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Women and Work: Inequality in the Labour Market, by Paul Phillips and Erin Phillips, Toronto, James Lorimer & Company, 1983, 200 pages, ISBN 0-8862-608-8 et ISBN 0-8862-607-X (pbk.)

At last, a readable up-to-date overview of the position of Canadian women in the labour market. This book, which provides a succinct treatment of the significant aspects of women's participation in the world of paid work, should be useful both for specialized readers and for a more general public. Its suitability for courses in economics, labour relations, and women's studies at the college and university level is undeniable.

The book begins with an historical retrospective on women's work and shows the deep roots of present labour force participation patterns. The following chapters summarize women's place in the labour force both in terms of distribution and of earnings. The dual market theory is applied to female labour force participation patterns to provide an overall explanation of the particular characteristics observed there: overrepresentation in unskilled, low paying jobs, interrupted participation patterns, few avenues of access to the better jobs in the «primary sectors», among others. It ties existing labour market segmentation to the pre-capitalist sexual division of labour and the economic transition to industrial capitalism where women's overall labour force participation patterns continue to be determined by their roles in domestic production.

The threat posed to millions of female jobs, especially in the service sector, by the introduction of the new microtechnology is discussed at length, highlighting the issues of deskilling, health and safety and job elimination. A chapter on women in the labour movement documents unions' past failure to negotiate optimal conditions for a significant number of women workers before very recently. It also discusses the dramatic rise in participation of women in the union movement and its results in increased sensitivity of union leaders to the concerns of female

workers: equal pay for work of equal value, flexible working hours, daycare and parental benefits, etc.

The forecast for the future is pessimistic. The structural barriers identified by the authors in their analysis mean that equality in the paid labour force will only come when «... fundamental institutions and attitudes in our society are altered». Although rapid change in practices ingrained for centuries is clearly unlikely, the authors do suggest that a significant impact on women may be made in the future through remuneration for work performed in the home, equal pay for work of equal value legislation, affirmative action, pension reform, fairer splitting of family assets, and adequate daycare. However, as they point out, all of these measures are costly and involve increased initiative by the state. In an era when fiscal responsibility and traditional values are the new buzz words, this may take a long time to achieve.

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Collection «Technologie et Travail», Montréal, Institut national de productivité:
Introduction à la technologie des micro-processeurs, 51 pp., 1983, ISBN 2-551-05780-9;
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