WOMEN, PART-TIME WORK AND LABOUR STANDARDS:
THE CASE OF SASKATCHEWAN

By

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Introduction
As a rule, a greater proportion of women than men are found in low-wage, low status, insecure jobs. About 70 percent of part-time workers are women, commonly low paid, and even in full-time jobs women earn less than men and have fewer employment benefits. Most women are also found in jobs that have lower status according to the terms of the capitalist labour market. Such conditions gave rise in the 1970s to dual or segmented labour market theory to account for unequal labour market status resulting from racist and sexist discrimination (Edwards, 1979). The gist of segmented labour market theory is that the capitalist economy is divided into primary and secondary labour markets, with women and racialized populations over-represented in the secondary labour market of low-waged, low-status insecure jobs. More recent applications of segmented labour market theory criticize the simplicity of early arguments in the school, but nonetheless note that ascribed characteristics often prompt employers to hire, promote and sort workers into better and worse jobs (Peck, 1996; Vosko, 2000). Despite some recent improvements, it appears that these conditions of inequality persist in the capitalist labour market, with women’s over-representation in low status part-time work being a case in point (Benoit, 2000; Statistics Canada, 2000). We will examine conditions under which women continue to be slotted into secondary jobs through the increase in part-time employment.

Globalization and the Casualization of Labour
The increase in part-time work is part of a broader trend towards a casualization of labour, wherein we see growing numbers of contract, temporary, self-employed and part-time workers in the older industrial centres of the world economy (Broad, 2000a; Vosko, 2000). This growth of casual employment is part of what is being referred to in much of the labour market literature as a shift from a Fordist regime of production to a “flexible” regime of accumulation (e.g., Harvey, 1989; Peck, 1996). Labour leaders have accused employers of using the notion of flexibility to deregulate labour markets and discipline workers (Hargrove, 1999; Stanford, 1996). The push for labour market flexibility is being presented as a necessary response to globalization and the need for corporations to become more competitive, but the outcome has been a polarization of labour markets and society, and erosion of working conditions in the First World (Broad, 2000a; Tabb, 2001;
Yalnizyan, 1998). These economic trends have been accompanied by the shift from Keynesianism to neo-liberalism in the realm of social policy since 1980, including emphasis on the deregulation of labour markets (Broad and Antony, 1999).

Given the context of global deregulation, it would seem exceptional that the Saskatchewan government chose to enhance its own labour market regulations in the early 1990s, in the form of revisions to its trade union, occupational health and safety and labour standards acts. The explanation for this, as discussed below, is found in the pressure put on a social democratic party by its labour supporters to improve workers’ welfare in the province, particularly after a decade of Tory promotion of neo-liberalism federally and provincially in the 1980s. This essay is based on a study of the situation of part-time workers in Saskatchewan and the potential impact of the improved labour standards legislation on their working conditions and social welfare, considering whether the legislative route could be used to better their status. In what follows, we will briefly discuss women’s subordinate status in the Canadian labour market, outline the reasons why women make up the majority of part-time workers, and discuss the need for improved labour standards for part-time workers. We will then provide an account of the attempts to improve labour standards in Saskatchewan, and discuss the experience of women part-timers in the province based on interviews conducted with part-timers in the cities of Regina and Saskatoon. Finally, we will offer some conclusions regarding the problems of relying on labour legislation as a means of correcting inequalities in the labour market.

**Women in the Labour Market**

Since World War II, and especially since the 1960s, more and more women have entered the formal labour market. In 1941, 21 percent of working-aged women participated in the Canadian labour market, constituting 19 percent of those in formal employ (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1994: 16). Women’s labour market participation increased steadily throughout the post-World War II decades (Statistics Canada, 2000). By 2001, 60 percent of Canadian women were in the labour market, constituting 46 percent of labour market participants (Statistics Canada, 2002a).
However, despite some gains, women are still concentrated in a small number of low-status jobs, while men are found in a wider range of employ (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1994; Benoit, 2000; Statistics Canada, 2000). Over half (54%) of women workers are found in those areas of the service sector that contain the so-called women’s jobs. Three out of four Canadian workers are now employed in the service sector. Seven out of ten employed women, compared to only three out of ten men, are working in teaching, nursing and related health occupations, clerical or other administrative positions, and sales and service occupations (Statistics Canada, 2000: 107). While more than two in ten men were still employed in manufacturing production, less than one in ten women were employed in manufacturing production in 2000. Women have made some gains in higher professions, but still represent only 43 percent of those employed in professional, scientific and technical services. Women constitute 47 percent of those employed in management of companies and administrative and other support services in 2000 (Statistics Canada, 2002b), but in many of these businesses women are over-represented in the junior management and secretarial positions (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1994; Menzies, 1996; Statistics Canada, 2000). “In 1999, 35% of those employed in managerial positions were women, up from 29% in 1987.” However, in 1999, “women made up only 27% of senior managers, compared with 36% of managers at other levels” (Statistics Canada, 2000: 107).

In terms of pay, women have made some gains and, by 1999, they earned on average 64 cents for each dollar earned by men, and 70 cents when only full-time, full-year workers are considered (Statistics Canada, 2002c). But some gains that women have made in recent years in comparison to men are illusory, because men’s earnings have deteriorated – i.e., women’s gains are more apparent than real (Armstrong, 1996; Statistics Canada, 2000). This suggests that global economic restructuring and the casualization of labour corresponds to a feminization of labour, extending beyond the work that women per se do to colour more of the work done by both men and women. As with relative wage increases for women, the degree of apparent lessening of gender segmentation in the labour market is perhaps at least partly caused by deterioration of working conditions for men. There has been some discussion of this trend (Mies et al.,
1988; Broad, 2000a; Naiman, 2000; Vosko, 2000), but it is an observation that requires further research. Back in 1975, Braverman (1998: 322) noted

the startling fact that a pretty large majority of the jobs in the economy have now been transformed by the workings of the capitalist division of labor into the kinds of work one usually thinks of as second jobs, the mythical pin-money jobs which women and teenagers are supposed to be the only ones to take to supplement the major family income.

Part-Time Work

In 2001, 17 percent of employed workers in Canada were working part time (Statistics Canada, 2002d), defined by Statistics Canada as working less than 30 hours per week at all jobs.¹ Saskatchewan figures on part-time employment tend to mirror those for Canada as a whole, but with the rate of part-time employment running two to three percentage points higher than the national average (Elliott, 2000). As noted above, women are over-represented in part-time and other sorts of casual employ. In Canada, 69 percent of part-time workers were women in 2001, with 27 percent of formally employed women working part time, compared to only 10 percent of men working part time (Statistics Canada, 2002d). There has been an increase in the proportion of men working part time since the 1970s, along with a recent shift from “short-hour” (less than 15 hours per week) towards “long-hour” (15-29 hours per week) part-time employment (Pold, 2001), but there are clear demographic differences between male and female part-timers (Broad, 2000a; Marshall, 2001). Male part-timers tend to be younger and employed part time while they are students, whereas females span the age ranges, with many experiencing long-term patterns of part-time employment (Marshall, 2001; Pold, 2001; Statistics Canada, 2000).

According to Statistics Canada’s Labour Force Survey, in 2000 over half (56%) of male part-timers were in the 15-24 age category, and 76 percent of them said they chose to work part time because they were going to school (Statistics Canada, 2002e). However, less than one third (31%) of female part-timers were in the 15-24 age category, with 72 percent of them saying they chose work part time because they were going to school (Statistics Canada, 2002f). Those 25-44 years of age made up 41 percent of female part-timers, and 33 percent of them said that they chose to work part time because they were caring for children. Another eight percent cited other personal and family
responsibilities, 20 percent cited personal preference and 29 percent gave other reasons for working part-time. But we know from studies based on interview and other qualitative sources of data that many women’s “personal preferences” and “other” reasons for working part time are structured by family responsibilities (Duffy et al., 1989; Duffy and Pupo, 1992; Broad, 2000a). Given the gendered nature of family roles and the lack of affordable quality child care, women’s “choices” in our society tend to be illusory (Duffy et al., 1989). The growth of “involuntary” part-time employment reveals another aspect of how our “choices” are socially structured. Statistics Canada (2000: 104) reports that “a substantial number of women work part time because they cannot find full-time employment. In 1999, 25% of all female part-time employees indicated that they wanted full-time employment, but could only find part-time work.”

In general, part-time jobs are noted for being lower paid, having fewer benefits, being less secure and having lower status than full-time jobs – i.e., they are considered lower status both for their extrinsic and intrinsic characteristics, and simply for being part time, as our interview results discussed below reveal. Two in five part-timers earn less than $7.50 per hour, while only one in ten full-timers earns such a low wage (Broad, 2000a; Schellenberg, 1997). In 1999, the average annual income for male workers was $35,169, and $22,535 for women workers. Males working full-time, full-year earned $45,800, and women full-timers earned $32,026. Meanwhile, men classified by Statistics Canada as “other,” which includes part-time and short-term workers, earned $15,481 in 1999, and women earned $12,074 (Statistics Canada, 2002c). In other words, male casual workers earn only 34 percent of what male full-timers earn per year, and female casuals earn only 38 percent of what female full-timers earn per year. While two thirds of full-time workers have workplace benefit plans that include pension, medical, dental and paid sick leave benefits, fewer than one fifth of part-timers have the same benefits (Schellenberg, 1997).

Part-timers’ lower pay and lack of benefits are often attributed to the fact that fewer part-timers than full-timers are unionized. By 2001, 23 percent of part-timers in Canada were unionized, compared to 32 percent of full-timers (Akyeampong, 2001). There has been some increase in numbers of unionized part-time workers in recent years, along with a decline in numbers of unionized full-timers because of economic
restructuring and globalization (Broad, 2000a). Part of the decline might be attributable to the shift from goods production to service production. In manufacturing production, for example, unionization declined from 44 percent in 1981 to 35 percent in 1992 (Glenday, 2001), and further to 30 percent by 2001 (Akyeampong, 2001). Part of this reduction is obviously attributable to restructuring within industries as well.

Women Need Better Labour Standards

Part-time work is sometimes referred to as “non-standard work,” based on the assumption that full-time, full-year work is standard work. Given the lack of employment security, the lower pay and the lack of benefits for many part-timers, it could also be referred to as sub-standard work. Part of the problem could be that the majority of part-timers are women, and women in general are still accorded lower status in the labour market and throughout society.

Regardless of the reasons for its lower status, given the expansion of part-time employment those concerned with labour market inequities argue that something needs to be done to improve conditions for part-time workers. For some time now labour market analysts have been advocating labour standards reform as a means of improving conditions for part-time and other casual workers (Belous, 1989; Fudge, 1991; 1996; 2001). Labour standards provisions have been used in European countries like Sweden to improve conditions for women and part-time workers (Sundstrom, 1987; 1992). In North America, Quebec and Saskatchewan have undertaken the most progressive legislative reforms to improve conditions for casual workers (Vosko, 2000). Reforms to Saskatchewan’s Labour Standards Act in 1994 were explicitly intended to improve working and welfare conditions for part-time workers in the province (Broad and Foster, 1995; Broad and McNeil, 1995).

After the New Democratic Party (NDP) was re-elected to government in 1991, following 10 years of a neo-liberal Tory regime, the new government set about revising labour legislation in return for trade union support in getting re-elected. Among others, The Labour Standards Act (LSA) was slated for overhaul to address some of the issues arising from growing insecurity in the so-called flexible labour market. In particular, lack of security and benefits for part-time workers was to be addressed. At the same time
that the Department of Labour began to draft revisions to the Act, the government established a business-labour Joint Commission on Part-Time Work to carry out hearings on issues respecting part-time work in the province. It became clear during the hearings that workers and their families were in favour of adding provisions to the LSA that would give part-timers more job security, but business in general was opposed to adding these new provisions to the Act (Broad and Foster, 1995). In a sense, business opposition should not surprise us, because many employers hiring part-time workers admit that they employ part-timers because of their “flexibility” – i.e., part-timers cost less because their benefits are few or non-existent, and they can be called in as needed and dismissed when not needed (Broad, 2000a). The marxian concept of a reserve army of labour seems appropriate here, Marx (1867) having referred to a number of forms of reserve labour, including the “stored” labour of those not fully proletarianized, such as “peasants” and “housewives” (see also Connelly, 1978: Mies et al., 1988).

The revisions to the LSA were intended to give part-timers in Saskatchewan added security and benefits in a number of ways. Whereas part-timers previously found themselves working in on-call arrangements, a new sub-section of the Act called for one weeks advanced scheduling of work shifts. Other sub-sections required rest and meal breaks for all employees. The revised Act also called for part-timers in workplaces with 10 or more full-time equivalent employees to be given benefits accorded to full-timers, on a pro-rated basis. Perhaps most significant was something known as the “most available hours” provision, which gave part-timers the option to take additional hours that become available, hence giving them the power to turn their part-time jobs into full-time ones.

It was the most available hours provision that elicited the greatest business opposition, given that it went against the notion of labour market flexibility for employers. At the crux of the debate was the opposing interests of employers and workers regarding part-time work. While business had been using part-time work to cut costs and control labour markets, thus giving workers more insecurity, the most available hours provision would give workers a means to increase their labour market security. This became such a heated issue for business that, in the end, the government bowed to business opponents of the Act, and cabinet decided not to declare the most available
hours provision and revisions that would give workers more protection against arbitrary termination. Therefore, not all provisions of the Act were put into effect through the enabling Regulations. As well, the government further weakened the revised legislation by allowing exemptions, such as not requiring employers to grant benefits to part-time workers who are students.

The Saskatchewan Federation of Labour (SFL) criticized the government for “watering down” the Act. According to the SFL’s newsletter “Labour Column,” the Romanow NDP government “made it a habit to introduce good, progressive changes to our labour laws, then spend the next several weeks backing away from the changes and ultimately watering them down.” In the case of legislative bills introduced to revise both *The Labour Standards Act* and *The Trade Union Act*, the SFL argued that “the government did not stick with the original language of the Bills. Instead, government officials and cabinet ministers decided there was some political mileage in being seen as responding to the objections of a small, but loud group of employers who opposed the legislation.” This is likely true, but the SFL itself probably did not fully grasp that, by the early 1990s, it was not simply a case of watering down, but rather a neo-liberal tide against labour market regulation. Perhaps Saskatchewan’s NDP government itself discovered that the early 1990s, unlike the early 1980s when the party was last in office, was a political climate in which social democratic policy options were more difficult to achieve (Broad et al., 2001).

The resulting exemptions and non-declaration of certain provisions of the Act meant that the expected improvements for part-time workers in the province would be fewer than anticipated. While Saskatchewan has one of the most progressive labour standards acts in North America, important provisions that exist on paper in the Act did not materialize in the enabling Regulations, and thus were never implemented. The consequence for our research meant that we would be studying less the impact of the Act, and more the conditions of part-timers and what still needs to be done to improve their working and welfare conditions. The results of our findings are presented below.
**The Saskatchewan Sample**

To examine the conditions of part-time workers in Saskatchewan and the potential impact of the revised Labour Standards Act on their working and welfare conditions, we undertook a series of interviews with part-timers in the province’s two largest cities of Regina and Saskatoon in 1997, 1998 and 1999. In each year 50 part-timers were interviewed in each city. Three quarters of the participants in both cities were women, and the findings presented below are based on the interviews with those female part-timers. The sample was based on lists provided by trade unions, and expanded using a purposive snowball method. The sample was purposive in that we were looking for participants in workplaces large enough to meet the LSA’s criteria of having 10 full-time equivalent employees for application of the new provisions (see below), and where full-timers had benefits that would be pro-rated for part-timers.

We had originally planned to ask employers for lists of potential subjects as well as the unions, but found that employers had no interest in the study. Managers who were contacted did not even wish to be interviewed about labour standards themselves, unlike trade union officials who were quite willing to participate in key informant interviews. Perhaps this itself is a telling comment on business attitudes to labour standards, or at least to research concerning them.

Consequently, we make no claim that our sample is representative of the total population of part-timers in Saskatchewan, which would have required interviewing subjects from both urban and rural settings, in large and small workplaces, both unionized and non-unionized. This would have been a much larger undertaking requiring more resources and, because of restrictions imposed by the LSA, many of these workers would not be directly impacted by the Act.

Interviews took about one hour for each participant, and were based on a series of open-ended questions inquiring into demographic characteristics, employment history, extrinsic and intrinsic employment characteristics, impact of the revised labour standards legislation on paid work and family life, and participants’ suggestions for improving the working and welfare conditions of part-time workers. (See Appendix A for list of questions.) We should note, because of the open-ended nature of many of the questions, that responses by some of the participants range beyond the LSA *per se.*
Women Part-timers in Saskatchewan

As noted above, the impact of the revisions to *The Labour Standards Act* were less than had been hoped for, but the data gathered allow us to make some comments on the Act’s impact and on working and welfare conditions of part-timers. Given that the data gathered from our interviews are qualitative in nature and our sample is relatively small, we will not assign percentages to our respondent results. Also, while summarizing overall findings, we will let the participants speak for themselves. The material presented below deals with issues of pay and benefits; scheduling, breaks and holidays; maternity and child care; employment security; and working conditions.

Participants ranged between their early 20s and mid-30s, with most falling in their mid-20s. Most worked in service sector industries, many in retail and food service businesses. Our participants worked for both large and small businesses, sometimes for both if they were multiple jobholders. The majority of our participants had held a number of part-time jobs over the years, with most having held their current one for one to two years, and working on average 15 to 20 hours per week. While most stated that they were not working part-time by choice, of those who did work part-time by choice the majority were students. Non-students were often multiple jobholders in their struggle to acquire full-time hours and incomes. Interestingly, Saskatchewan’s rate of multiple jobholding is almost twice the national rate of five percent of employed workers. This may be partly attributable to farm families seeking off-farm work to supplement the family income, but not completely. Around 30 percent of the province’s part-timers are multiple jobholders (Elliott, 2000: 24).

As with part-timers generally, our participants often complained about low rates of pay, combined with the need for more hours. The minimum wage rate in Saskatchewan at the time of our interviews was $6.00 per hour, and many part-timers made little more than this amount. A number of participants suggested that the minimum wage should be raised, which it was recently, to $6.70 per hour, certainly not enough to make it a living wage even for full-timers. Low wages is one of the reasons given for multiple jobholding by part-timers, and we found this to be true for many of our participants, some of whom also commented on discriminatory pay rates for women.
One participant said: “Women don’t get paid anywhere near what men get paid. This is unfair when we women have all this other (family) stuff to consider.”

The revised Act stipulates provision of benefits to part-timers on a pro-rated basis, in workplaces with 10 or more full-time equivalent (FTE) employees where the part-timers work for 15 or more hours per week. Unfortunately, the implications of this provision are that part-timers in smaller workplaces, and those in non-union settings, are still not likely to have benefits. The experience of most of our participants is, indeed, that in unionized settings they have benefits based on a collective agreement, and in non-union settings they have few or no benefits. Since some of our participants are multiple jobholders, they personify both cases. Most of those in unionized positions had their benefits before implementation of the new legislation, suggesting that the legislation has had little impact in increasing benefits for part-timers in the province. Some respondents felt the benefits provision was confusing, that the qualification period is too long, and that there are too many ways for employers to get around it. In fact, information from some respondents and from key informant interviews which we conducted with trade union representatives indicate that some employers were reducing part-timers’ hours below the 15-hour threshold prior to implementation of the new legislation in 1994.

A particularly sore point for many of our participants is that employers are exempted from providing benefits for full-time students. One participant noted that “many students are older now, and a lot of them have children. I find the distinction between student and non-student unfortunate. My partner and I are both students, and tuition is increasing again.” Another, reflecting beyond the LSA, commented that

full-time students are ineligible for everything they do. If I had been fired or the place burned down, I wouldn’t have been able to collect Employment Insurance because of my student status. When you are a student for awhile you just become bitter because of being shafted all the time.

One of the main problems of part-time work has been its “on-call” nature – the fact that many part-timers have no fixed schedules. Some literally wait by the phone to be called into work. At the time of the hearings on the revised Act one grandmother phoning into the CBC Radio Noon talk show likened her granddaughter’s situation to being held under “house arrest.” The issue is further complicated if working mothers must then arrange child care once called into work.
A provision of the revised Act stipulates that schedules be posted one week in advance so that part-timers will have more control over their time, thus being better able to balance work and family responsibilities. Many of our respondents have benefited from this provision, but some noted that this provision of the Act is frequently violated. One woman who works as a waitress says of her employers: “They say the schedule is supposed to be up Wednesdays, for the next week, but sometimes it’s up Thursday for Monday. However, compared to other restaurants, I’ve heard that that’s not bad at all.” Some participants did say that, for small employers, advance scheduling may be difficult in the event of employee illnesses, which will require that other employees need to be called in on short notice. But it is also common for larger employers who should, because of the scale of their operations be able to plan for such contingencies, to call in part-time casuals as a way of cutting overhead costs related to benefits and payroll deductions required for permanent employees. Most participants agreed with the provision as a minimum standard, many saying schedules should be posted two weeks in advance, not just one.

The revised Act requires that employees be given regularly scheduled rest and meal breaks. Employers must provide a rest break of eight consecutive hours in any 24-hour rest period. Employers must also provide a 30-minute unpaid meal break to all employees who work six or more consecutive hours in a shift. The experience of over half of our participants is that breaks are not regularly scheduled, and for some they are non-existent. One woman said of her restaurant employers:

They don’t mention anything about breaks when you start, and there’s no system for taking breaks. They don’t forbid taking a break, they just don’t encourage it. I didn’t even know for the first year I was here that we are supposed to get them.

Most participants thought that employees should be given their breaks, though we did find that some part-timers would prefer not to take unpaid breaks because it meant a loss of wages or time that they could devote to another job or family. One woman said that “especially with waitressing, you’d be missing out on your tips if breaks were mandatory. You don’t just work for a wage.”

The revised Act stipulates that part-timers receive statutory holidays and holiday/vacation pay. Less than half of our respondents get holidays, but most who do not are given vacation pay. Most participants agreed with this provision of the Act, but
some felt that it was not applicable to them due to the casual or temporary nature of their work. One asked: “How would that work for seasonal? I don’t really care except if it affects how much money I make.” The reality for many part-timers is that they cannot afford a vacation and, since they are seen as casual labour, would not be allowed one. One participant commented: “I would have liked some holiday time last summer, but I wasn’t dumb enough to ask for it because there’s no way I would have gotten it.” Another said: “People need holidays. You can’t just work and work and work.”

An important area of labour standards legislation affecting women is that governing maternity leave. The Act says that full or part-time workers who are currently employed and have been for at least 20 of the 52 weeks before the day the leave is requested are eligible for an unpaid maternity leave of 18 weeks. (Monetary benefits for this period are available through the federal Employment Insurance program.) Our participants were generally supportive of this provision, but thought that the leave should be longer and much more inclusive, that parental leave covered by the Act should be made more easily available by employers so that fathers are encouraged to take more responsibility in this area. (This, incidentally, was mentioned by a number of the male part-timers who participated in our study as well.) One woman said: “You talk about sexism, here it is; motherhood above all else. Dads need to bond with their kids as much as anyone else.” Another said: “The idea that the woman should be the one at home with the child is outdated.” And yet another said:

I think families are really key in our post-industrial society, but we’ve stopped thinking of families as our major social unit. Now it’s just business and industry. I think it’s a travesty. Paternity leave would be a huge step for the women’s movement.

Some participants also suggested that there are insufficient supports in this area for single mothers.

Among the unfortunate but too frequent experiences that some of our participants recounted, about themselves or co-workers, was women being fired when employers discovered that they were pregnant, or not being re-hired despite the fact that the Act stipulates they be given the same or an equivalent position when their maternity leave is over. One participant reported that, at the restaurant where she worked, she had to quit because of the working conditions and “every girl who got pregnant after me got fired.”
Another said: “My friend worked at the clothing store for about a year and got pregnant. She was fired when she went on leave.” One woman we interviewed contends:

> It’s so old boys club. It’s mostly men doing the hiring, and whose he going to hire for the full-time position? A woman who may take maternity leave, get cramps once a month, or has her children phone her at work because they are sick? They’d rather hire a man who, apparently, doesn’t have any of those responsibilities.

Related to maternity leave is the issue of child care. There is a shortage of high quality affordable child care across Canada, and Saskatchewan is no exception (Foster and Broad, 1998). Many of our participants spoke of the difficulties of arranging child care, which is a common reason for women working part time rather than full time. One participant said: “Finding a daycare is hell. Finding a great daycare is even worse.” Another participant suggests that “there should be some kind of daycare at work. It’s usually expensive and parents have to get up early and ship their kids off to daycare on the other side of the city.” A woman we interviewed summarized some common themes that we heard from participants:

> There should be a different level of respect for people in part-time positions than there is. Some people are working the odd hours they are because they have children or other jobs. There isn’t much security. I’m not sure if this is the area to raise it, but there should be more subsidized daycare and more involvement with family on men’s part. I don’t know if this is labour standards, but it’s the root of many problems part-time people face. I don’t know how to solve it. I see a lot of the laws, even if they make them in favour of women, have assumptions within the laws about women staying at home and taking care of the kids.

An encouraging sign is that many of our male participants raised these issues as well.

Often referred to as flexible labour, it should come as no surprise that many part-timers experience little job security. The LSA does provide conditions for layoff, but they are not generous. There is a provision in the revised Act to expand this area of protection for workers, but it was not proclaimed. Currently, there is no required minimum notice of layoff for those who have been employed by an employer for 0-3 months. For those who have been employed 3-12 months minimum required notice is one week, and for those employed 1-3 years it is two weeks. Since most part-timers hold their jobs for less than three years, there is little required notice of layoff. Moreover, many participants report that employers give part-timers no notice of layoff. Even though this violated the Act, part-timers do not feel it worth fighting, especially since the Labour Standards Branch of the Saskatchewan Department of Labour is, according to
some of our respondents and trade union representatives, doing little to police the Act even when complaints are brought forward.

Most of our participants agreed that the stronger legislation covering notice of termination should be implemented. One said:

You need time to find another job. A week or a day is not enough. I had a friend who worked at a manufacturing company and so did his wife. He got laid off and she didn’t. Imagine if they both had been laid off.

Another recommended: ‘Make the minimum notice for even more time, especially for those big layoffs just because of the job market. There are a lot of people looking for work.’ A third commented: ‘People deserve notice, not just gone one day with no income. And implementing the provision would reduce use of social assistance programs in a big way.’

When asked about the unproclaimed “additional hours” provision of the Act, most participants said that it should have been implemented, though some wondered whether simple seniority would be the best way to allocate hours or if there should be some other formula. The main reason that people support the provision is because so many part-time workers are involuntary part-timers. One woman said she agreed with the provision “because there’s lots of full-time staff getting lots of hours and overtime. They should give it to someone else. A friend of mine, she works in neo-natal, just made 40 hours in overtime. That’s someone else’s job!” This comment reflects the fact, reflected in much recent literature on the labour market, that alongside part-time work we also find much overtime work (Broad, 2000a). Another woman said that for a while “I had a minimum of three jobs at one time because of not enough hours, not enough pay.” She added that, at one restaurant,

I was getting three hours a week. That’s why I started at the other restaurant. You get shifts by seniority or by fluke. They post extra hours one week in advance, but you have to come down at 8:10 in the morning to get an extra shift because there’s so many other people wanting it.

One participant simply said that the available hours should be implemented “because it promotes equity and efficiency.” A number of participants complained of favouritism in allocation of hours to part-timers, some relating it to problems of sexism and harassment. In some cases this involves giving more hours to males with less seniority than their female co-workers. One woman said: “I’d been there for six months
and they hired another person. He was working 40 hours a week when I was begging for hours.” Another participant complained:

Our manager hired a girl that he said had a waifish look about her and he wanted to see how long it would take him to get her into bed. He schedules himself and the girl alone together all the time. She can’t do returns, can’t do cheques, but the manager gives her way more hours than anyone else.

These cases highlight some of the problems that women, already over-represented in part-time work, face in the labour market. The Saskatchewan Labour Standards Act is supposed to provide protection and promote equity in a number of ways, but one of the biggest problems our participants reported is that even the proclaimed provisions of the Act are not being enforced. We heard many cases of employers ignoring or flaunting provisions of the Act. But in most cases when workers have phoned Labour Standards Branch to lodge a complaint, they are simply told to talk to their employer or their union, if they have one. But some respondents noted that, if talking to their employers would do any good, they would not be phoning the Branch. In most cases part-timers have so little job security that they are afraid to complain for fear of employer reprisals.

It comes as no surprise, then, that when asked for general recommendations, a most frequent one given by our participants was that government should enforce the Act. Along with the additional hours provision, many participants also said they thought there should be a significant increase in the minimum wage so that people are guaranteed a living wage. Related to women in particular were calls for more action on employment and pay equity, for more comprehensive family benefits and leaves, and for expansion of quality, affordable child care. One woman offered a good summary of many of our participants’ thoughts and recommendations:

Business can be extremely inhumane. I think there’s a sense by workers of being unprotected and robotic. If you are lucky enough to work in a compassionate environment, issues of maternity, bereavement, and family conflict will be dealt with. I think that government has to protect part-time workers to its maximum. I would make benefits mandatory. I was just thinking about daycare. Business doesn’t see daycare to be the responsibility of the employer. My instinct is that, if you have a large workforce with men and women who have children and are generating revenue, the company should be helping out the parents. Another thing, in my job, the pleasure quotient is rather low, with no regard for how there could be some other criteria for a good job other than hours. I think they should make that [bad jobs] illegal. Finally, I’m worried that, in emphasizing the part-time worker, this legislation could be entrenching the movement toward part-time work.
One participant commented:

It’s a scary concern that I’m always going to have two part-time jobs. It’s going to make it hard for a lot of people, especially women, balancing two jobs and looking after kids. It’s two places to go, two groups of people to deal with, two bank accounts. I think there should be more concern within labour organizations to see if full-time positions are disappearing. I mean women who waitress and work in stores. There’s a lot of things they don’t consider.

Another woman recommended that

if you make part-time work less attractive to the employer, make legislation that makes it harder for the employer, then there will be fewer part-time positions. Part-time work seems to be considered less than work, like housework, it lacks respect.

In a discussion along the same lines, another participant observed that, with respect to employee productivity and commitment to employers, “in a lot of situations businesses are hurting themselves, although they wouldn’t see it that way.”

Some participants did argue for part-time jobs. One said:

They should be doing both; create more full-time jobs, and make part-time jobs enjoyable. For example, a lot of people need or want part-time jobs if they go back to school, but there should always be a higher percentage of full-time jobs.

Another participant recommended:

Full-time positions yes, for the stability of the individual, but there are more single parents out there than there ever were, and so few jobs. And not everyone wants to work themselves to the ground; they want to spend time with family. If someone chooses part-time work, they should reap the benefits of full-time work—in terms of job security and pro-rated pay and benefits.

Conclusions

Overall, our findings accord with other studies showing that women’s part-time work tends to be low-wage, low status, insecure employment. While it was not our intent to demonstrate the validity of segmented labour market theory, our research does support the argument that women often still find themselves reluctantly segregated into a secondary labour market. Those interviewed for our study report on working conditions that exhibit little extrinsic or intrinsic value for their jobs. These part-timers generally experience low pay and few benefits. The work is often tedious and unrewarding. Our respondents report arbitrary treatment and harassment by managers. While the Saskatchewan Labour Standards Act is supposed to provide improved standards for part-timers in the province, the women we interviewed report that the Act, along with The
Occupational Health and Safety Act which is supposed to protect against gender-based discrimination and harassment, are too often not respected by bosses and not enforced by the government. Meanwhile, the provincial government has closed the Saskatchewan Women’s Secretariat with its most recent April 2002 budget, a move that does not bode well for promoting gender equality in the province.

Our main conclusion is that legislating improved standards for workers is only a first step towards improving working conditions and social welfare, and it is unlikely to succeed in a more general context of global labour market deregulation without constant pressure from labour and other social movements. The fact that the Saskatchewan government did not declare parts of its own legislation, and has been lax in enforcing what is in effect, tends to bear this out. In an interview with us Barb Byers, former President of the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, admitted that the SFL should have kept more pressure on the government from the start to implement the new provisions of the LSA.

In introducing his book on problems of labour market regulation, Peck (1996: xiii) provides the following instructive anecdote and observation:

During a recent taxi ride in Vancouver, the driver shared with me his analysis of Canada’s twin problems of mass unemployment and burgeoning public indebtedness: there is work to be done, but because of the overly generous welfare system, the unemployed are not motivated to work; in order to solve the problem, women should be excluded from welfare and all but the most menial of paid work, which would result in full employment (for men) and renewed commitment to the sanctity of marriage (on the part of women). Never before, it is probably fair to say, has this taxi driver been so in tune with the thinking of employment ministers in Canada and elsewhere in the ‘advanced’ industrial world.

However, our interview respondents, both male and female, voiced great support for improvements to Saskatchewan labour standards for part-time workers, and offered a number of recommendations for improving working conditions and social welfare for part-timers and all women workers. These ranged from fully implementing and enforcing the provincial Labour Standards Act, increasing minimum wage, expanding provision of quality affordable child care, to rethinking the whole nature of gender relations and the balance between paid work and family responsibilities. According to Fudge and Vosko (2001: 349): “Women’s employment shows that it is impossible to separate the institutions of the labour market from the family and the social distribution
of caring responsibilities.” They therefore argue that the problem with most labour legislation is that it is ostensibly gender neutral, but actually needs to be gendered to take account of the special needs of women in the labour market and in society. The promise of the revisions to the Saskatchewan Labour Standards Act was that it might in fact do this to some extent, both in recognizing the needs of part-time workers and in improving maternity benefits.

The Saskatchewan government also recently carried out a Balancing Work and Family Task Force, including policy research and hearings around the province. However, in both cases, the promise has not been fulfilled. The SFL accused the government of watering down the LSA, but might well also have said that the Act is dead in the water. The balancing work and family initiative is so far mostly rhetoric, and with the closing of the Women’s Secretariat will likely not be pushed. It would appear that the current neo-liberal era is a difficult one in which to promote new labour market regulations favourable to those on the lowest rungs of the ladder. Some would go further and say that social democracy itself is dead (Albo, 1997; Teeple, 2000).

Nevertheless, there seems no reason we should not continue to push for improvements to working and living conditions. Elsewhere we have argued that maybe we should all be working part time (Broad, 2000b), rather than some being over-worked and some under-worked. Perhaps it is time to make a priority of campaigning for shorter work time and flexible work schedules to give us all, men and women, more time for our families and personal lives (O’Hara, 1993; Hayden, 1999). Owens (1993: 422) notes that, currently, “the flexibility of atypical work is not … a flexibility of paid work to suit the needs of women….Rather, it is the assumed flexibility of women to meet the demands of the whole system of work.” What needs to be asserted is flexibility on workers’ terms. But as the Saskatchewan case suggests, this requires more than official policy-making; it demands continuing struggle by trade unions, feminists and other social movements. While the current neo-liberal policy climate is not one that facilitates gender equality, global economic restructuring is proving to bring great hardships for women and their families throughout the world. Necessity being the mother of invention, women and men will continue to struggle in their workplaces and communities, through trade unions and other forms of organization, to improve their working and welfare conditions.
However, the success of that struggle will also depend on the success of these groups in convincing the general public that such changes would be beneficial to society overall.
Statistics Canada defines part-time work as less than 30 hours per week, and a part-time worker as one who works less than 30 hours per week at her or his main or sole job. Prior to 1975 part-time work in Canada was classified as less than 35 hours per week, and prior to 1996 a part-time worker was one who worked less than 30 hours per week at all jobs. These changes in classification were made because of the decrease in weekly hours for many full-time jobs by the 1970s, and the increase in part-time employment by the 1990s. One consequence of the shift to focus on main or sole job is that part-timers who are multiple jobholders could be working more total weekly hours than some full-timers, though there has been a more recent trend towards overtime work by full-timers.

Following much of the sociological literature, we define those classified by Statistics Canada as “other” to be “casual” workers.

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Some employers require direct deposit of pay into specific banks.