. One cook carved penises out of carrots to place in the waitresses' gathering space; male customers in another restaurant/bar ran their fingers down the buttons on her required, revealing "costume" and made lewd comments about her breasts. In the higher-end Royal York hotel, where the part-time waitresses were assigned to the lower-price Gazebo Room and the waiters to the higher-end Imperial Room, she quit rather than wear the required high heels.[59]

In 1976, Agger worked as a youth employment counsellor on a short-term, government-funded Opportunities for Youth project. In this job, she still had time to do WAC organizational work and could also access a mimeograph machine, a basic technological tool for organizing at the time.[60] Her waitressing experience gave her the ability to speak meaningfully about work conditions, while her current position protected her from being fired from a waitressing job – a common employer response to servers who complained. A graduate of a Toronto free school, she already had grassroots political experience through Wages Due and the family allowance campaign; Aggers and fellow WAC member Dorothy Kidd had gone door to door in Regent Park with the WFH petition. At a 1976 rally protesting budget cuts, Agger spoke about how social service cuts differentially hurt lesbians. In a telling comment on

59. Ellen Agger, conversation with the author, 24 March 2022. For a description of the small claims incident, see Brief, UOA, appendix, 7.

60. Both Kidd and Agger noted in conversation that the importance of Opportunities for Youth (OFY) and Local Initiatives Projects (LIP) for youth employment should not be underestimated; these programs offered wages, plus exposure and training in political organizing and networking.

https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2023v92.003

trade unions, she suggested that, after women had done "unpaid" work for unions for years, it was now time for unions to support lesbian rights.[61]

The strategies developed by the WAC were shaped by their astute analysis of the structural limitations on reaching a scattered and transient workforce that included many women who worked part time.[62] A substantial group of "older" women, in their 30s and 40s, also had family responsibilities.[63] The labour law regime, based on union locals representing a workplace or a group within a workplace, was not conducive to organizing; however, the WAC eschewed worksite organization for an occupational mobilization outside of the existing union structures. One problem, the WAC conceded in a letter to a Kingston waitress, was that waitressing was often a "filler" job for women between other jobs or in hard times, so "once a waitress, you are not always a waitress." Even if women continued to do the job, they might move from one locale to another. Recognizing "how dangerous and difficult" it was to organize at the workplace, as well as women's reluctance or inability to attend meetings that clashed with child care, the WAC developed alternative tactics: petitions, publicity, lobbying, and alliances with politicians, feminists, and a very wide array of social movements.[64] "We never intended to make a big membership drive," Agger wrote to a waitress in Waterloo near the end of the campaign; the WAC's tactics reflected "who we are in ways that would reflect our own lack of time."[65]

The small WFH and WAC instigating group tried to locate grassroots waitress supporters and raise public awareness, as well as secure endorsements from organizations to emphasize the breadth and interconnections of this workplace issue. They did not focus only on obvious allies; they approached Lynne Gordon, head of the ACSW, and Laura Sabia, a Tory, as well as more progressive groups. By 1977, the WAC's list of supporters protesting the differential included legal reform groups and immigrant, feminist, lesbian, antipoverty, educational, social service, and labour organizations; they accrued 33 official endorsements. Given the WAC's small numbers, this outreach was nothing short of astounding.[66]

61. Ellen Agger, Wages Due Collective, speech at Toronto Rally, 11 March 1976, box 101, file 33, WAC, UOA.

62. Similar hurdles to collective protest were shared by other women labouring across many workplaces in the service economy. See, for example, Becki Ross, "Troublemakers in Tassels and G-Strings: Striptease Dancers and the Union Question in Vancouver, 1965–80," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 43, 3 (2006): 307–322.

63. The transience of waitressing makes it difficult to take census numbers as an absolute, but the age span of women servers listed in the census reinforced this view: many were young women, but there were substantial numbers of women in their 30s and 40s. Canada, 1971 Census, vol. III, part 2, table 8.

64. Agger to Rachel Holtham, 16 November 1977, box 101, file 34, WAC, UOA.

65. Agger to Virginia Medley, 29 March 1978, box 101, file 34, WAC, UOA.

66. Endorsement list, n.d., box 101, file 30, WAC, UOA.

Most responses to the WAC indicated a shared concern about the ongoing economic fallout of cuts, inflation, and declining wages in women's lives. The combined class and feminist message of the WAC appealed; a local antipoverty group offered its immediate support, promising to write to the government and noting that the issue spoke to "sole support moms," likely because some women with dependents moved in and out of waitressing to try to make ends meet.[67] The class message was less appealing to some groups, including the politically cautious Ontario ACSW; it took a long time to create a lukewarm resolution of support. If an organization refused to endorse, as did CHAT (Community Homophile Association of Toronto), Agger followed up with further persuasion. If she encountered politicians gladhanding in public spaces, as she did with both NDP leader Stephen Lewis and Conservative Larry Grossman at the Bathurst Street United Church festival in the summer of 1977, she queried them on their views on the differential and waitresses' wages.

The WAC worked the phones to raise public awareness, but it also circulated its brief, originally written for the provincial Department of Labour and Department of Industry and Tourism early in 1977. Any inquiry the committee got, out went the brief and the petition, titled "Money for Waitresses Is Money for All Women." The brief was a tightly organized, well-argued, and convincing document that earned the WAC respect. A seven-page analysis, it covered a history of the tip differential, including the strong business lobby behind it, and the biased nature of that lobby's selective comparative statistics drawn from other regions and the United States. It also exposed a secretive provincial government unwilling to publicly acknowledge what it was planning vis-à-vis the minimum wage.

The brief held that the tipping system should not be considered a wage but rather a payment for service that might or *might not* be paid, and it noted that tips subsidized employers, not workers, since they allowed owners to pay low wages – something Ministry of Labour researchers privately said too. Those hurt most by a growing differential, it showed, were those at the bottom of the workplace hierarchy in hospitality – women, sole support mothers, immigrants. Most waitresses made close to (if not only) the minimum wage; a statistical appendix showed the wage gap between male and female workers in general and food servers in particular. Women and men were rewarded differently for their work, in part because of the gendered hierarchy of service labour, with men working in more prestigious locales, but wage differences were still striking. Although women made up the majority of the workforce, they earned at least a third less than men in the same job.[68] Waitresses who

67. "Endorsing groups log," n.d., box 101, file 31, WAC, UOA.

68. A 1971 Ontario government publication showed women as 70 per cent of this occupational group; it listed the median income for male waiters as $4,431 and for women waitresses as $2,997. Cohen, "Below the Minimum."

https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2023v92.003

had to support dependents, the WAC brief showed, were poised close to or below the poverty line.

Agger quoted waitresses interviewed in the press who pointed out that their wages were supporting families and that, even with tips, the money they earned "barely kept the wolves from the door."[69] The brief asked why waitressing was deemed a (low) minimum-wage job, and here, the views of WFH were clear: serving was considered women's work that required no training, as it was an extension of their work in the home. Many women, moreover, took up waitressing as their only alternative to "wagelessness in the home." Just as women in the home provide "cheap labour," so did women and immigrants in serving jobs, with the latter always "with the gun of poverty to their heads."[70]

WAC material sometimes grouped women alongside other oppressed groups in the workforce, such as "immigrants, Native peoples, Blacks."[71] A more extensive analysis of race and serving employment was not part of this campaign. Indeed, the WAC usually used the category of "immigrant" rather than identifying "race" to denote those in the hospitality industry who were lower paid and vulnerable – a reflection of contemporary immigration and work patterns. At the time, Indigenous, Black, and people of Asian descent were a small, though growing, part of Toronto's working population. The vast majority of the working class were Canadian-born and European/British immigrants who claimed British, French, and European "ethnicity," particularly in terms of language and culture.[72]

Restaurant work was a reflection of pre– and post–World War II working-class immigration from Britain and Europe; indeed, this is one reason the WAC sought out endorsements from immigrant organizations such as Women Working with Immigrant Women. According to the census, food and beverage servers were predominantly white, with the majority born in Canada. Still, immigrants from Europe made up an important part of the workforce, and it was these workers who were perceived to be more vulnerable; undoubtedly, some were "racialized" southern and eastern European immigrants. Discrimination likely also played a role in keeping the workforce white, due to

69. "We Can't Survive."

70. Brief, UOA.

71. No author, draft of letter to newspaper, 21 September 1977, box 101, file 34, WAC, UOA.

72. On population demographics, see Canada, Census of Canada, 1971, vol. 1: 3, table 4, 6. See also Anne Milan and Kelly Tran, "Blacks in Canada: A History," *Canadian Social Trends*, Statistics Canada – Catalogue No. 11-008 (Spring 2004); Michael Ornstein, *Ethno-Racial Groups in Toronto, 1971–2001: A Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile* (Toronto: York University Institute of Social Research, 2006). Summary of statistics in Canada, Census of 1971, vol. 3, tables 4, 5. Note that the 1971 census definition of "ethnicity" is not ours today: those of European birth or descent typically listed "German, Ukrainian, Italian," etc., as their ethnicity, though the majority of food and beverage workers cited "British and French." The census counted "Asiatics and Native Indians" in this occupational category but not those we would designate as Black, whether Canadian born or immigrant.

employers' preference for white applicants. One waitress in contact with the WAC told them that in 1969, there were two Black women in Toronto serving alcohol, and she was one of them.[73]

The brief's extensive list of the unacknowledged, unpaid "domestic" labour of waitresses showed the influence of WFH, though it echoed other feminists' emerging critiques of the sexualized and gendered job performance required of women, particularly in feminized white-collar and service jobs.[74] If earning tips helped to "keep the wolves from the door," it also pressed women into certain emotional and sexual roles that were required to get *any* tip. Getting and keeping the job meant spending time and money on your appearance, body work that was then displayed in humiliating ways for management's approval. In a *Branching Out* article, Agger described having to "parade" her body in interviews and, once on the job, the pressure to exhibit flirty "sexual behaviour," always "acting heterosexual."[75] Constantly suppressing one's anger at being belittled, infantilized as a "girl," and harassed entailed extra emotional labour too.[76]

Waitresses were also forced to do extra jobs such as cleaning washrooms, to labour before and after their paid shift doing set-up and cleanup, and to sacrifice break time because of understaffing – what today we would call wage theft. They were required to pay for "walkouts" who skipped out on their bills, and they were substituted for other jobs such as cashiers. Because they were held accountable for illegal alcohol service to underage customers, they could easily lose their jobs. As Agger recalls, this also meant they were supposed to "cut off drunks," a daunting if not dangerous task for women dealing with angry men.[77] Tipping out might mean contributing a portion of their tips to better-paid maître d'hotels, yet waitresses found it difficult to protest a practice that was not part of the official wage system.

73. "Talk with Elizabeth" notes, December 1976, box 101, file 30, WAC, UOA. As Cobble shows, the racist preference for white waitresses was a problem in the United States.

74. Feminist critiques were proliferating around three themes that were different but often connected: the feminization (and thus devaluation) of certain jobs, sexual harassment, and the gendered sexualization of some work. See, for example, Marjorie Davis, *Woman's Place Is at the Typewriter: The Feminization of the Clerical Labor Force* (Somerville, MA: New England Free Press, 1974): Marlene Kadar, "Sexual Harassment Is a Form of Social Control," in Maureen Fitzgerald, Connie Guberman, and Margie Wolfe, eds., *Still Ain't Satisfied! Canadian Feminism Today* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1982), 168–180; Joan Sangster and Julia Smith, "Beards and Bloomers: Flight Attendants, Grievances and Embodied Labour in the Canadian Airline Industry, 1960s–1980s," *Gender, Work and Organization* 23, 2 (2016): 183–199.

75. "Tipping: The Waitress Pays," *Branching Out*, July–August 1977.

76. Agger, "Smile Honey." Agger describes what Arlie Hochschild analyzed in her pathbreaking *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

77. Agger and Kidd conversation.

https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2023v92.003

The WAC finished its brief with a list of demands, including a higher, common minimum wage for all workers and stiff labour regulations to force employers to pay for all their labour time. They demanded that employers not hold them responsible for walkouts or illegal liquor service and end tipping out, or "kickbacks," by paying all workers within the restaurant sector decent wages. The appendix included powerful testimonials from waitresses who described being "grabbed and touched" by customers, fired for the smallest effort to assert their rights, or pressed by bosses to "give them a kiss."[78]

The brief was informational, educational, and agitational. Its circulation gave the differential issue considerable visibility, which was essential if the WAC was to stop wage changes made behind cabinet doors. Only publicity would bring the debate to the public. Contrary to a view of the WFH as singularly dogmatic, these WAC tactics were inclusive and expansive. As Dorothy Kidd, also active in Toronto WFH and Wages Due, remarked in retrospect, "if we were partisan in our rhetoric, we were not in our organizing."[79]

Waitress inquiries and political endorsements came primarily from Toronto, though support grew across the province, in part due to the WAC's smart use of the media.[80] The WFH women taught each social movement skills like typesetting, printing pamphlets, and making videos, as well as how to use press releases to garner TV, radio, and newspaper coverage. The WAC also responded promptly to news stories of any relevance with letters to the editor. When the *Toronto Star* covered an economic study that claimed "full employment" rather than higher minimum wages would restore the economy, Agger countered by arguing full employment at low wages would only lead to "spreading the poverty around."[81] Kidd remembers some left-wing and feminist critiques of their strategy of engagement with the mainstream, corporate media, since it was far from feminist friendly. The WAC, however, felt the media had to be cultivated and used to attract the attention of many women who were unattached to the feminist movement.[82]

The use of radio was especially productive as the WAC secured scores of interviews in Toronto and other Ontario cities; the WAC campaign fit with current political preoccupations, including feminism, women's work, and the minimum wage. Local TV was useful too. In July of 1977, Agger braved an appearance on City TV's *Free for All*, a debate-format program in which the audience was encouraged to take sides. She received a positive letter afterward

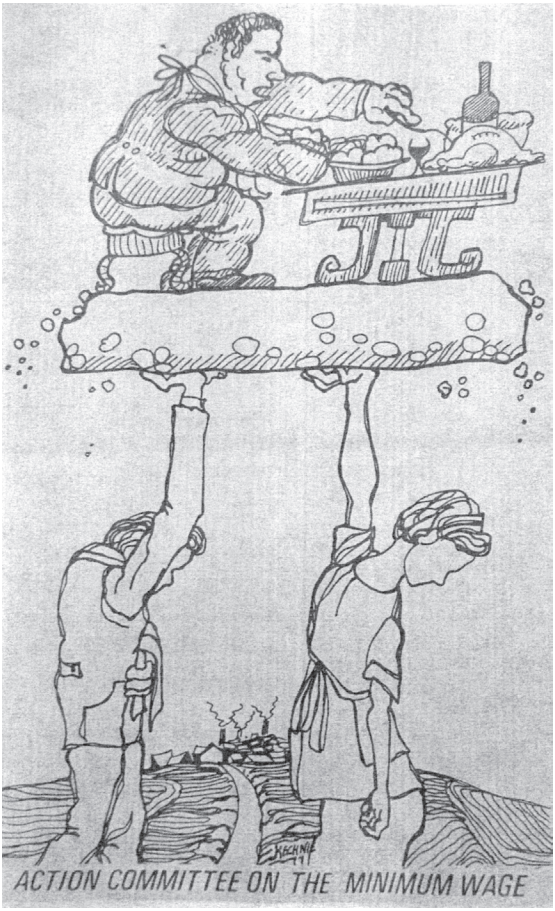
78. Collette Obre, "Appendix," Brief, UOA.

79. Agger and Kidd conversation.

80. WAC "List" of (59) names of supportive inquiries wanting the brief, box 101, file 31, WAC, UOA.

81. Agger, draft letter to *Toronto Star*, 21 September 1977, box 101, file 34, WAC, UOA. Her letter was edited when published as "Low Wages Are No Solution," *TS*, 24 September 1977.

82. Agger and Kidd conversation.



Pamphlet supporting the WAC created by London Action Committee on the Minimum Wage.
"Minimum Wage Tip Differential" file, box 214294, Ministry of Labour 7-1, Archives of Ontario.

from a woman viewer who thanked Agger on behalf of herself and her friends for speaking out "on behalf of older women"[83] The WAC's media savvy was critical to its ability to convey a message beyond its own small numbers and the limited reach of the women's movement.

The WAC's success in garnering public support was evident in the letters of protest sent to the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Industry and Tourism. Thoughtful and sometimes extensive, these letters described women's structural disadvantages in the workforce as well as the inherent unfairness of the differential. A mere $2.65 an hour was "scarcely enough to live on," wrote the Christian Resource Centre, while the YWCA pointed out that women in general made 55 per cent of a male wage, and there already was a "differential"

83. Log, box 101, file 30, WAC, UOA. One assumes Agger mentioned that older women were discriminated against in the industry.

https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2023v92.003

in the restaurant industry as women were relegated to lower-wage venues. The Law Union of Ontario laid out a long list of objections, including the fact that a tip differential would further disadvantage workers who were seldom unionized and thus some of the most economically vulnerable – those who "can least afford it." Moreover, the differential would set a dangerous precedent for other business lobbies.[84] Some letters to the Minister of Labour came from natural allies: two NDP riding associations, Times Change Women's Employment Service, and the Northern Women's Centre and Women's Resource Centre in Thunder Bay and Timmins, respectively. Others indicated the WAC's persuasive ability to reach out to less obvious supporters, such as the Business and Professional Women's Club of Fort Frances, which endorsed the brief. So too did the Thunder Bay city council.[85]

Waitresses also responded individually with calls and letters to the WAC. These were not simply the result of the WAC's smart communication skills. Waitresses were angry. What the WAC outlined – uncertain employment, wage theft, sexualization, "hustling" for a tip – applied everywhere, and women had had enough. They wanted copies of the brief, the petition, information on what they could do, or simply to vent their unhappiness with wages and working conditions. A few wrote directly to Labour Minister Bette Stephenson. The "work is no joy," wrote one Thunder Bay waitress at a licenced steakhouse; it entailed constant stress from uncertain pay, fear of losing the job, and "boorish [customer] behaviour" that "drove her to tears…. Something happens to people when they are hungry," she concluded. "They become less than human."[86] A former waitress who had worked in other countries, even as a maître d', identified exploitation as transnational: "It has always been a slave trade, with the poorest working conditions, paying the lowest wages."[87]

As the government dug in its heels on the differential in 1978, a Kitchener waitress blasted Stephenson. The government policy was "sexist" since it discriminated against most women at "less classy establishments," and it ignored all waitresses' unpaid labour. In her job, she filled in for other workers; as a result, only 50 per cent of the time was she even able to get tips. The government also ignored the health hazards of the job, including noisy, smoky bars where waitresses "risked being injured in fights between customers." Some waitresses, she wrote, spent their paltry "nickels and dimes" tips on taxis to

84. Christian Resource Centre to Bette Stephenson, 30 March 1977; Toronto YWCA to Stephenson, 7 April 1977; Judith McCormack for the Law Union to Bette Stephenson, 6 April 1977, "Minimum Wage Tip Differential" file, box 214294 ML 7-1 (hereafter Tip Differential File), AO.

85. These letters are also in Tip Differential File, AO. The Thunder Bay council enclosed a resolution and a copy of the brief's recommendations, red-circling them in support.

86. Irene Hanuta to Bette Stephenson, 20 April 1977, copy, box 101, file 34. WAC, UOA.

87. Anon. [name omitted because of FOI regulations] to Claude Bennett, 11 April 1977, Tip Differential File, AO.

get home late at night. She identified the true culprit – the tourist industry, demanding small savings "on the backs of the hired help" – and suggested that the business lobby's comparisons with American wages was "unfair to Canadian workers."

She ended with a comparison the WAC also made in its publicity: "I find it ironic," she wrote, that "well paid" government officials, who voted on their own pay increases, were depriving waitresses of "25 to 50 cents" an hour.[88] Finger pointing about the class interests of the government were apparent in other protest letters. "We need an equitable incomes policy, not one that decreases the earnings of working people in lower economic brackets," wrote a woman from West Hill. "I wonder when the government will treat working people as well as they do [those] in the upper middle class."[89] Others implied that the Tories, eating at "high class" establishments, naturally did not understand the issue, while one letter offered a sarcastic take on Premier Davis' recent election slogan: "Davis for all the people – well, just not waitresses."[90]

Enlarging Community Support

The stories waitresses told the WAC contradicted any notion that they were perfectly happy because they made enormous tips. Low wages and lack of respect were high on their list of complaints, but they also noted difficult working conditions and the lack of dignity accorded a job that required mental and physical skills such as "juggling, diplomacy, and a good memory."[91] The WAC tried to answer all letters and offered to speak as far away as Ottawa and Thunder Bay. Two WAC members travelled to Milton to meet with cocktail waitresses at the Mohawk Raceway. The women "shared their experiences" with the WAC, including their fears about any and all organizing on the job as hostile bosses hovered, though one waitress declared she was so "angry" that she was willing to "risk her job."[92] The WAC offered the best advice it could to these women. Given the difficulties of organizing at the worksite, committee members could hold meetings in their homes, use the media to reach out to other waitresses, advertise through community papers and venues, or leave WAC materials at places frequented by women, such as shopping centres, laundromats, and YWCAs, as the WAC had done in Toronto.

88. The writer said "civil servants" rather than government officials, but I think her other wording indicated she meant politicians like Stephenson. Virginia Medley to Bette Stephenson, 26 February 1978, copy, box 101, file 34, WAC, UOA.

89. Anon. [name removed under FOI] to Minister of Labour, 18 March 1977, Tip Differential File, AO.

90. Anon. [name removed under FOI] to Bette Stephenson, 9 July 1977, Tip Differential File, AO.

91. Letter to *Toronto Star* clipping, 29 October 1977, box 101, f 31, WAC, UOA.

92. Log, box 101, file 30, WAC, UOA.

https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2023v92.003

WAC information meeting at London Public Library. Courtesy of University of Western Ontario Archives, London Free Press Collection. Photographer: Graham.

Prompted by the WAC campaign, the London Working Women's Alliance took up the minimum-wage issue. Ellen Agger, Elizabeth Escobar, and Dorothy Kidd spoke about the waitress mobilization at their small organizing meeting in May of 1977. Escobar opened with a personal testimonial: after 25 years of waitressing, and as a widow with six children, she knew the minimum, even with tips, was inadequate. Many attendees indicated their fear of being discovered and fired if they even signed the petition; one downtown employer had told his waitresses "not to go" to the meeting. A representative from the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union agreed that fear was a factor in low unionization and suggested "informational pickets" instead, a tactic that had worked in the United States.[93] In early June, the Working Women's

93. "Waitresses Urged to Fight Freeze Bid," *London Free Press*, 16 May 1977.

Minimum-wage protest in downtown London, 4 June 1977.
Courtesy of University of Western Ontario, London Free Press Archive, Photographer: James.

Alliance followed up with a protest march through London's downtown, leafletting about the tip differential and engaging with onlookers. Although "enthusiastic," the protest was quite small, reflecting the difficulty of mobilizing waitresses and waiters through "traditional" union drives and street protests.[94]

Inquiries also came from waitresses and women's organizations in North Bay, Timmins, Kingston, Ottawa, and Thunder Bay, as well as smaller towns including Havelock and Brantford. Groups from other provinces also wrote, often having read about the WAC in one of the many feminist newspapers that thrived at the time. Agger wrote an excellent article for Alberta's *Branching Out*, while Vancouver's *Kinesis* also did a piece on waitressing and the WAC. Ontario coverage in the *Wages for Housework Campaign Bulletin*, *The Other Woman*, and the *Northern Woman Journal* also encouraged a letter-writing campaign, either to local newspapers or to cabinet ministers, calling for a public forum on the minimum wage.[95]

94. "Marchers Protest Wage Plan for Service Workers," *London Free Press*, 4 June 1977.

95. "Tipping: The Waitress Pays"; "The Unpaid Work of Waitressing," *Kinesis*, June 1977; "Waitresses Action Committee," *Northern Woman Journal* 3, 6 (1977); "The Waitress," *Northern Woman Journal* 4, 4 (1978); "Tipping the Wage Scale," *Wages for Housework Campaign Bulletin*, Fall 1977; *Manitoba Women's Newspaper*, June 1980.

https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2023v92.003

The feminist press provided a particularly sympathetic ear, though not all mainstream journalists were unsympathetic. Toronto papers, especially the *Toronto Star*, interviewed waitresses who provided experiential confirmation of the precariousness, low pay, and lack of employment protections in the job. Coverage sympathetic to the waitresses irritated the tourism lobby, which responded with letters to the editor.[96] A related public debate about tipping out continued in 1979 and 1980, even after the WAC was inactive, as more wait staff protested the practice. Some unionized restaurant workers filed grievances, though arbitrators were not consistent in their rulings.[97]

Sadly, though, some male journalists were more interested in covering the contemporaneous debate about topless waitresses. As bar owners turned to topless or scantily clad waitresses to enhance profits, they met some resistance. Waitresses who were replaced because they would not partially or fully expose their breasts protested, even picketed, and one politically savvy waitress filed a human rights complaint after she was told to "take her blouse off" in an interview as the job was "topless."[98]

The sexual harassment that waitresses described was increasingly becoming visible in feminist writing, but legal and human rights protections were rudimentary at best.[99] Unionized waitresses who grieved being forced to wear revealing "harem costumes" lost their case. Unionized waiters who complained when they were replaced by topless women garnered more sympathy.[100] The city and the province became embroiled in morality debates about regulating topless waitresses and adult entertainment. Male journalists guffawed over their supposedly witty headlines like "bare service only" and "busty dining," making light of employers who insisted they did not hire older women because

96. For example, Roy Huddart, executive director, Tourism Ontario, letter to the editor, *GM*, 4 December 1976; Roy Huddart, letter to the editor, *London Free Press*, 9 June 1977.

97. "Arbitrator Rejects Grievance over Tips," *GM*, 11 June 1979; "Tip Sharing Proposal Vetoed by Arbitrators," *GM*, 25 April 1980. See also "Forced to Give Up Half of Tips, Waitresses Quitting Jobs," *GM*, 20 June 1979; "Who Gets the Tip?," *GM*, 15 May 1979.

98. She was a law student. "Waitress Fighting Topless Tavern Granted an Inquiry after a Year," *GM*, 15 August 1979. See the case: Ballentyne v. Molly N' Me Tavern (1982), 4 CHHR D/1191. See also "Espanola Waitresses Continue to Picket," *GM*, 21 September 1976.

99. Constance Backhouse and Leah Cohen, *The Secret Oppression: Sexual Harassment of Working Women* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1979).

100. "Rules on Sexual Harassment Set by Rights Board of Inquiry," *GM*, 25 August 1980. The men's case was well known as the Red Lion case. While *requiring* female waitresses to be topless was deemed discriminatory by the Ontario Human Rights Commission, very revealing outfits were accepted. When Toronto cocktail waitresses were required to don a "harem" uniform, they lost their human rights claim and, in a close decision, an appeal of that decision to the courts. Allan v. Riverside Lodge, Board of Inquiry, September 1987, BOI 213A. Ontario decisions were in line with other provincial jurisdictions.

"no one wanted to look at them with their clothes off."[101] (As the WAC argued, hiring for *all* waitress jobs was often biased against "older" women.)

Reporters also tried to create a wedge between topless waitresses and the WAC, portraying the latter with the stereotypical trope of the moralistic, judgmental feminist. The opposite was true: Agger protested the journalist's effort to create a "false division" between WAC women who wanted "dignity" and topless waitresses who supposedly "like to be exploited." The WAC did not judge any women trying to make a living, since all waitresses want the same thing: "money, good conditions and respect."[102] Even the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) convention "snickered" over the topless waitress issue when it was raised as a problem by the Bartenders union – until a female flight attendant intervened and told the delegates to stop laughing about women's "exploitation."[103]

The WAC knew it needed more than columns in the feminist press and official endorsements; it required allies who had the ear of the mainstream media, could join it in lobbying politicians in the legislature, and would get the WAC a hearing with the Ministry of Labour, which it correctly suspected was more sympathetic than Industry and Tourism. Feminist groups concerned with workplace issues proved the most proactive, as were some NDP members of the legislature. Unions, as discussed below, were not.

The Ontario Committee on the Status of Women, an alliance of liberal, labour, and social democratic feminists, swung into action very quickly, offering advice on tactics and sending letters to the government and the media.[104] Representing them, feminist economist Marjorie Cohen wrote repeatedly to both Claude Bennett and Bette Stephenson, as well as to newspapers.[105] In a long newspaper opinion piece, Cohen laid out the policy contradictions that waitresses faced. The province claimed tips made up part of the "wage," and the federal government agreed that tips should be counted as income for tax

101. "Bare Service Only," *GM*, 17 March 1977; "Cop-Out in Battle of the Bosoms," *GM*, 22 November 1978; "Franchising Plans by Topless King Led to Drea's War on Busty Dining," *GM*, 25 October 1978; "Topless Waitress Wanted – over 35," *GM*, 23 February 1978.

102. Ellen Agger, draft letter to *Toronto Sun*, 18 July 1977, box 101, file 34; see the original article: "They Also Wait Who Wear Clothes (but the Tips Aren't as High)," *TS*, 18 July 1977.

103. The Bartenders union had a motion asking that the Toronto Metro Council ban topless waitresses, leading to widespread "snickering." A flight attendant informed the men this was a serious issue of "human dignity," It's likely the WAC would *not* have asked for a ban given their other statements. "Chuckles Stop, Claps Start as OFL Delegates Get Serious about Topless," *GM*, 16 November 1978.

104. Beth Atcheson and Lorna Marsden, eds., *White Gloves Off: The Work of the Ontario Committee on the Status of Women* (Toronto: Second Story, 2018).

105. Marjorie Cohen sent telegrams and letters of concern to Claude Bennett and Bette Stephenson. Copies of their replies were given to the WAC. See Frederick Boyer (executive director, Tourism) to Cohen, 12 December 1976; Stephenson to Cohen, 4 January 1977, both in box 101, file 34, WAC, UOA.

https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2023v92.003

purposes, but tips were *not* counted when it came to unemployment insurance rates (or Canada Pension, as one "older" woman pointed out to the WAC). Whatever the calculation, Cohen concluded, it "will always be to the benefit of government and industry and to the detriment of the worker."[106] It was no accident, she suggested, that the government was targeting low-wage women whom they presumed would not resist. Her intervention, like that of other supporters, pointed to a sad history of the minimum wage: over the decades, businesses consistently claimed that they could not pay, that people would lose jobs, and that workers did not need it. Yet when the minimum *was* raised, the economic sky never fell.

Organized Working Women (OWW) – an autonomous feminist organization of Ontario trade union women founded in 1976 to promote women's equality in their unions, workplaces, and society – also kept in touch with the WAC, defending it when a former head of the Hotel and Club Employees Union and OFL secretary treasurer Terry Meagher "tried to get them out" of an OFL convention on human rights in September of 1978.[107] The male leaders informed Agger that the WAC was not welcome as it was not a bona fide union. Although OWW represented only union women, it supported a range of struggles and had already disregarded Cold War union leaders by welcoming "left-wing" unions like the Canadian Textile and Chemical Union. OWW president Evelyn Armstrong reassured the WAC that its members could share OWW's convention table for WAC information at the larger OFL convention in November.

Even within the government, it was likely a few feminists – including Marnie Clarke, head of the Women's Bureau, and Constance Backhouse, a law graduate and executive assistant to the Deputy Minister of Labour, Tim Armstrong – who convinced the Department of Labour to finally meet with the WAC in the summer of 1978. Stephenson, to the WAC's disappointment, did not come to the June meeting with the deputy minister, Backhouse, Clarke, and staff from Employment Standards. Stephenson did attend a private meeting three months earlier with eight lobbyists from Tourism Ontario, who were confident that their views would reach cabinet.[108] Even if her ministry was better informed on the need for an improved minimum wage, Stephenson was well aware of the power dynamics shaping government decisions.[109]

The WAC came to the June meeting with representatives from the Immigrant Women's Centre and Opportunities for Advancement, a "mothers on welfare"

106. Cohen, "Below the Minimum."

107. "Log," box 101, file 30, WAC, UOA.

108. William Biggs, chair of Tourism Ontario, and Roy Huddart, ED of Restaurant Association, to Stephenson (relaying their confidence that their views "would be discussed in cabinet"), 13 April 1977, Employment Standards "Brief and Submissions" file, box 214294, ML 7-1, AO.

109. The Ministry of Labour Research Department had some "progressive" analysts, but their views were not shared across other ministries. Constance Backhouse, email to the author, 6 May 2022.

group; this trio reflected WFH's stress on the interdependence of women's struggles with low wages, poverty, and discrimination. The WAC pushed for a "public forum" on the minimum wage and believed it had a commitment from the ministry, an impression reinforced by OWW member Deidre Gallagher. It never happened. A proposal for an inquiry on the minimum wage had been drafted, but not all ministry officials were convinced it would be useful, and in any case, these officials imagined an extended inquiry on policy that would hear from all experts and interests, including business.[110] The WAC's "public forum" was to be a focused public event that gave workers a chance to voice their views, including their frustration with stagnating wages. Waitress testimony marshalled by the WAC would have been a powerful means of swaying public opinion. McKeough understood this danger and lobbied against an inquiry, warning that such a forum might "involve public pressures we can't withstand," especially when the government should be aiming for "the confidence of the private sector."[111]

Agger followed up after the June meeting, as she always did, with multiple letters and calls asking for a ministry response. Stephenson's absence from the meeting was significant. Although the WAC continued to fight, it was clear the government was politely meeting with the committee but not listening, and that it did not intend to rescind the differential.

Political Manoeuvrings

Opposition politicians also became embroiled in the tip differential issue, in part because the minimum wage was already a source of contention – and especially so in inflationary times. Through 1975 and 1976, the Ontario NDP opposition asked the Tory government in the legislature when it was going to raise a minimum wage that was lagging behind inflation and lower than that in other provinces. Government ministers were evasive, not least because they could be; legislation was not needed to make changes. As the opposition hounded ministers, demanding answers, the government prevaricated, though Stephenson and the Tories did tell opposition critics that Ontario's "unique" industrial and wage environment had to be considered, as did the need to be "competitive." The latter necessitated making comparisons with low-wage American states, instead of higher-wage Canadian

110. For an initial draft of the idea, see Inquiry, 3 October 1977, Policy, Employment Standards, 1977–78 file, ML RG 7-1, AO. After consulting an economist expert from the University of Toronto, the idea of an inquiry was shelved. There were a number of reasons, including how extensive and time consuming it would be, but some also worried it could become a "snowball" the ministry could not control. Deputy Minister report to Minister of Labour, 3 October 1977, Employment Standards file, AO.

111. Darcy McKeough to Bette Stephenson, 20 September 1977, Policy Employment Standards file, ML 7-1, AO.

https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2023v92.003

provinces.[112] Again, the Ministry of Labour's internal research contradicted these arguments.

Even before Bennett's November speech, the NDP zeroed in on the tip differential in their criticisms of the government. After it, they decried the government's "reduction" in the minimum wage.[113] In response, the Tories resorted to semantics, claiming it was not a reduction but simply a freeze. Through 1977, the NDP maintained its critical stance on the tip differential and recommended a much higher minimum of $4.00 an hour for everyone. This four-dollar minimum became a key issue in the 7 June provincial election. The Tories, with aid from the media, caricatured this demand as unrealistic and "foolish," if not ludicrous. Stephenson predicted social catastrophe: employers would have to find an additional $7 billion for wages, and businesses would shutter their doors.[114]

The election, however, provided the WAC with an opportunity to keep its issue in the public spotlight. It developed a template letter asking all candidates for their position on the minimum wage and tips. Many Conservatives apparently avoided the issue. Liberals opposed a tip differential but were extremely critical of the NDP's four-dollar minimum. NDP candidates were usually supportive, especially those with any experience in or with the hospitality sector. One candidate, whose mother worked "for thirty years as a waitress," was unequivocal: "I know how hard the work is and for so little [pay.]" Although the NDP became the WAC's strongest political ally, the WAC disagreed with some of its candidates' views on tips. Ian Deans, member of provincial parliament (MPP) from Hamilton, asserted that workers' dignity would be enhanced if tips were replaced by a service charge for all servers, as in Europe. He seemed shocked at Agger's temerity in bluntly rejecting this solution. She told him (and others) there was evidence that workers could be deprived of their share of the service charge, so women's best bet for a living wage right now was an increase in the minimum wage *and* their ability to keep all tips.[115] A few NDP candidates were condescending, informing the WAC that it should redirect its efforts to campaigning and voting for the NDP. Petitions "don't do much good," one said, adding that the waitresses "should work for them [the NDP] as

112. George Samis question and Stephenson answer, re: Minimum Wage, Legislative Assembly of Ontario, *Official Report of Debates* (hereafter *Hansard*), 30th Parl., 2nd Sess. (15 January 1976).

113. Ian Angus question, re: Throne Speech Debate (Continued), *Hansard*, 30th Parl., 3rd. Sess. (29 March 1976); Floyd Laughren question, re: Throne Speech Debate (Continued), *Hansard*, 30th Parl., 3rd. Sess. (1 April 1976); Stephen Lewis question, re: Minimum Wage, *Hansard*, 30th Parl., 3rd. Sess. (25 November 1976).

114. "Stephenson Says $4 Minimum Wage Would Cost Employers $7 Billion," *GM*, 4 June 1977.

115. The hospitality lobby was also against a service charge. Stephenson agreed with them and said it was not an issue for her ministry, as it was a matter of employer choice and between proprietors and customers. Bette Stephenson to Gordon Gale, general manager of the Hotel Association of Metro Toronto, 11 April 1977, Tip Differential File, AO.

that is how we will get what we want."[116] This was a constant refrain of social democrats to grassroots labour actions: just rely on us and the parliamentary system.

The WAC asked all its allies to raise the issue whenever they could in the election campaign, and it offered to go to all-candidates meetings to pose questions about it. The election kept the tip differential in public view, but the results were inauspicious for the WAC's strongest ally in the legislature. The NDP lost five seats as well as its status as the official opposition, and the media laid the fault at the feet of the supposedly unrealistic $4.00 minimum wage. In the subsequent NDP leadership race, the victor, Michael Cassidy, had been the most wishy-washy on the minimum-wage issue, allowing that there could be exceptions to it. The WAC had already taken him to task for his "disappointing" failure to defend "the working people of this province."[117]

A few politicians did continue to support the WAC's critique of the differential after the election. The NDP, especially MPP Bob Mackenzie, tackled Ontario's low minimum wage repeatedly in the legislature; a "shouting match" between him and Minister Stephenson during question period late in June indicated that the policy differences between Stephenson's and Bennett's ministries were something of an open secret.[118] Using the Ministry of Labour documents justifying a far more substantial minimum-wage increase, Mackenzie asked why the "richest" province was saddling its workers with "almost the lowest" minimum wage.[119] NDP criticisms and Conservative prevarications continued into 1978, even after the government had announced its increase in the general minimum wage from $2.65 to $2.85 in February – leaving alcohol servers at $2.50 an hour, now with an even wider differential than the original fifteen cents. NDPer Marion Bryden, who had earlier tried to rally MPPs to support the WAC, used another approach, asking if the tip differential was "discriminatory" toward women, as the WAC had shown, and therefore a violation of the Human Rights Code.[120] This too did not work.

116. Log, communication from Dave Gracey, 30 May 1977, box 101, file 30, WAC, UOA.

117. WAC to Michael Cassidy, 17 January 1978, box 101, file 34, WAC, UOA. They also reminded him that fellow NDP members had a better position on the minimum wage than him.

118. "Minimum Pay Issue Is Creating Conflict in House, Cabinet," *GM*, 30 June 1977. The WAC was told something similar by their contacts in the Ontario Committee on the Status of Women.

119. Bob Mackenzie questions, re: Minimum Wage, *Hansard*, 31st Parl., 1st Sess. (28 June 1977) https://www.ola.org/en/legislative-business/house-documents/parliament-31/session-1/1977-06-28/hansard-1#P348_127710. See also questions on 17 October 1977: *Hansard*, 31st Parl., 1st Sess., https://www.ola.org/en/legislative-business/house-documents/parliament-31/session-1/1977-10-17/hansard#P260_65295.

120. Marion Bryden question, re: Minimum Wage, *Hansard*, 31st Parl., 2nd Sess. (13 April 1978), https://www.ola.org/en/legislative-business/house-documents/parliament-31/session-2/1978-04-13/hansard#P271_65402.

https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2023v92.003

Despite the best efforts of politicians like Bryden and Mackenzie, the differential had become permanent. The WAC publicly claimed a partial victory in February of 1978 for two reasons: the differential was not widened to a full 50 cents as originally suggested, and it was not extended to other hospitality workers, which had been the goal of Tourism Ontario. The WAC followed up with an exasperated letter to Stephenson, accusing the government of "sexism" since any differential hurt low-wage women workers and pushed women further into sexualized behaviour akin to "legitimizing prostitution."[121] The NDP also persisted with questions in the legislature about tipping out, showing that waitresses were giving up a large proportion of the tips to subsidize other low-paid workers. This generated enough controversy in the newspapers that the government announced it might regulate tipping out. It did not. In subsequent changes to the minimum wage, a differential remained and later grew to the 50 cents Bennett originally proposed.

"*Very* Unfriendly" Unions

The WAC knew it was politically necessary to engage with unions, yet they were arguably the least helpful groups in the campaign. Early in the fight, the WAC sent its brief to the OFL and Metro Labour Council and talked to unions representing waiters and waitresses. At the time, there were two of relevance: the Hotel and Club Employees Union, affiliated with HERE (the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union, headquartered in the United States), and the International Beverage Dispensers and Bartenders Union (Bartenders), also an international union. The Canadian HERE union, which focused on staff at large hotels, had weathered a massive and unsuccessful strike at the Royal York in 1961–62, while the Bartenders locals tended to be smaller, located in taverns and hotel bars.[122] Later mergers of the two produced the composite Canadian HERE.[123]

In 1977, there was a third, momentary player, the Independent Association of Ontario Waiters/Waitresses (AOWW), led by Reinaldo Santos, who had been fired for organizing at Ed's Warehouse restaurant. This association was a self-described "professional" union in favour of a service charge, not tips, as well as industry-wide better wages and benefits.[124] Elizabeth Escobar, involved in the AOWW but in touch with the WAC, explained it too was preparing a

121. WAC to Bette Stephenson, 15 March 1978, box 101, file 34, WAC, UOA; "No Raise," *GM*.

122. Jeremy Milloy, "'A *Battle Royal*': Service Work Activism and the 1961–1962 Royal York Strike," *Labour/Le Travail* 58 (Fall 2006): 13–20.

123. Both the hotel and club workers' union and the bartenders' union deposited some papers in the City of Toronto Archives; however, they do not deal with the 1970s or this campaign.

124. "Waiters, Waitresses Protest Firing of Worker by Ed's Warehouse," *GM*, 30 May 1977; "Waiters, Waitresses Unite to Fight Bias, Intimidation," *TS*, 11 May 1977; "A Tip on Tips: Love Them or Leave Them," *TS*, 2 September 1977.

government brief (aided by a law firm), and though Agger tried to keep channels of communication open between the two groups, Escobar relayed the AOWW's preference for its own less politicized brand of organizing.[125]

WAC member Boo Watson also tried to talk to Santos directly but was rebuffed. When the AOWW held a meeting at Central Tech School (with a subsequent protest march to Ed's Warehouse), the WAC was initially told its members could not even come. Behind-the-scenes lobbying by the wife of a union lawyer resulted in their attendance – on the condition that they remain silent. The WAC women claimed there were only fifteen women of about 250 in attendance, and one of the few women, a Black waitress who worked at the Hyatt, confessed to Agger that she wanted her tips, not a service charge. The WAC members observed there was "no recognition of women and sexualized labour" in this largely male-dominated group. "Much talk, no action," they concluded about this effort.[126]

The two existing unions were unsympathetic or hostile. Their antipathy to the WAC was not related to the WAC's stance on the tip differential, which the Bartenders union also opposed, noting in a brief to the provincial government that a lower minimum wage for *any* servers was a basic bread-and-butter issue that limited its members' pay.[127] It also agreed with the WAC that tax collectors going after unreported tips as income was hardly fair – or an accurate portrayal of their income. The Bartenders complained that reports about the feds pursuing people making vast sums in tips unfairly skewed perceptions of servers as fat cats. Yet when a newspaper story relayed this characterization of large tips, only Agger intervened publicly with a blistering letter to the editor.[128]

Rather, union leaders were opposed to waitresses organizing outside of union structures, as this might interfere with worksite unionization, the basis of their locals, their membership dues, and their power. Their view was not unlike old-fashioned Gomperism, though their dislike of any alternative form of organizing – and by feminists at that – was also conditioned by the tight control by a largely male leadership of these unions, as well as their growing corruption. The Canadian HERE, Steve Tufts argues, became affiliated with mob interests in Canada – specifically, the Cotroni family in Montréal.[129]

125. I found no trace in WAC or Ministry of Labour records of the AOWW's brief.

126. "Log," box 101, file 30, WAC, UOA.

127. Ontario Provincial Council of International Beverage Dispensers and Bartenders Union, to Ontario Legislature, Standing Committee on Resources and Development, 1977, signed by W. Kowalchuk, president, box 101, file 32, WAC, UOA.

128. Agger, "Ill-Paid Waitresses," *GM*.

129. Steve Tufts, "Fragmentation in Toronto's Hotel Sector," *The Bullet*, 13 February 2018, https://socialistproject.ca/2018/02/fragmentation-torontos-hotel-sector/. On HERE Local 75 and the criticism of labour officials for track record and undemocratic practices, see "The Haunted House of Labour," Members for Democracy Archive, n.d., accessed 8 June 2023,

https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2023v92.003

In the United States, waitresses had a longer history with HERE, stretching back to the earlier 20th century when waitresses organized first as craft and sex-based locals, and after the 1930s, in mixed-sex locals. In some pro-union cities, at least half the waitresses were unionized. Women unionists carved out a separate political and bargaining space as a "sex conscious, occupational community," shaped by their work culture, views of protective legislation, definitions of skill, and concepts of equality. Exercising a "semi-autonomous" place in HERE, they had reserved positions on the national executive board until the 1970s. In Canada, in contrast, wait staff was less organized and female membership was very small. Moreover, as Dorothy Sue Cobble points out, all servers in the United States faced union decline in the 1970s and 1980s as a result of the postwar Taft-Hartley backlash against unions, the growth of locations in the anti-union South, and especially the rise of the mass chain restaurant.[130]

What is revealing is the intensity of union animosity toward the WAC, which was clearly a pressure group, not a raiding union. As Agger commented, it seemed as though the unions were "threatened" by the committee. In WAC organizing notes about conversations with union leaders, words like "hostile, *very* unfriendly, angry" appear.[131] The HERE affiliate referred to WAC waitresses as "freeloaders" and "usurpers" because they did not recognize that the union represented them; they should just "pay up" their dues. The union refused to even sign the WAC petition until the women joined a union: "they won't support us until we support them by paying up," stated the WAC organizing notes.[132]

The HERE affiliate had other disagreements with the WAC. The union leadership supported tipping out, claiming it was an accepted practice. It also rationalized low wages in the business by saying its members joined the union primarily for job protection and benefits, plus "all the tips they get." There was only one solution, the union leadership told the WAC: join the union and "they will look after us." This paternalism was likely the response of arrogant men to "usurper" women, but it also emerged from the union's top-down exercise of power.[133]

The Bartenders appeared somewhat less hostile, but their objections were similar: no organizing outside of their purview. The union was opposed to a WAC member coming to its meeting to talk and, like HERE, condescendingly dismissed the women's efforts as nothing new. The WAC tried to explain that it was filling an organizing gap "because unions don't and haven't spoken for

http://www.m-f-d.org/article/general/hfc82fscn5b.php.

130. Cobble, *Dishing It Out*, 192–195, 4–5.

131. Log, box 101, file 30, WAC, UOA.

132. Log, UOA.

133. Log, UOA.

and represented *all* waitresses," but the Bartender leaders insisted they should secure jobs through union membership.[134] In the United States, waitresses had earlier benefitted from such "hiring hall" practices and portable union memberships; however, this was less likely to aid Canadian waitresses, whose work was transitory in a less unionized industry. It is revealing that other waitresses writing to the WAC did not see unions as either sympathetic or a viable option. Commiserating with one letter writer, Agger pointed out that the Hotel and Club Employees Union did not protect its part-time workers, noting that the union representatives "tell us things like … what are you girls bitching about, you make all those tips (literally!)."[135]

"He seemed to be saying we should not lead ourselves," was the rather astute WAC comment about one union leader.[136] Indeed, the unions' suspicions of the WAC reflected a broader dislike of any grassroots protests, especially from the left, which might challenge their leadership. They had reason to fear: feminism and demands for democracy often went hand in hand in unions.[137] The principle of women's grassroots self-activity so important to WFH and the strategy of garnering outside support from feminist, antipoverty, and community groups were also anathema to inward-looking unions. It is revealing that in 1978, the OFL women's committee, chaired pro tem by Terry Meagher and including HERE leader William Kowalchuk, never discussed the tip differential.[138]

Meagher aside, there were some sympathetic unionists, but support was sporadic. In addition to a couple of union representatives at the London march, Bob Mackenzie also tried to intervene to aid the WACs relations with the OFL. Organized Working Women, as well as a Toronto CUPE local, were more supportive of the WAC's efforts. However, the latter was a union with an existing, internal feminist presence. Some well-meaning, supportive feminist organizations like the Voice of Women kept telling the WAC that the solution was to "organize a union," but the Voices were unaware of how hostile the relevant unions were.[139]

134. Log, UOA.

135. Agger to Virginia Medley, 29 March 1978, box 101, file 34, WAC, UOA.

136. Log, box 101, file 30, WAC, UOA.

137. Briskin and McDermott, eds., *Women Challenging Unions*.

138. I cannot locate their minutes/correspondence from 1977, when they might have discussed it, but the presence of Kowalchuk would also have mitigated against sympathy for the WAC. See Correspondence, Women's Committee, 1978, box 102, Ontario Federation of Labour Papers, F 4180, AO.

139. Log, UOA.

https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2023v92.003

Conclusion

The WAC faded away later in 1978 when the differential seemed irreversible; as a subgroup of WFH, activists could turn their attention to other WFH priorities. Without financial and organizing support, the committee's resistance could only continue for so long when WAC members were also working at other jobs and when their one demand was a losing cause. In terms of building sustained resistance to capitalism, there were disadvantages to one-issue campaigns that were not able to build a wider, long-term organizational base. Writing to a northern Ontario group interested in the WAC, Agger noted that the group "never had the finances and resources to propagandize as we wanted."[140] Her last letter to a waitress' inquiry, in June of 1978, admitted that the WAC was "quiet now" as the differential had been its "main subject of activity"; however, she pointed to its success in preventing a much-enlarged differential and offered to talk on the phone to the writer or come to speak to local waitresses.[141]

The waitresses' predicament had some parallels with the Service, Office and Retail Workers Union of Canada (SORWUC) in British Columbia, although that organization had opted for a strategy of unionization. Nonetheless, SORWUC attempted to organize as a highly democratic and grassroots union with a feminist agenda and oriented to other community struggles. Like the WAC, it embraced a philosophy of working-class women's self-activity, with women defining what they needed, what they wanted, and how they would organize. Because SORWUC was outside the "official" house of labour, and a militantly feminist and socialist union to boot, it earned the approbation of the mainstream union leadership, which sanctioned raiding of SORWUC. In the end, SORWUC ran out of the energy required to fight employers, the state, and "fellow" trade unionists.[142] Similarly, while union antipathy to the WAC was undoubtedly shaped by its links to the feminist WFH, anti-left sentiments were also apparent; in the WAC's organizing notes, some unionists the members talked to denounced "Marxists" in the labour movement.[143]

Yet the WAC's organizing methods that were such anathema to trade unions aided its ability to secure recognition, sympathy, and endorsements. Rather than organizing by workplace, it mobilized outside of union structures, and given its small numbers, it concentrated on publicity, petitions, and consciousness raising – reaching out through grassroots groups, community venues, and women's newspapers, as well as engaging creatively with the mainstream media. In its speaking and writing, the WAC also spoke "waitress to waitress," not as union leaders to followers. This conscious engagement with waitresses'

140. Agger to *Northern Woman*, box 101, file 34, WAC, UOA.

141. Agger to Jenny, 7 June 1978, box 101, file 34, WAC, UOA.

142. Smith, "'Entirely Different' Kind of Union."

143. Log, UOA.

day-to-day experiences was a strength of the campaign. When Agger wrote back to angry waitresses, she relayed her own bad experiences as a waitress, establishing a common bond. WFH and the WAC also situated the WAC's fight within the economic landscape that all women workers were facing, pointing to inflation, the escalating cost of family survival, stagnant wages, and cutbacks to the social safety net.[144]

The WAC undoubtedly benefitted from the aid, networks, and expertise of its allies, including politicians and social movement groups. This was particularly true of interventions from labour feminists, who were committed to women's equality and dignity at work and also to exposing sexual harassment in the workplace. The irony, of course, was that WFH was known primarily for its demand for wages for *housework*, not workplace issues. Yet WFH and Wages Due perspectives were important in shaping the WAC's analysis of women's coerced, extra emotional and sexual – specifically heterosexual – labour, and of the connections between women's serving work at home and low pay at work, not to mention women's desperate need for the dignity of economic independence. While the WAC's links to the WFH initially met with suspicion from some feminists, this was temporarily overcome because the WAC did not insist *only* on building WFH membership and the key WFH demand of a wage for housework. It kept its focus on the minimum wage and waitresses' "surplus," feminized, sexualized labour.

The WAC's educational and agitational efforts to raise awareness about waitresses' poor working conditions, low pay, sexualized labour, and sexual harassment, as well as the unfairness of the tip differential, did have an impact, in part due to the committee's unrelenting efforts to keep the campaign in the public eye and on the agenda of politicians. The WAC's intention to bring the issue "out from behind closed cabinet doors" succeeded, and its speculation that the tourism and restaurant industries never expected "such a fight" over the differential is likely correct.[145] Tourism Ontario's hope that the differential would be extended to other tipped workers did not materialize, and when MPPs spoke in the legislature on the tip differential, they referred more often to the WAC than to unions.

The WAC excelled at spreading the message across the province, appealing to people outside of limited feminist and union orbits. Despite their small numbers, these activists had the boundless energy born of political passion and a deep commitment to facing down capitalist exploitation and the sexism of heteronormativity. If the mainstream labour movement had tapped into that commitment rather than dismissing these women as usurpers, it might

144. This was also true of other WFH and Wages Due campaigns. See Dorothy Kidd, speech, Toronto, 1 May 1976, Rise Up: A Digital Archive of Feminist Activism, accessed 31 October 2022, https://riseupfeministarchive.ca/activism/organizations/wages-due-lesbians/wagesforhousework-dorothykidd-speech-1976-ocr/.

145. "Tipping the Wage Scale," *Wages for Housework Campaign Bulletin*, Fall 1977.

https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2023v92.003

have ultimately gained more supporters or members – particularly, underrepresented women service workers. More importantly, it would have benefitted from the militant, anti-austerity, anti-capitalist political perspectives and energies of feminists like those in the WAC. After all, state and business efforts to suppress labour's demands and roll back gains only intensified in the next decade. An opportunity was lost not only because of the structural constraints of the prevailing workplace/union model but also because of the ideological limitations of a union movement focused on defensive efforts to protect a decent deal for the few, rather than fighting for the lives of the many.

However short, the WAC's history also contributes to our ongoing rethinking of "second-wave" feminism, still portrayed by some authors as limited in its analysis of inequality, with white and middle-class (with those typically elided) political perspectives the norm.[146] Feminists were, supposedly, also overly judgmental about both popular culture and sexualities that fell outside of their own "politically correct" categories.[147] In this "progress" narrative, the second wave was overtaken by a more insightful and inclusive third wave of feminism, the homogenous second wave having "collapsed" under the contradictions of its own narrow "essentialism, universalism, naturalism."[148]

Feminism during the 1970s was never one organization or ideology: there were multiple groups, small and large, and various mobilizations and campaigns that came and went, all of them speaking to different feminisms on many political, social, and cultural fronts. As with the WAC, they disagreed with their allies even as they temporarily collaborated with them. They were made up of working-class and/or middle-class women, and though most were white, the WAC list of endorsements indicates support from immigrant organizations similarly concerned with ethnocentric labour practices. Feminists' political projects ranged from embracing capitalism to smashing it. Some were failures. Some disappeared. Yet many left traces that became part of an enlarged analysis or idea – in this case, labour feminism. The WAC, like many other fleeting groups, was part of an oppositional, anti-capitalist feminist history that we should acknowledge.

At the time the WAC was organizing, the restaurant business was changing. The growth of large chains and composite ownership of multiple bars

146. Of course, there have long been countervailing views. For one Canadian example, see Luxton, "Feminism as a Class Act"; for one American example, see Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

147. Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie, and Rebecca Munford, *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Astrid Henry, *Not My Mother's Sister: Generational Conflict and Third-Wave Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 22.

148. Ann Braithwaite, "The Personal, the Political, Third-Wave and Postfeminisms," *Feminist Theory* 3, 3 (2003): 335–344; Susan Archer Mann and Douglas Huffman, "The Decentering of Second Wave and the Rise of the Third Wave," *Science and Society* 69, 1 (2005): 74.

and eateries came at the expense of smaller restaurants, and the anti-union resources of the chains seemed endless. Youth employment grew, and the changes in immigration policy after the late 1960s also meant that the industry increasingly used racialized immigrants as lower-paid labour. If owners, workers, and the hospitality industry changed significantly after the 1970s, did any part of the WAC's message stay relevant? Certainly, the sexual, emotional, gendered component of women's service work was increasingly unveiled and critiqued by feminists – so much so that our understanding of this surplus labour, and of sexual harassment, is markedly different today.

As Cobble points out, some parallels also exist between the earlier occupational organizing of waitresses and current efforts to create solidarity and raise the consciousness of service workers by mobilizing them according to occupation and geography, perhaps in specific, localized, and short-term projects of resistance. In the face of the power of owners to conduct expensive, unrelenting anti-union campaigns, this appears to be an alternative to workplace unionization.[149] These efforts also draw on the support of other social movements and have even staged one-day strikes. However, this alternative organizing is still vulnerable, and sometimes fleeting, without the legal protections that union membership offers – however weak those protections have become. There are no easy lessons from the history of feminists mobilizing to challenge underpaid and undervalued service labour, but the very existence of the WAC, a momentary but imaginative effort, should become part of a more complex history of Canadian labour and socialist feminism.

My thanks to Labour/Le Travail *co-editor Kirk Niergarth and the journal's anonymous reviewers for their suggestions for this article and to Dorothy Sue Cobble for her reading and comments on an earlier draft. Special thanks to Ellen Agger and Dorothy Kidd for sharing their reminiscences about the* WAC *and to Judith Ramirez and Constance Backhouse for their comments too.*

149. Dorothy Sue Cobble, "What Waitresses Teach Us," *Arbetarhistoria*, no. 3–4 (2018): 167–168.

https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2023v92.003