

BOOK REVIEWS

JUST WAGES: AN ASSESSMENT OF PAY EQUITY

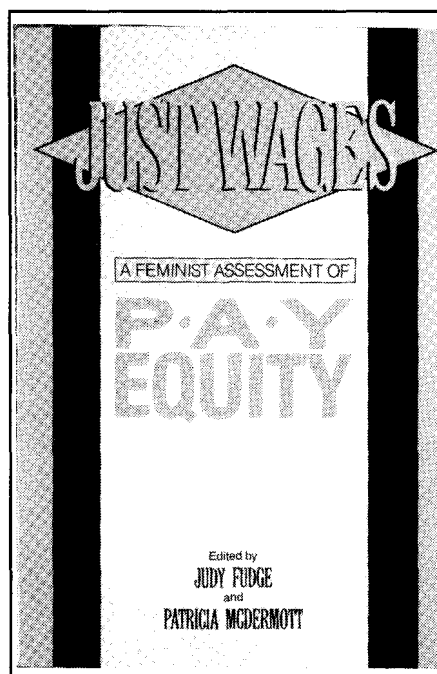
Edited by Judy Fudge and Patricia McDermott. Toronto: University of Toronto, 1991.

By Jan Kainer

The major focus of the 15 essays in this volume is to assess some of the current developments in pay equity reform in the US and Canada. While all of the writers recognize the pitfalls of pay equity as a 'procedural reform' there is also a perception that equal pay endeavours have been met with a certain amount of success. A central question that emerges from this collection of essays is whether or not the technical processes involved to implement pay equity operate to thwart the goals advanced by the pay equity movement.

Several of the essays in this volume, including articles by McDermott, Cuneo, Fudge, Findlay and the Armstrongs, point to the limitations of pay equity that are created by the technical requirements of Ontario's pay equity legislation. These authors demonstrate how the requirements operate in various ways to minimize the extent of coverage of the legislation, and undermine the standard of equity that can be achieved by the law.

The remainder of the essays in the collection investigate the problems of implementing pay equity schemes from a political and economic standpoint. The papers by Haignere, Steinberg, Lewis, Evans and Nelson and Warskett docu-



ment how pay equity reform has been effectively contained by employers and politicians in the process of formulation and implementation.

Specifically, control over job evaluation represents the most effective containment mechanism to subvert the pay equity exercise. Gaskell warns pay equity practitioners of the risks associated with defining skill as an objective category. She encourages advocates to view skill in political and ideological terms rather than treating the concept as a "unidimensional thing."

Other essays in the volume stress the importance of the current economic context for pay equity implementation. While Acker discusses how international competition has weakened the trade union

movement in the Nordic countries creating a pressing need for a pay equity movement, Bakker points out how economic restructuring in Canada severely undermines the state's efforts to regulate the workplace in respect of pay equity policy.

The analyses of pay equity presented in this collection are an important contribution to the literature. By focussing on the hazards of the implementation process the writers specify the special relationship between the 'technical' and 'political,' bringing into sharp relief the complex and varied means by which pay equity reform is impeded. These writers recognize that pay equity reform is accepted by those in power only when the reform has been de-radicalized or contained by 'neutral' administrators. The articles demonstrate concretely how a myriad of technical decisions and procedures required for pay equity implementation can undercut the radical edge required to achieve pay equity.

Readers unfamiliar with pay equity legislation may have some difficulties following the finer points of the debates, especially with respect to Ontario's legislation. However, this probably reflects the complexities of the legislation itself and underscores the difficulties faced by the pay equity movement.

Those interested in reading a detailed discussion about pay equity in other jurisdictions in Canada, besides Ontario, may be disappointed. However, this book is a welcome addition to the debates on equal pay of interest to both pay equity specialists and nonspecialists alike.