Breadwinning, Equity, and Solidarity

_Labor Feminism in Oregon, 1945–1970_

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**THE SURGE OF UNION ORGANIZING** in the Pacific Northwest during the Depression and World War II brought Oregon women workers into a strong regional labor movement — but their place there was not secure. Alice Wesling of Waitresses Local 305 remembered that “the real work of organizing women” began after the passage of the National Labor Relations (or Wagner) Act in 1935, granting workers the right to join a labor union. Newly organized, primarily male, Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) unions helped women workers — who were mostly segregated into teaching, clerical, restaurant, apparel, canning, and laundry work — organize and gain union contracts across Oregon. During World War II, many of those women workers flocked to industrial jobs, especially in the Portland-Vancouver Kaiser Shipyards, where they received higher rates of pay and reached almost 30 percent of the workforce. When the shipyards closed at the end of the war, white male workers fiercely defended their control of industrial jobs by emphasizing their breadwinner privileges. After women members of Electrical Workers Local 48 complained about layoffs, the union spokesman reminded them that they “knew they were only working until such time as manpower was available.”

Union leaderships’ fixed belief in a labor hierarchy reflected the stubborn ideology of the white male breadwinner, which assumed that men required a wage sufficient to support a family while wives provided unpaid domestic and caregiving labor. Historian Alice Kessler-Harris attributes the persistent power of the male breadwinner ideal to deeply embedded “gendered habits of mind” in American culture. In the Pacific Northwest, unions emphasized physical strength and masculine solidarity in their defense of sex-segregated work in major occupations, such as logging. During the postwar period, many union men recognized the need to forge partnerships with the growing number of women in the workforce, but often, many also clung to patriarchal values that curbed a more expansive solidarity. They supported equal pay measures — if primarily to protect their wages — at the same time as they resisted women working alongside them as laborers or organizers. “Gendered habits of mind” were manifested locally, and the Oregon labor movement’s failures to abandon the trope of the male breadwinner, embrace women’s organization, cultivate women leaders, and recognize women’s concerns reflect some of those same failures in the national postwar labor movement.

After World War II, many Oregon working-class women actively campaigned for labor and civil rights, the elimination of sex discrimination in the workplace, and representation in union leadership. Laurie Mercier was awarded a 2015 Donald J. Sterling, Jr., Senior Research Fellowship in Pacific Northwest History.
workplace, and support for their domestic labors. This group of “labor feminists,” as Dorothy Sue Cobble argues, recognized gender-based inequalities and sought “first-class economic citizenship,” bridging the first and second “waves” of feminist movements traditionally described as ending in the 1930s and being renewed in the late 1960s and early 1970s. They did so by pushing their unions, women’s groups, the U.S. Congress, and the courts to support working women. In outlining these achievements, however, Cobble de-emphasizes how many male union members contested women workers’ assertions. Oregon labor feminists, taking inspiration from state and national civil rights and feminist struggles, responded to that resistance by making their appeals more prominent.

Scholars have documented how national union and political figures worked to alter gendered social policies, but less known is what women at the state level saw as their immediate concerns, how they addressed them, and how they intersected with national developments. After World War II, Oregon was one of a dozen or more states with relatively high union density, but because of its location in the Pacific Northwest, where the major industries of mining, forestry, fishing, and shipping remained exclusively male, much of the unionized labor force was also male. Unlike places in the Northeast and Midwest, where in the 1940s women broke into the ranks of industrial workers and some later became leaders in their internationals, in Oregon, women mostly continued to toil in low-wage domestic, service, and unskilled industrial sectors. Consequently, little has been written about working-class women in the postwar Pacific Northwest, where much labor history has focused on the region’s militant, masculine heritage. This local study, by focusing on specific struggles and on specific union and political leaders, illustrates just how determined, flexible, and creative women had to be in their collaborations and multipronged strategies to win reforms for working women.

Evidence from Oregon suggests how women at the grassroots level helped shape second-wave feminisms and, as Stephanie Gilmore maintains, that focusing on community activists “offers more than a local variant of a national story.” Working-class women in Oregon labored to convince reluctant male unions, employers, and the state to recognize their rights as breadwinners and their needs as caregivers. But they moved cautiously and, like both their own unions and labor feminists nationally, sometimes used the conflicting discourses of gender-neutral job equality and gender-based difference, including special protections, to win social and political support. Their efforts both influenced and were influenced by national movements and brought real accomplishments before the 1970s, when a burgeoning feminist movement accelerated the rate of change in working women’s lives.

MOST OREGON WOMEN who lost their industrial jobs after World War II returned to lower-paying “women’s” jobs in laundries, food service, teaching, and related service occupations. Yet they retained their enthusiasm for the wage equality that many wartime jobs had afforded and for the benefits of union representation. Even when faced with job segregation, women unionists, like their male counterparts, focused on organizing new workers, fighting for union contracts, and supporting strikers as ways to provide women workers with more autonomy and a living, if not equal, wage. While insisting that they too were breadwinners, supporting themselves or their families just as men did, they often downplayed gender differences in order to emphasize their common interests as workers. They expressed optimism that they could improve their material conditions with support from male allies. As an eager Marjorie Dover was reported to say in 1945, after successfully organizing the Mallory Hotel in Portland: “Hotel employees long underpaid and overworked have a chance to join a union supported by the whole labor movement.” Or, as a 1949 Oregonian article profiling women labor leaders reported, women had “inched forward” to gain their union positions by working hard to prove their worth. Reflecting their optimism and putting a positive public face on the movement as a whole, it continued, the women leaders now felt “no particular resentment or discrimination” based on their gender. In fact, they sanguinely insisted that organizing and collective bargaining had eliminated exploitation. But male unionists responded to this enthusiasm with ambivalence or downright opposition. To many men (and women), working wives signified inadequate male wages, and unions often used breadwinner rhetoric to boost their pay and to limit women’s access to jobs. In 1946, for example, the state labor federation passed a resolution insisting that the University of Oregon grant its physical plant employees a pay raise, noting that with rising costs of living, workers were “forced to adopt painful expedients, including the seeking of employment by over-aged wives.” Nevertheless, as more women organized and increased their proportion within the state labor movement, they compelled the Oregon Labor Federation to acknowledge their energy and skills and to grant them more visible leadership roles. At the 1946 convention, for example, after state American Federation of Labor (AFL) president J.D. McDonald announced the escort committee for Gov. Earl Snell, Gertrude Sweet of Waitresses Local 305 sternly reminded him: “Women are a vital part of the labor movement in the state of Oregon, and there should be a woman on that committee.” McDonald responded patronizingly: “I am very fond of the ladies. However . . . I saw fit to make the appointments as I made them.” But McDonald must have heeded Sweet’s complaint, because in 1947, women sat on most if not all the annual convention committees and made up one fourth of the total delegates.
If the 1947 convention reflected some victories for equal representation, it also raised questions about how to guarantee that women would play a role in leadership. Delegates debated and divided over Sweet’s resolution to appoint a female at-large executive board member. Some, such as Alice Wesling, an activist with Sweet’s Local 305, and Mildred Ripley Gianini, representing the Laundry, Dry Cleaning and Dye House Workers Union, feared that reserving one position would limit women’s opportunities to run for other offices, reflecting concerns over strategies that emphasized difference. Instead, they supported an amendment that would create two vice president positions without gender labels, hoping that by having more open positions, “women would take the chance of electing one woman.” Although some delegates argued that without a special designation, female candidates would not win a majority of male votes, a majority of delegates voted to support the constitutional amendment to have the officers of the Federation include a president, two vice presidents, and an executive secretary-treasurer. Delegates then elected Gianini as vice president of the state federation. The convention’s decision to not to create an official position for a woman nonetheless initiated a tradition of electing female second vice presidents. Concerns about emphasizing difference continued to confound Oregon labor feminists for the following four decades, during which women retained but were also reduced to just one executive board position — with the implication that it was secondary in status — in the labor federation.

Women unionists recognized that age and racial divisions also limited their opportunities for advancement. Clerical and sales job ads, for example, specified that only younger women need apply. Jettie Lebor, business agent of the United Garment Workers Union No. 208, noted that as a result of organization in her trade, older women, no longer “spring chickens,” were able to earn good incomes and thus stayed with the industry for a long time, but she also hinted that older women had few options for employment. The union protected older
workers, but younger, former shipyard workers reported that they despised the tedium and pressures of piecework and sought other opportunities.18

While many white working women utilized union contracts to improve their lot, they did not include African American and other women of color in their ranks. The Oregon AFL officially advocated tolerance of and support for African American as well as Japanese American workers, who had experienced wartime incarceration, but locals during and after the war fiercely resisted extending membership to workers of color.19 Women’s unions often expressed sympathy and sent support to civil rights struggles in the South and, later, to striking farm workers in California, but they rarely practiced inclusion at home. Fighting against the dual-wage system that paid women and minorities lower wages, Gianini celebrated the laundry union’s expansion in southern states and the growing presence of African American delegates at the international’s convention, but her frequent advocacy for civil rights did not seem to apply to union membership in the workplaces she represented. In 1951, when Laurelhurst Cleaners in Portland established a dual-wage scale, paying newly hired black workers less than whites, Gianini’s union, joined by the Teamsters, set up a picket. Still, her union did not appear to extend membership to these black workers.20

White women unionists embraced a variety of tactics as they sought support from the male-dominated labor movement and from the broader public for equal rights as workers. Because their jobs often involved service to the public, Oregon women workers understood consumer actions and community solidarity as key strategies for success and eagerly cultivated alliances with union households. They organized boycotts, insisted that consumers wear the union label and that businesses display the union card, urged voting for labor-friendly candidates, and engaged in “spotlight picketing” — rotating pickets at selected unfair businesses. They cajoled the labor federation to hold conventions in unionized hotels and restaurants and its members to avoid patronizing contested or “unfair” shops. They rallied support for ballot and legislative measures that supported jobs, wages, and tips for women workers. And they developed community service projects to engender goodwill. LaRene Paul recalled how her Communication Workers (CWA) union built success by a three-pronged “attack”: organizing, public relations, and community service. In their community service projects, the women publicly identified as CWA members rather than as telephone employees; then, when they needed help from the community in negotiations with the company, they “could get it.”21

Auxiliaries, including union wives, daughters, sisters, and mothers, had lent critical support during the 1930s strikes, which had revitalized the region’s labor movement, and labor feminists sought to reinvigorate them in the postwar period. Given the exclusion of women workers from the region’s major industries and unions, CIO unions actively encouraged wives to form auxiliaries to support union struggles, labor-friendly candidates, and programs that benefited workers, women, and children.22 The Oregon AFL, pushed by its women unionists, also organized ladies auxiliaries to help win statewide support for workers’ issues. In response to the passage of the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act, which restricted union activities, Gianini urged the state federation to create a dynamic educational program so that labor
could “tell its story.” She believed that women in unions and auxiliaries “banded together would prove a powerful educational force.” Through the 1950s, the women unionists gained mixed results. In 1960, AFL-CIO auxiliary organizer Marcella Beatty was disappointed to find only six affiliated auxiliaries in Oregon. To emphasize their importance, she reminded state convention delegates that auxiliaries were no longer organized just to “have a social club or card party” — they worked for the union label, civil rights, and labor’s Committee on Political Education (COPE). Mocking stereotypes of women in an attempt to appeal to men, she added that “women have been given the name of having a big mouth . . . now we can put it to a good use, with your help.”

Building on principles of solidarity and notions of equity, Oregon women workers led a series of strikes in the late 1940s and early 1950s to establish their rights as breadwinners. In April 1947, Oregon’s largely female telephone workers joined a nationwide strike against the nation’s largest private employer, AT&T, demanding higher wages, a union shop, and an improved pension plan. Although Oregon communities were hit hard by phone service shutdowns, the state’s 4,700 operators held fast against company efforts to divide workers through individual settlements with local offices. As the strike entered its fifth week, workers employed more militant tactics. In Astoria, strikers carried banners and effigies identifying “scabs.” Portland telephone operators created a “squirrel cage” picket that revolted in front of building entrances, making it difficult for supervisors and strikebreakers to enter. They even threw stink bombs at women supervisors passing through the picket, saturating their coats “with the sulphurous odor,” and tore their stockings “in scuffles.” Although the national strike ultimately dissolved, Oregon telephone workers held out until May 16; the majority then voted to return to work, but they won an end to discriminatory wage differentials and a promise not to retaliate against striking employees.

Low-wage workers, who had much to risk in organizing or striking, often faced more protracted struggles against obstinate employers, as was the case when Portland’s Emanuel Hospital’s nursing attendants, orderlies, maids, and kitchen aides demanded wages of a dollar an hour and launched what became a nineteen-month campaign for union recognition in August 1950. They recognized that public expectations of “caring” labor required careful strategizing, including pressuring the larger labor movement and community to support their cause. Not wanting to risk alienating potential supporters by pulling out the employees, in order not “to let suffering humanity down,” the Building Service Employees Union Local 49 set an informational picket, urged patients to find other hospitals and doctors, requested Teamsters not to deliver nonessential supplies, and demanded the reinstatement of employees fired for union activity. By November, solidarity within the city-wide boycott began to rupture. Local 49’s Louretta Carlston complained to the Central Labor Council that some AFL unions had crossed the hospital picket line. The council responded by enacting heavy fines on any union member crossing the picket, but the action suggested that women activists had to maintain vigilance to compel others to respect their struggle.

The Emanuel workers’ tenacity inspired three hundred employees at Good Samaritan Hospital in January 1951 to also declare a strike to challenge assumptions about their jobs and rights as breadwinners. As the local press editorialized that hospital workers “had a moral obligation to the patients,” the union responded that the hospital had “a similar moral obligation to those it employs.” The fact that they chose to work with the sick should not make strikers into second-class citizens, “unable to earn a wage that will allow them even the most basic necessities of life.” The union argued that the Lutheran and Episcopal churches who ran the hospitals “piously say they believe in human rights... and dignity,” but “they deny it in practice,” even refusing to meet with the union. Union education and persistence paid off. On December 7, Good Samaritan granted its workers a contract. Finally, on March 14, 1952, Emanuel nonprofessional employees also won union
recognition, a 10 percent wage increase, and a reduction in the work week from forty-four to forty hours without a reduction in pay. Both lengthy struggles revealed how the union organizers had marshaled community support to treat women’s caregiving labors as work rather than “service.”

Dependent on community support as well as labor solidarity to win contracts and strikes, women unionists crafted a public image as independent and deserving workers and responsible citizens. Sometimes this meant playing on gendered stereotypes, such as when a Service Employees Union official emphasized propriety, noting that its members behaved “like ladies and gentlemen” on the picket line and contrasted that with the disrespectful treatment hospital workers received from their employers. Recognizing the importance of public and political support, many female-dominated unions upheld standards for professionalism and service and required members to register to vote. Local 305 required servers to update their training, attend regular union meetings, and uphold high moral standards, including not smoking or drinking while on the job. But members also confidently asserted their rights as equal citizens. When, in October 1956, an Oregon Journal letter complained about waitresses wearing earrings that advertised support for the reelection of Senator Wayne Morse, a group of Local 305 women shot back: “Nobody tells us what kind of earrings or campaign buttons to wear, and nobody tells us how to vote.”

Labor feminists also struggled, with some success, to change gendered media images. The Oregon Labor Press instituted a women’s page in 1950, with homemaking advice, recipes, consumer information, and auxiliary news, which drew more women readers, who then complained about glamorous pin-ups elsewhere in its pages. Mrs. O.D. Cook, secretary-treasurer of the Telegraphers Union, objected to images of “undraped women” and argued that instead of attracting more women to union issues, “more ladies will be complaining.” The editor solicited readers’ advice about whether to feature the images, generating a “pin-up battle . . . raging in the letters column.”

Gordon Swope, business agent for the Retail Clerks, which had a large female membership, protested that “cheesecake pictures of partly-dressed girls . . . give the paper a raffish, undignified tone . . . [that] may even offend some people... who are likely to be our most responsible union members.” Critics apparently influenced the paper to publish fewer images that explicitly objectified women, but Stan Jennings’s popular “Union Maid” cartoon continued to present busty, long-legged worker heroines, even as they upheld union principles and challenged lecherous bosses. In any case, after the public debate, the newspaper’s women workers, glamorous or not, were not portrayed solely as either docile or the subject of men’s fantasies.

While Oregon labor feminists continued to emphasize the intersecting goals of gaining respect as breadwinners and as union equals, some became increasingly frustrated by the slow pace of change. Male allies often had to be pushed to offer assistance. On June 19, 1952, Gianini forcefully reproached the mostly male unionists at the Oregon Labor Federation convention for their failure to support a critical struggle of her Laundry Workers Union. After
a three-year union lockout at two dry-cleaning plants in Eugene, the owners had fired the workers and filed a Taft-Hartley injunction suit. She told the assembly that if the Eugene labor movement had been more cooperative, the strikers could have won. Instead, its failure to take working women’s efforts seriously had risked the futures of all workers: “If we lose that injunction suit, look out, labor movement! You will be next!” Invoking women’s rights as breadwinners, she pleaded, “For God’s sake, do not crucify four hundred workers, women who are supporting families?”

Although many competent women organized workers, or were active in or served as officers in their locals, male unionists continued to resist electing or appointing women to statewide positions. In 1950, LaRene Paul quit her job at the telephone company to become a full-time organizer for CWA in Oregon and, later, in northern California, but she recalled that, through the 1950s and 1960s, it remained “an unusual position for a woman.” 35

In addition to labor’s resistance, patriarchal cultural constraints burdened women with caregiving responsibilities, making it difficult to actively participate in union business. The success of leaders such as Gianini and Sweet—who led their union expansions across the state and had commanding presences in the Oregon Federation of Labor and their international unions—had much to do with their energy and effectiveness but also with the nature of their industries and unions, as well as their ages and family situations. Both came from female-dominated unions where they could develop leadership skills, but those few who achieved leadership positions were older or, like Sweet, divorced and without young children. 37 If they were married, it was often to other labor leaders, who were likely to understand and support the demands of a union activist’s life. Alice Wesling, who had worked for decades as a waitress in Klamath Falls and then served as Waitresses Local 305 business representative from the 1940s through the 1960s, was married to the business agent of the Hoisting and Portable Engineers union. 38 In 1955, when the AFL and CIO began merger talks, she was the only woman on the negotiating committee. 39 Not all union husbands supported their wives’ aspirations. In the mid 1950s, Nellie Batman Holmes (later Fox-Edwards) became an organizer and business agent for the Retail Clerks Union. Her union husband disliked the long hours and travel associated with union work and urged her to quit, but she liked the work and continued, believing that female clerks needed more women in union leadership, even as her persistence ultimately ended her marriage. 40

Despite their modest gains, union women recognized the limits of the labor movement and collective bargaining to challenge the fundamental assumptions of breadwinning. This recognition propelled them to increasingly call on the state to implement key goals: increase the minimum wage, provide assistance for child care, and enact legislation guaranteeing women the same pay as men who performed comparable jobs.

OREGON LABOR FEMINISTS welcomed new political opportunities as the labor movement helped the Democratic Party make gains in a state long dominated by Republicans. With its extensive network of women volunteers, including many union members and wives, the party expanded its campaigns in every county. Beginning in 1950, Democrats increased their seats in the state legislature and elected former teacher and union member Maurine Brown Neuberger. After her husband, Richard, had won a seat in the state senate in 1948, Neuberger realized that she could “do more on the floor of the House than she could knitting socks in the gallery of the Senate” and devoted her two terms to supporting working women’s issues, including consumer protection, child care for working mothers, and an equal pay act. 41 Still, Neuberger found that her male colleagues resisted legislation that challenged the primacy of the male breadwinner. When she introduced a “babysitting bill” to provide tax deductions for working mothers, other legislators insisted that the measure would encourage women to leave home and abandon their children.42 Popular with constituents, in 1954 she turned to national politics and helped elect Richard to the U.S. Senate, the first from their party in forty years. That same year Edith Starett Green defeated Republican Tom McCall to represent Oregon’s Third Congressional District (Multnomah County) in the U.S. House of Representatives.
becoming one of the first women elected to Congress who did not inherit a seat from a husband’s prior election. Green spent the next two decades championing the interests of girls and working women.43 These Democratic victories aided the equal pay movement, which had gained steam among labor and middle-class feminists after World War II. During the war, labor unions, fearing that lower wages would encourage employers to prefer women, had insisted with some success that women industrial workers be paid the same as men. In 1945, the U.S. Senator from Oregon, Wayne Morse, helped introduce the first national equal pay bill.44 A number of scholars have documented well the long struggle to win passage of the Equal Pay Act (EPA).45 The efforts of Oregon working women and Green highlight the significance of grassroots activism in influencing state and national policies as well as the debates about how to argue for equality while maintaining the “difference” of protective legislation. In the process, more working women began to reject those protections in favor of economic equality. Helen Nikkum, for example, had found work with IBM in Salem in 1951 after graduating from college and expressed frustration at legislation that prohibited women in manufacturing from working over 40 hours a week. “The law was intended to protect them from overwork,” she noted, but “they were protected over the right to be paid overtime. The man I trained with who became office manager was paid for all of the overtime that he worked. I was not. I would have to clock out at 5 o’clock, go back to my desk and continue working without being paid.” When she complained to her boss about pay and promotion inequities, he replied, “That’s the way it is.”46

The pressure exerted by increasing numbers of women in the workforce helped transform the Oregon Bureau of Labor into an important ally. In 1952, the agency published a fiftieth anniversary booklet that boasted the state had “led the nation in progressive labor legislation,” focusing on the broad postwar civil rights accomplishments for minority and women workers. In 1949, Oregon had passed a Fair Employment Practices Act that prohibited employers and unions from discriminating against a worker because of race, religion, or national origin, and the bureau claimed that “few occupations are closed to women.”47

In the early 1950s, after a handful of states had passed equal pay legislation based on a model bill authored by the U.S. Labor Department’s Women’s Division, the Oregon State Council of Retail Clerks and its labor allies joined with the Oregon Business and Professional Women (BPW) and American Association of University Women (AAUW) to persuade sympathetic state legislators to introduce and support a bill to abolish discriminatory wage rates based on sex.48 Records of the Oregon Senate and House hearings on the bill reveal how male labor representatives, legislators, and employers affirmed notions of gender difference as they debated the role of women workers. In crowded committee hearings, state AFL and CIO leaders favoring the bill spoke about the importance of paying the same rate for the job in order not to undercut the male family wage. Gordon Swope of the Retail Clerks Union urged legislators to consider the reality that one-third of Oregon workers were women, who “work to make a living [but] are undercutting men’s wages. This jeopardizes an adequate standard of living.” He testified that many female bank tellers and retail store clerks received significantly less than their male counterparts for doing the same work. Whether employers thought “that women are superior to men” or simply sought to reduce labor costs, they were hiring more women in retail jobs. John R. Moore of the Salem Trades and Labor Council argued that women should receive equal pay because they also contributed comparably to profits, affirming that a woman in a store might not be able to lift heavy objects, “but [she] can smile all day and bring in the customers.”49

Employers’ testimony justified lower wages by stereotyping women

workers as temporary and unreliable. They claimed that after investing time and money in training, “girls have a knack for getting married and leaving their job.” Clifford Zollinger, representing the Oregon Bankers Association, argued that banks paid male tellers more than women because male college graduates “can go further in the business and be of more value at a future date.” Apparently trusting that women were unaware that male employees were already openly favored, Zollinger also contended that equal pay legislation would undermine morale as more women employees would question whether they had been discriminated against. Others disguised their opposition to equal pay by arguing that the requirements of Oregon’s protective legislation forced them to discriminate. W.F. Lubursky, of the Portland Retail and Trade Bureau, insisted that such gendered protections limited the weight that women could carry and mandated additional rest breaks, making women employees less productive and more expensive.50

In contrast to men’s arguments, working- and middle-class women rejected differences altogether and united to testify against the inherent unfairness of a dual wage structure. They spoke against protective legislation as limiting opportunities, even as international unions continued to juggle arguments supporting both protections and equal wages. Even though her union had campaigned after the war to forbid (and “protect”) women from working as bartenders, Anne Chambers of the Restaurant Workers insisted that women wanted bartending jobs because they “can still make more than working as a waitress.” To her, the jobs were comparable and should be paid the same. Thirty BPW members from nine Oregon clubs, speaking as both employers and employees, argued for legislation that recognized the value of individual workers rather than as employees discriminated by sex. Nellie Burns, Oregon BPW president, proclaimed to the House committee that rather than being temporary workers, “women are here to stay!”51

The state legislature yielded to labor and women’s groups, and in April 1955, Republican Gov. Paul Patterson signed the bill that guaranteed women workers the same wages as men when they performed comparable jobs in a workplace.52 Legislators had backed away from defining comparable work, however, reassuring opponents that pay scales could be based on experience, which allowed loopholes, and failing to provide strong enforcement measures. That lack of enforcement led many union and BPW women to seek federal regulation. Supported by labor feminists in her state and elsewhere, Green introduced federal equal pay legislation in May 1955, shortly after her first election to Congress, and, for the next eight years, was a prominent advocate for its passage.53

Green quickly learned that women and girls had few advocates in Congress. Yet, in order to preserve her support in Oregon and to become effective in Congress, during her first years in Washington, D.C., she avoided associating herself solely with women’s issues, insisting in one interview that women were just as interested in foreign policy or labor issues as men.54 But Green heard often from her constituents about job discrimination and the economic challenges facing working women, and she used her position on the House Education and Labor Committee to help them. At the Oregon AFL-CIO convention in 1955, Green reported that the three most important bills to come out of the committee — an increase in the minimum wage, federal aid for school construction, and the lowering of the voluntary retirement age for women from 65 to 62 — all benefitted working women. She also joined a growing chorus calling for the end of wage inequality and asked Oregon’s Retail Clerks Union to send her materials that had helped union women pass the Oregon law.55

While Green tried to move an equal pay bill forward each Congressional session, many of her male committee colleagues refused to consider it, so she turned to the public for support. She frequently argued to the media, women’s groups, and her Oregon constituents that an equal pay bill was “sorely needed.” To undermine the cultural resistance she encountered, she focused on the necessity of women working and tirelessly recited facts about how they sustained families. Women were not just “second breadwinners” working for “pin money”; almost half supported dependents.56 Green focused on this group — women breadwinners — to win male support, even though she also privately supported women’s rights to work by choice.

As labor feminists struggled to dislodge assumptions about the male breadwinner model, they found an important ally in the Oregon Bureau of Labor. In 1958, research director Eric J. Weiss published a report on the “Self-Supporting Woman in Oregon.” Drawing on testimony given to the state House Committee on Education and Labor to extend coverage of the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and a recent survey of working women in eight Oregon cities, the report highlighted a growing gender wage gap and the dire economic circumstances of the 55 percent of women wage earners who were divorced, separated, or widowed and caring for dependents. Weiss argued that one prejudicial argument was replacing another: instead of paying lower wages for allegedly lesser abilities, employers were paying women for “allegedly lesser needs and requirements.”57

Weiss’s interviews for the report revealed the particulars of women’s frustrations with this double standard. One Portland cashier reported that “too many divorced women are trying to raise children on much less money than their [ex]husbands make for similar jobs.” A secretary noted that women “can handle the same jobs as men do. It costs a woman the same amount . . . for
Clothing, car, and insurance. The report demonstrated that working women led a precarious existence, depending on relatives to help with childcare or provide housing and rarely receiving support from former husbands. Some even admitted that they gave up custody of their children to former husbands who earned more, demolishing the argument that women breadwinners would destroy family life. Instead, discriminatory wages affected women’s abilities to care for families.\textsuperscript{58} Many of the women interviewed recognized that unionization — and access to jobs where men predominated — offered hope for greater income security. Likely aware of overall declining union membership by the late 1950s, the report argued that state wage and hour conference boards should establish higher minimum wages.\textsuperscript{59}

A controversy over hiring in the U.S. Post Office in Portland reflected ongoing tensions between women’s equal rights to jobs and the masculine breadwinner ideal and provoked Green to mediate. On May 1, 1959, in response to an announcement that the post office would now encourage women to apply for open positions, one employee wrote to Green: “I do not think a working wife should have preference [sic] over a man supporting a family.” Green immediately responded that “the objective you have in mind,” namely, preventing the hiring of women at lower pay rates, could be best addressed by adopting an equal pay act. Challenging the reference to the male breadwinner hierarchy, she argued that women should have the right to compete and that a better way of protecting wage standards was to encourage high employment rather than restrict jobs by gender.\textsuperscript{60} After the Multnomah County Labor Council passed a resolution opposing the postal service’s plans to hire more women, Green and U.S. Postmaster General Arthur E. Summerfield intervened to educate resistant unionists and their wives. On May 21, Roy C. Hill, business representative of the Painters, Decorators & Paperhangers Local 10, reversed his position and admitted to Green that the council sometimes got “carried away”; after reviewing her communication, he had “cleared up . . . the equal pay situation” with the city’s unions. To soothe men’s fears, Green focused on maintaining wage standards rather than on the abstract concept of women’s rights, although her work nevertheless advanced that cause.

While Green succeeded in convincing union men that they should support equal pay, the Post Office reassured men that opening jobs to women would not threaten the gendered order of work. In a follow-up communication, Cecil M. Harden, Special Assistant to the Postmaster General, affirmed that women “both as citizens and as competent members of the potential work force of the Nation, should not be excluded.” He also stated, however, that mechanization eliminated the need for physical strength in some jobs, which were “more attractive to women than to men.” Harden tried to mollify those fearing the loss of masculine authority by suggesting that the arduous
Maurine Neuberger, who, after her husband’s death in 1960, became the first to his President’s Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW), along with support equal pay legislation. Shortly after his election, he appointed her John F. Kennedy’s campaign chair in Oregon, Green had urged him to and Congress and through dedicated lobbying by women’s groups. As a school teacher “at a low wage” and his sister who finished business college and became a cashier at a “low[er] wage to men’s wages for a responsible job,” Mrs. Homer McMilin complained that she was fired from her job at Tektronix in Beaverton because she refused “to perform the buffing operation any longer unless I received the same wage scale” as men who worked in the area.

Some Oregon constituents, especially male employers, claimed the EPA would usher in dramatic gender role changes that would destroy the male breadwinner and American families. Bob Dove of Portland complained that the “modern” woman was doing a poor job taking care of children and was “more interested in getting away from home to make money,” increasing divorce rates and women as heads of families. K.D. Flesichman, vice president of the North Pacific Lumber Co. in Portland, wrote Green that he was opposed to the EPA because “our experience has proven that women, due to their household duties. . . . are not career workers.” He added, “does it seem wise to encourage the mother to work and thus evade her responsibility to her family?” An exasperated Green responded that she did not understand why he would object to paying employees the same amount for the same work and noted the “volumes of testimony” that showed women working in identical jobs were paid a lower wage. Green’s arguments about women as breadwinners did not contest their family roles, claiming instead that they should be compensated fairly in order to better care for families.

Due to the tireless work by Green and other advocates, supportive lobbying from constituents, and the influence of the civil rights movement, the legislation passed. Kennedy signed the EPA on May 23, 1963. As Maurine Neuberger remembered, the movement “finally built up . . . times change[d] to a certain extent.” The act protected men and women who perform substantially equal work in the same establishment from sex-based wage discrimination and was the first national civil rights legislation focusing on employment discrimination.

The final EPA, however, was not what Green and labor feminists had endorsed for many years. Through amendments, Republican women (and even the BPW) had weakened language from “comparable” to “equal” work and did not include effective enforcement mechanisms. As scholars physical demands of most jobs meant they were likely to remain male.

Green also had to mediate tensions between labor and middle-class women’s clubs over priorities for working women. Although the BPW supported Green’s equal pay efforts, it was equally fervent about passing the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) — a movement that began in 1920 and gathered steam after World War II. Like most labor supporters in the 1950s and 1960s, Green feared the ERA would eliminate hard won special protections for women workers, such as maximum hours and rest breaks, and alienate the AFL-CIO, which hoped to expand protections to all workers. She deftly sidestepped the issue by assuring Oregon BPW chapters that supporting the EPA was the smartest strategy to achieve gains for women. As she wrote to Joyce Willis, president of the McMinnville BPW, the ERA was “far too broad”; preferable was the “selective rather than the ‘shotgun’ approach” in her equal pay bill, “since employment greatly discriminates against women.” Green’s position reflected the challenge labor feminists faced in trying to eliminate discrimination while recognizing “genuine differences,” especially domestic burdens — a position she and most labor feminists would abandon by the 1970s, when there was more widespread, popular support for the ERA and some women were pressing men to assume more domestic duties.

During the early 1960s, the EPA gained traction with a new president and Congress and through dedicated lobbying by women’s groups. As John F. Kennedy’s campaign chair in Oregon, Green had urged him to support equal pay legislation. Shortly after his election, he appointed her to his President’s Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW), along with Maurine Neuberger, who, after her husband’s death in 1960, became the first Oregon woman to be elected to the U.S. Senate (and only the fourth in U.S. history). As the first federal commission devoted to assessing women’s status, the PCSW — along with the EPA, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, and amendments to the FLSA — represented, as Cobble notes, the culmination of two decades of work by labor feminists to gain “first-class economic citizenship” for women, years before the rise of the more visible women’s movement of the late 1960s. Green and the majority of the PCSW pursued antidiscrimination measures that did not alienate the labor movement’s commitment to protective legislation; they advocated a federal equal pay law and skirted an equal-rights bill. Unlike Green, Neuberger — who in an interview characterized herself as more independent from Oregon labor — opposed the committee’s support of protective legislation and supported an equal rights amendment. In their reminiscences, both Neuberger and Green expressed belief that the male labor movement had been more of an obstacle than a help in winning equal pay legislation. According to Neuberger, “Labor was never very strong for women to get big-headed.”

In 1962, Green’s House Education and Labor Committee held hearings on the equal pay proposal, signaling its support and imminent passage. Dozens of constituents wrote to Green praising her efforts, even as they warned about lack of enforcement, as in Oregon’s equal pay law. Wilma Stevens of Port Orford reported: “As a working woman with the same responsibilities as a man I am vitally interested in this legislation which I feel is only just and right.” Warren Loyal Irwin of Portland thanked Green for her “gallant fight for equal rights for women . . . long overdue” and recalled his mother’s struggles as a school teacher “at a low wage” and his sister who finished business college and became a cashier at a “low[er] wage to men’s wages for a responsible job,” Warren Loyal Irwin of Portland thanked Green for her “gallant fight for equal rights for women . . . long overdue” and recalled his mother’s struggles as a school teacher “at a low wage” and his sister who finished business college and became a cashier at a “low[er] wage to men’s wages for a responsible job,” Mrs. Homer McMilin complained that she was fired from her job at Tektronix in Beaverton because she refused “to perform the buffing operation any longer unless I received the same wage scale” as men who worked in the area.

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Mercier, Breadwinning, Equity, and Solidarity

have noted, the act preserved the white, male breadwinner wage in that it excluded domestic and restaurant services and agriculture, where women, especially women of color, were concentrated.75 And the act did little to improve access to “men’s” jobs — including the region’s well-paying unionized industries, such as forest products — from which women had been historically excluded. Even so, the few Oregon women in these industries were enthusiastic about seeing their pay boosted. Marguerite Bye, a delegate from Local 100 of the International Brotherhood of Pulp, Sulphite & Papermill Workers in Portland, eagerly asked Green for copies of the EPA to use in coming wage negotiations.76 But most letters from working women to Green, before and after the act’s passage, urged her to seek other federal remedies to assist female breadwinners by raising the federal minimum wage, repealing the Taft-Hartley Act, and expanding the FLSA and access to health care — all general labor movement issues.77 The state and the labor movement offered some mechanisms for improving women’s lives, but by the late 1960s, a burgeoning social movement compelled both to devote more serious attention to working women’s issues.

POST WORLD WAR II LABOR HISTORY has often emphasized the Cold War’s impact on weakening unions, but as the case of Oregon demonstrates, another key reason for the labor movement’s decline was its failure to actively support women and workers of color, weakening its ability to defend against new assaults in the late twentieth century.78 Unions provided lukewarm support for women organizing in their sex-segregated job sites and for equal pay, while many white male members remained fixated on the male breadwinner ideal and on maintaining their perceived privileges. The failure of the state’s unions to organize women’s auxiliaries after many years of concerted efforts by its women members spoke to how the labor movement could not even sustain its most important allies. Through the 1960s, national AFL-CIO Women’s Activities director Margaret Thorburn scolded the Oregon federation for letting most of the women’s departments dissolve and, in 1965, pointed to men’s hypocrisy in claiming that their locals did not support auxiliaries because “women fight.” She noted that “it would take a heck of a lot of fighting on the part of the women to equal what has taken place in [the state] convention this week. . . . But when men fight . . . it’s called constructive criticism.”79 Resolutions by state leaders and prodding by women union activists could not overcome the resistance of male-dominated locals and labor councils to alter their culture and embrace women’s goals to build broader solidarity.

Even if Oregon’s labor movement appeared to seesaw from support to apathy — if not outright hostility — for women’s activism, by the late 1960s, more than two decades of advocacy by labor feminists and their supporters had resulted in some favorable actions by state and federal governments and more public acceptance of the reality of their breadwinning roles. Oregon appointed commissions to study, and passed legislation to address, workplace discrimination and a persistent pay gap.80 Even the traditionally pro-business Oregonian began featuring editorials critical of pay disparities, continuing discrimination, and the lack of childcare facing the state’s working women.81 After the 1965 creation of Title VII’s enforcement agency, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), more working women turned to the courts to force unions and employers to hire and promote them.82 Many Oregon women workers realized that too many employers classified jobs with reference to protective restrictions in order to maintain sex-segregated employment. The Governor’s Committee on the Status of Women reported in 1968 that the regulations revealed “an outmoded paternalistic attitude toward women

IN HER TWENTY YEARS in Congress (1955–1975), Oregon Representative Edith Green doggedly pursued legislation for gender equality in education and the workplace, including the Equal Pay Act. Here, she is pictured to the immediate left of President John F. Kennedy as he signs the Equal Pay Act on June 10, 1963. Senator Maurine Neuberger stands to the right of Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson.
employees." In 1969, Diana Richards, an employee at Griffith Rubber Mills in Portland, filed the state’s first sex-discrimination case, charging her employer with not promoting her to press operator. The U.S. District Court ruled in her favor, and it also reinforced the primacy of Title VII in noting that the company had honored state law and union contract regulations prohibiting women from lifting objects heavier than thirty pounds; hereafter, the state would need to modify its protective legislation to avoid conflicts with the federal law.83

Many labor feminists in Oregon had long questioned the value of protective legislation, and once again, the Retail Clerks Union focused the state’s attention on how it created inequities in the workplace. Beginning in 1965, Local 1188 in Coos Bay led a series of strikes to pressure grocers to equalize pay and eliminate distinctions between “light and heavy duty.” After two weeks of a work stoppage in late July, food clerks returned to work under a new contract that retained pay differentiation although with a smaller gap. By the late 1960s, the food industry had equalized pay scales of men and women employees in the Portland area, but Robert Dillman, president of Local 1188, reported to the Oregon Labor Commissioner’s ad hoc committee on sex discrimination that the retail food industry “is full of discrimination.” The union went on strike against Safeway stores in other Oregon counties over pay and seniority list differentials. Appealing to women consumers in a flyer “to Women who shop at Safeway from Women who work at Safeway,” the union noted that discrimination against women — over the classification of jobs as “light” or “heavy” to avoid paying women higher wages — forced the strike. Male employees were given “‘heavy duty’ classification, on the assumption that a man may sometimes lift or move or carry something that a woman doesn’t” and every woman “‘light duty’ — at 10 to 12½ cents an hour less. But, as Dillman admitted, strikes were difficult to sustain because “there are more males in the union and men won’t strike to give women equal pay and opportunities.” In 1970, however, when a Coos Bay woman and Local 1188 jointly filed a lawsuit against the company in U.S. District Court, Safeway voluntarily eliminated its gendered job classifications.84

Women’s labor gains were met with new local and national challenges. Although the proportion of women in unions was growing, the actual numbers of union women workers were not. Automation, capital mobility, and increasing employer hostility to union power led to declining unionization across industries and among locally owned businesses. The Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union faced an uphill battle organizing the low-wage workers in the new motel and drive-in businesses.85 Additionally, as the number of jobs in Oregon’s timber-based economy began to shrink, so did the proportion of unionized workers. Gertrude Sweet recalled that, during the 1960s, as

INSPIRED DURING THE LATE 1960s by new state and federal legislation that banned workplace discrimination and a growing feminist movement, the Retail Clerks Union challenged discriminatory job categories and wages through a series of strikes in Oregon. Here the union makes a special plea to women consumersto boycott Safeway until the strike is resolved.
than white women, and 70 percent, compared to 33 percent of white women, women, concentrated in the service sector, had higher unemployment rates and for African American women it was clothing for their families. Black medical care; for rural and suburban women, it was reliable transportation; with dependents described as “the hardest bill to pay”: for a majority it was lack of affordable child care. Weiss found disturbing what working women Burden Alone unfairly penalized women. The women interviewed for women were supplementary and to illustrate how the gendered labor mar-
to again contest the stubborn cultural belief that wages of breadwinning dependents. His new study had a more desperate tone, with ample data to the subject he had pursued a decade earlier — working women with dependents. His new study had a more desperate tone, with ample data to again contest the stubborn cultural belief that wages of breadwinning women were supplementary and to illustrate how the gendered labor mar-
ket unfairly penalized women. The women interviewed for They Carry the Burden Alone complained about raising children on low incomes and the lack of affordable child care. Weiss found disturbing what working women with dependents described as “the hardest bill to pay”: for a majority it was medical care; for rural and suburban women, it was reliable transportation; and for African American women it was clothing for their families. Black women, concentrated in the service sector, had higher unemployment rates than white women, and 70 percent, compared to 33 percent of white women, earned less than $3,000 a year, below the federal poverty level. Unlike the earlier study, however, survey respondents did not mention labor unions as solutions to low wages, indicating how unions were losing ground. Instead, the study emphasized education, training, and enforcement of equal pay and Title VII antidiscrimination measures to lift women workers out of poverty and into more lucrative occupations.

Declining awareness about the value of unions can be attributed in part to the general decline in union density, but the lack of women’s representation in leadership also played a role. In the late 1960s, Nellie Fox-Edwards was the only woman on the eighteen-member Oregon AFL-CIO board, reflecting little progress since Sweet’s day. In 1969, Labor Commissioner Norman Nilsen appointed her to a new Committee on Sex Discrimination in Employment, which would study gender discrimination practices in workplaces and develop guidelines to enforce Oregon’s civil rights provisions. Inspired by the expanding feminist movement and the committee’s findings, Fox-Edwards dedicated herself to reforming the state AFL-CIO. Her reports to the federation revealed “many and widespread” problems of sexism in employment, and she believed the labor movement could become important agents in advocating for women workers. She pleaded with unions to eliminate discriminatory practices in contracts, take a more active role in electing women to leadership roles in their locals, and participate in statewide conferences on sex discrimination. Advocating for non-discriminatory contracts and child care legislation, she argued, would encourage working women to take a more active part in local unions. Recognizing that the annual labor convention was “strictly oriented towards men and men’s issues,” Fox-Edwards and others organized an annual luncheon at the convention to discuss women’s issues they believed should be at the forefront of the labor movement, including equal pay and child care (an issue that, she noted in her oral history, has “never gone away”). The ad hoc group later merged with the Oregon chapter of the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), a national organization created in 1974 to address the needs of unorganized working women and make unions more responsive to the concerns of their women members.

Civil rights, antiwar, and feminist activism in the 1960s spawned a new generation of women leaders who became more demanding about workplace and union justice, and by the 1970s, Oregon’s labor feminists were optimistic about revitalizing the labor movement to support equal rights, full-employment and child-care legislation, low-wage women workers, and public policy advocacy. They had received AFL-CIO support to organize more women into CLUW, believed an equal rights amendment was imminent, and held that the state and federal governments, in expanding affirmative action and enforcing Title VII, were in their corner. After twenty years of organizing for the CWA, LaRene Paul recalled that during the early 1970s, “finally the women’s movement blossomed, things began to develop.” She echoed the reflections of other labor feminists of her generation who welcomed the new energy and demands of a youthful social movement. This optimism, coupled with a dramatic rise in public-sector organizing, which brought more women into the labor movement, suggests that — unlike the arguments offered by some labor historians — the 1970s did not necessarily signal the beginning of the end of labor vitality. Nor did it mark the end of labor feminism. In 1973, after the Oregon Legislature passed a collective bargaining bill that allowed public employees to unionize and strike, women who dominated teaching, nursing, and government office work developed a stronger presence in the state labor movement. The efforts of post-1970 Oregon labor feminists to win union leadership positions, legislation, and equal pay, along with the disappointments that followed towards the end of the century, await another chapter.

From the 1940s through the 1960s, women struggled against wage discrimination and for a place in the Oregon labor movement. They pressured their unions and lobbied state and federal legislators to boost the
minimum wage, require equal pay, and support welfare measures aiding women with domestic burdens. In their pursuit of access to “men’s” jobs and wages, they became less interested in traditional protective legislation. Labor feminists also enlisted a broader community of support, including unorganized workers, union wives, and middle-class women, to aid in general education, consumer boycotts, and political action. They worked through their unions, the state labor federation, political action committees, women’s labor auxiliaries, the Oregon Bureau of Labor, and the U.S. Congress, through Green, to make gains in economic, social, and political equality. Although the labor movement formally embraced women’s participation, it tried to steer support to its traditional issues, including organizing sex-segregated workplaces and electing progressive politicians who supported labor causes. This study reveals that in Oregon, gender ideologies operating in the workplace, labor movement, and home remained stubbornly resistant to change. Working women insisted, however, on gaining recognition and rights as breadwinners, presaging other feminist achievements, and challenges, in coming decades.

Because of the persistence and activism of postwar labor feminists, working women today are accepted as breadwinners and have gained formal equality under the law. The achievements of that earlier generation of women, and the scale of resistance to them, are perhaps underestimated because of the persistence of wage inequality, job segregation, sexual harassment, and discrimination based on gender and race. Although union membership as a share of the American workforce declined steadily after the 1960s, to just 10.5 percent today, women constitute almost half of all members. In Oregon, 51.6 percent of union workers are women. Although their wages still lag behind men’s wages, they experience a smaller gender wage gap. But they still share some of the same challenges as their sisters in the twentieth century, chief among them gendered pay gaps, anti-union employers, limited leadership opportunities in labor, and the lack of assistance for caregiving. Some scholars have observed that although many professional women have benefitted from legal equality, class inequalities among women have concurrently widened.

The historical undervaluation of women’s work — both in sex-segregated occupations and at home — continues to perpetuate women’s low wages and generational family poverty. Sixty percent of Oregon’s minimum wage workers are female, concentrated in the growing retail, home and personal care, food service, and administrative sectors. In its recent report on women and girls, the Women’s Foundation of Oregon determined that the state is one of the least affordable for child care, has disproportionate barriers for women of color, and is where women have the “second highest rate of asset poverty in the nation.” These statistics only underscore how the goals of Oregon’s earlier labor feminists — for pay equity, greater unionization, and social policies to aid caregiving — still call for collaboration and activism to create a more equitable future.

NOTES

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4. Dorothy Sue Cobble, The Other Women’s Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 3; Dorothy Sue Cobble, Linda Gordon, and Astrid Henry, Feminism Unfinished: A Short History of the American Women’s Movements (New York: WW. Norton, 2014), 1–67. Although the Oregon women did not describe themselves as feminists until the late 1940s (if then), they actively worked for gender equality and challenged sex discrimination in their workplace and unions from the 1940s through the 1960s.


7. See for example, Marcia Walker-McWilliams, Reverend Addy Wyatt: Faith and the Fight for Labor, Gender, and Racial Equality (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2016). Ruth Milkman traces the origins of occupational segregation by sex and the concentration of women and men in particular industries and unions in several essays collected in On Gender, Labor, and Inequality (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2016), 5–6; 100–113; 170–89, 208–209. The exclusion of women from industry in the Pacific Northwest contrasts to how other states, such as Indiana, recruited employers to take advantage of its pool of women workers. Nancy Gabin, “Bossy Ladies: Toward a History of Wage Earning Women in Indiana,” Indiana Magazine of History, December 1, 2016, 92–93.


10. In 1903 Oregon passed legislation limiting the workday for some women to ten hours, which in 1908 was upheld by the landmark Supreme Court case Muller v Oregon; and in 1911 it passed the first enforceable state minimum wage law, which affected many women workers. Most states had such protective legislation by the early 1920s. See Nancy Woloch, Muller v Oregon: A Brief History with Documents (Boston: Bedford Books, 1996); Janice Dilg, “‘For Working Women in Oregon’: Caro-


43. In the late nineteenth century, the Knights of Labor called for equal pay, and in 1919, on the heels of progressive reform, Michigan and Montana became the first states to enact equal pay legislation. When it was established in 1920 the US Women's Bureau advocated equal wages, and in 1922 it pushed the federal government to classify federal jobs according to duties rather than sex. Robert D. Moran, “Reducing Discrimination: Role of the Equal Pay Act,” Monthly Labor Review 93:6 (June 1970): 30. In its post-World War II iteration the Equal Pay Act would have made it illegal to pay women less than men for work of “comparable quality and quantity,” a significant feature that was amended in the 1963 EPA to apply only to jobs of “similar” conditions.
46. Nnukom interview by Greg Karnes, SR 11230, OHS Research Library.
Union Support: Edith Green sponsors bill to give women equal pay,” OLP, June 3, 1955, 1, 3.
62. The proposed ERA would guaran- tee equal rights for all citizens regardless of sex and end legal distinctions between men and women. Since 1920 women’s groups divided over whether to support it depending on their class interests — many labor feminists believed working-class women would lose more than gain by the amendment. For more on their support for state protective legislation and opposition to the ERA, and how they came to support the ERA by the 1970s, see Cobbie, The Other Women’s Movement, 60–68, 190–95.
63. Green to Newport BWP, November 10, 1960, Green Papers, box 54, file 10 “Equal Rights,” OHS Research Library; Green to Mrs. Thomas Scales, Sandy, Oregon, April 10, 1957, Green Papers, box 18, file 25 “Equal Pay for Women Correspondence,” OHS Research Library. Like many professional women’s groups, the BPW believed protective legislation limited opportunities and pay by treating women as “different.” With over 150,000 members strong in 1956, BPW chapters had strength beyond their numbers as witnessed by the public activism of Oregon members. Laughlin, Women’s Work and Public Policy, 55. Acknowledg- ing the important role of BPW, President Kennedy, in signing the1963 Equal Pay Act, gave BPW/USA president Dr. Minnie Miles the first pen from the signing. Business and Professional Women’s Foundation, “His- tory of Business and Professional Women,” http://bpwfoundation.org/about/history-3/ (accessed December 13, 2018).
64. Green to Willis, April 21, 1958, Green Papers, box 45, file “Women — Equal Rights,” OHS Research Library.
66. Neuberger served only one term in the Senate, having distinguished herself by supporting a variety of consumer and women’s issues, but discouraged by the role of money in politics and having to raise enormous sums to run again. “Retiring Lady Senator Tells Lady Politicians; Always wear the same hat,” Oregonian, October 30, 1966.
67. Cobbie, The Other Women’s Move- ment, 145. The EPA passed in 1965, Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act prohibited discrimination in employment based on sex or race, and in 1966 an expanded FLSA extended coverage to millions of formerly excluded workers in hotels, restaurants, laundries, hospitals, and agriculture (only domestic workers remained outside the legislation).
70. Green credited the new chair of the committee, Adam Clayton Powell, who “brought a new inspiration” and made the issue a priority. Green interview by Har- rison, December 18, 1978, OHS Research Library, 3.
73. K.D. Flesichman to Green, April 18, 1963, and Green to Flesichman, May 1, 1963, Green Papers, box 92, file “Eq Pay Clippings and Reference,” OHS Research Library.
77. After winning passage of the law, Green continued to work to erase barriers to girls and women in higher education and in new federal programs such as the Job Corps. Green interview by Harrison, December 18, 1978, OHS Research Library, 16. For more on Green’s role in passing Title IX, which as part of the 1972 Higher Education Act prohibited federally funded colleges and universities from discriminat- ing against women, see Deondra Rose, “Regulating Opportunity: Title IX and the Birth of Gender-Conscious Higher Educa- tion Policy,” Journal of Policy History 27 (2015): 157–83.
national federation, the Oregon AFL-CIO continued to support the Vietnam War into the late 1960s.


82. For more on the struggle to Title VII and later enforcement measures, see Harrison, On Account of Sex, 176–91; and Nancy MacLean, Freedom is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006). 120–54. Women who dissented against the EEOC’s slow progress in eliminating discriminatory state labor laws formed the National Organization of Women (NOW) in 1966, electing former labor journalist Betty Friedan as president and several women labor leaders as officers. Coble, The Other Women’s Movement, 178, 185. Katherine Turk outlines the national explosion of EEOC cases during the 1970s, in Equality on Trial.


86. Sweet interview by Tanzer.

87. Jan Newton and Sandy Gill, Women Workers in Oregon: A Portrait (Eugene: University of Oregon Labor Education & Research Center, 1978), 5–10, 23, 56. The authors emphasize the gendered division of labor in the 1960s, with 78 percent of clerical workers female and 87 percent of blue-collar workers male. Oregon had a higher percentage of men and lower percentage of women in its blue-collar jobs than the national average. Women made up only 2–4 percent of longshore and wood products jobs.


