

Gender and control in offices of the New Zealand public service, 1880-1920

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This paper presents a case study of the transformation of office work in the New Zealand public service from the 1880s to the 1920s. It focuses on the intersection of 3 phenomena in this transformation - bureaucratization, mechanisation and feminisation - and how these have contributed to the constitution of the occupational and control structures that have come to predominate in the "modern" office. This paper represents a preliminary investigation of the origins and development of what, by the 1920s, had become a fully-feminised occupation concerned entirely with the transcription of copy.

1. Introduction

In this paper I adopt an approach which is concerned with the politics of paid work. It seeks to explain the relationships between social structures of power and workplace relations. The central theoretical theme is that, contrary to unitary and pluralist ideologies about workplace relations, structural inequalities of power between different groups at work exist and that "... dominant modes of interaction consistently favour one category of actors and result in the systematic exploitation of others" (Offe, 1985, p.2). Drawing on theory from political sociology and on more recent feminist theories of gender and the labour process (Thompson 1983, pp.180-209; Game and Pringle, 1983; Knights and Willmott, 1986; Walby, 1986) this paper explores the social processes which constituted the technical division of labour, with its hierarchies of occupations and sex segregation, in the offices of the New Zealand public service. The historical approach taken has particular value in that it enables an analysis of the processes of social action and interaction through which enduring structures of gender differentiation and control in the workplace were first established.

2. Conflict and control in the workplace

A number of different approaches in the social sciences have sought to account for conflict in the workplace. One approach is that of neo-classical economics, wherein human labour is treated as a commodity which is traded in labour markets, in the same way that other commodities are traded in other markets (Hill, 1981). Suppliers and purchasers of labour stand opposed in the labour market and enter into exchange relations. The purchaser obtains the labour inputs required for production, while the seller receives

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wages which provide the means of existence. As with all markets, the buyers and sellers of labour are in competition with other buyers and sellers. There is also a conflict of interests between the 2 parties in that wages represent a cost on profits and profits can be raised at the cost of wages. Employers and employees pursuing their own self-interest, i.e. seeking to maximise either profits or wages, will therefore have interests that conflict. But under the ideology of free and equal exchange within competitive markets, there is assumed to be no disparity of power in the exchange relationship and the outcomes are believed to be harmonious to all.

A contrasting approach derives from Marxian political economy. This recognises that the trading of labour power as a commodity is the distinguishing feature of capitalist social structures, but offers a more useful (and realistic) framework with which to analyze the employment relationship. Fundamental to this view is the distinction between labour and labour power: what the employee sells and the employer buys is not a fixed amount of labour, but labour power - the capacity to perform labour. In Karl Polanyi's terms (Polanyi, 1944) wage labour is a "fictitious commodity", partly because it cannot be separated from its owner and partly because it does not reach markets in the same way that other commodities do. It is this distinctive feature that is the basis for conflict and the need for control in the workplace.

The basis for conflict between employers and employees, and for the need for control, derives from the indeterminacy of labour power and of employment contracts. What the employer buys is the ability to perform labour, not what is required in production, labour. Labour power remains under the control of its owner even after its purchase by the employer, and the employment contract cannot fully determine the exact nature of the required labour (to do so would totally remove any of the worker's autonomy, and reduce him or her to an automaton). Herein lies the conflict of interest between employers and employees:

The interest of employees in defending their autonomy, the physical integrity of their labour power and their skills conflicts with the entrepreneurial interest in maximum economic utilization of the 'purchased' labour power, whose productive use-value is by no means assured by the worker merely showing up at the workplace and remaining there for the duration of working hours (as is specified in the labour contract) (Offe, 1985, p.24).

Herein also lies the necessity for the employer's control of labour and the labour process, which is the problem of management. As Littler and Salaman put it (1982, p.252): "To translate legal ownership into real possession the employer must erect structures of control over labour."

In state organisations the necessity for control has 2 main sources. The first is the need for economy of action. The material resources of the state are limited by its ability to raise revenues, so a requirement of state agency managers is to maintain efficiency and economy of action. In seeking to achieve these goals, state managers have attempted to gain the maximum economic utilisation of the labour power they purchase (particularly at times of fiscal crisis) by means of various control strategies, but most notably through the institution of bureaucratic organisation.

The second source of the need for control derives from the constitutional framework of New Zealand's liberal democracy whereby each agency within the administrative apparatus is responsible to a Minister, who in turn is responsible to Parliament. Such a framework requires the predictability of action of appointed officials and hence is also a motivation to introduce modes of control. It is bureaucratic organisation, with its hierarchy of authority and its explicit rules and regulations, that is the mode of control most suited for this purpose.

Some additional aspects of conflict and control in the workplace need also to be considered. A range of different strategies may be employed by managements in their

attempts to contain conflicts and maintain control within the workplace (Edwards, 1979). Underlying these strategies, managerial ideologies seek to secure a basic level of consent to managerial rule among employees by persuading them of the organisational necessity of the managerial function and of the legitimacy of managerial authority (Fox, 1971; Fox, 1974; Nichols, 1980).

Furthermore, managerial attempts at achieving control are carried out within "arenas of struggle" and face a variety of obstacles as other groups resist these attempts and seek to advance their own interests (Hindess, 1982). The workplace is indeed a "contested terrain" (Edwards, 1979) in which employers are neither "veritably omniscient" nor employees "infinitely malleable" (Stark, 1980). Rather, outcomes are the product of struggles between contending groups among both capital and labour, which creates a "...multipolar and complex pattern of cleavages, collectivities and conflicts..." (Offe, 1985, p.2).

Another source of power relations and division among the paid workforce is patriarchy, which articulates with capitalist relations of power and exploitation (Walby, 1986). Patriarchal relations pre-date capitalist structures and exist independently of, but in interaction with, them (Hartmann, 1982). Central to patriarchal relations is men's control over women's labour power. This control is exercised in the household and in the labour market, and results in a sexual division of labour within both. In the labour market, male-dominated organisations of employers and employees may seek to restrict and control the entry of women into paid employment. Patriarchy therefore provides another source of control, and this may be used strategically by employers to maintain divisions within the workforce.

The following case study applies this perspective on gender relations, control and conflict in the workplace to the differentiation of clerical work in the New Zealand public service over the period 1880 to 1920.

3. The transformation of office work in the New Zealand public service: 1880-1920

The growth and diversification of the state administrative apparatus

By the 1880s, the New Zealand state had become involved in a diverse array of activities, and hence there existed a heterogeneous accretion of agencies within the state apparatus. But at this time, the departments of state were relatively small. Most departmental head offices, for example, consisted of a permanent head, a chief clerk, and not more than half a dozen clerks; in some cases, these would be complemented with an accountant or an inspector and a few clerical cadets. A few other departments employed larger numbers of clerical staff, notably those involved in the control of state finances, the provision of the transport and communications infrastructure, and trading.

These offices were all male. With work oriented around ledger-based record keeping and written correspondence, the tools of the clerical trade were pen, ink, ledgers and writing paper. There was a basic division of labour and a clearly-defined clerical hierarchy. At the top of this were the chief clerks, the accountants and the inspectors, in the middle were the bulk of the clerks (generally undifferentiated), and at the bottom were the cadets (i.e. apprentice clerks) and messengers. Entry into and movement up this hierarchy did not depend on any explicit bureaucratic rules. Rather, in a context of direct control relationships between subordinates and supervisors, entry and promotion were dependent on the judgements of senior clerks and on political patronage. Consequently, there was a distinct lack of uniformity in employment conditions and no defined career

structure in the civil service (Polaschek, 1958). This situation was to change dramatically over the period from the 1880s to the 1920s.

While in the 1880s the state was the central agent of development in New Zealand, during the period of social reforms from 1891 it expanded further into all areas of the dominion's economic fabric and began to take a more active role in social amelioration. As a result of social legislation aimed at improving working conditions, regulating industrial conflict, raising the living standards of the aged and improving the health of the growing population, new state agencies were established. The development of the market economy was fostered through state intervention in all sectors. But the state did not only intervene, it also became directly involved in market activities: in banking, coal mining, property insurance and the administration of superannuation schemes.

By the 1920s, the state's administrative apparatus had thus increased both its diversity and its size. This growth and diversification led to a vast increase in the amount of paperwork to be processed, and hence to an increase in the size of the clerical workforce. Associated with this were changes in the occupational structure of the civil service and in the modes of control employed to ensure the desired work performance from civil servants. Two other major changes in the period from 1880 to the 1920s were the introduction of office machines and the growing involvement of women in the clerical workforce. The "Dickensian" office of the 19th century had given way to the "modern office" in which there was a complex division of labour, 2 hierarchies of occupations, job segregation by gender, and a structure of impersonalised bureaucratic control.

The bureaucratization of the public service

Bureaucracy is a structural "system of control" which institutionalises the exercise of hierarchical authority deriving from economic and social power relationships within organisations (Edwards, 1979, pp.130-162). Bureaucratic control is embedded within the social structure of the organisation. It establishes the impersonal force of organisational rules as the basis for control, replacing personalised face-to-face power relations. Organisational control is mediated through explicit bureaucratic rules and procedures which cover the definition and direction of work tasks, the evaluation of worker performance, the distribution of rewards and the imposition of sanctions. It is through this form of control that those managing organisations seek to obtain desired performance from employees. The full development of bureaucratic control in the New Zealand public service, to replace more direct forms of control, did not occur until the early 20th century.

In the mid-19th century, the New Zealand civil service did not exhibit the features of the "ideal type" bureaucracy as identified by Weber (1948); i.e. there was no clearly-defined hierarchy of offices, no career structure with security of tenure or prescribed criteria for promotion, no uniform scales of pay, nor any explicit rules and regulations. As the 1866 Royal Commission on the Civil Service observed:

No fixed principles have existed to harmonise and cement the structure of the service. That two fold spirit of independence and emulation, which arises from a reasonable security of tenure and probability of preferment, and which is so essential to the good of the public service is feeble and languid. Appointments, pay and promotion depend more upon fortuitous events than on settled principles.

Despite several earlier attempts, it was not until the Public Service Act 1912 that bureaucratization of the public service was eventually achieved. This Act, and the regulations made under it, provided for impersonalised and standardised control over the activities of civil servants, and introduced the main features of bureaucratic organisation. Officials were made subject to a unified control and disciplinary system under the

authority of a public service Commissioner (the role of which office was "... to ensure the establishment and continuance of a proper standard of efficiency and economy in the Public Service"). The service was initially classified into 4 divisions (i.e. administrative, professional, clerical and general), and each of these was subdivided into classes with prescribed salary scales. Qualifications for entry into the various divisions of the service were set down, as were the conditions for promotion and dismissal.

Thus, the Act provided a career structure within the public service with, for most employees at least, the opportunity for upward mobility through an hierarchy of graded positions. However, the Act also empowered the Commissioner to appoint temporary staff in certain situations, and this was to prove an important factor in the employment of women.

The mechanisation of office work

The first mechanisation of office work was that of the copy transcription task, which followed the first commercial production of the "type-writer" in the mid-1870s. Writing, of correspondence, minutes, accounts, ledger-entries, etc., and copying have traditionally been the quintessential tasks of clerical work. As all clerical work involved handwriting, a basic qualification for clerks was to be able to write legibly. An additional skill which complemented this in the mid-19th century office was shorthand writing. As Anderson (1976, p.104) has noted in a study of Victorian clerks, "... shorthand was an extra weapon in the clerk's arsenal of testimonials and work skills".

Shorthand writing was important in the civil service (particularly for the recording of Parliamentary and court proceedings) and was recognised as a valued skill. In the revised examination regulations under the Civil Service Act 1866, shorthand writing was prescribed as one of the optional subjects for the Senior Civil Service Examination (this examination, introduced in 1871, was intended to qualify clerks for promotion), and in 1881 shorthand was added as an optional subject in the Junior (i.e. entrance) Examination. Even after mechanisation, new regulations under the 1912 Public Service Act placed a premium on shorthand writing. Junior clerks could gain 6 months' seniority by passing a shorthand test at 100 words per minute and typing at 40 words per minute.

Whenever the efficiency of the civil service became an issue of concern, strategies to reduce the cost of clerical labour engaged in routine writing and copying were introduced. Shorthand writing was one means by which clerical time spent on writing could be reduced. Another strategy to reduce labour costs in this area was the appointment of temporary "writers" outside the terms that were supposedly governing the employment of permanent civil servants. These employees were a cheaper form of labour, paid by the day at a fixed rate, subject to discharge when no longer required and with no claim to superannuation or permanent employment. Clearly, under the impetus of the continuing need to contain the costs of clerical labour on the one hand, and the need to deal with an explosion of paperwork arising from the expansion of the state's activities on the other, a niche was emerging in the civil service offices of the late 19th century for mechanised copy transcription.

The first workable and portable writing machines date from the late 18th and early 19th centuries. By the 1860s the labour-saving potential of these machines was beginning to be recognised:

A machine by which it is assumed that a man may print his thoughts twice as fast as he can write them, and with the advantage of legibility, compactness and neatness of print, has lately been exhibited before the London Society of the Arts ... The subject of typewriting is one of the interesting aspects of the near future. Its manifest feasibility and advantage indicate that the laborious and unsatisfactory performance of the pen must, sooner or later, become obsolete for

general purposes. Legal copying, and the writing and delivering of sermons and lectures, not to speak of letters and editorials, will undergo a revolution as remarkable as that effected in books by the invention of printing, and the weary process of learning penmanship in schools will be reduced to the acquirement of the writing of one's own signature, and playing on the literary piano so described, or rather on its improved successors. (Scientific American editorial, 1867, cited in Beeching, 1974, p. 23)

But it was not until the 1870s that the first commercial typewriters were produced. While in 1873 there were no typewriters in use in offices, by the end of the 19th century many manufacturers were producing these machines (30 in the United States alone) and they were being introduced into offices throughout the world.

The typewriter was marketed as a machine to supersede handwriting in correspondence, copying and the production of manuscripts by clerks, journalists, authors and people in business. As advertisements for the Remington Model No.2 (1883) reveal, the advantages with which it was promoted were the speed of transcription ("... having twice the speed of the pen ..."), the saving of clerical time ("... of employers who dictate their correspondence to a shorthand clerk there are but a few who dictate with sufficient rapidity to keep him fully employed ... with the typewriter, as soon as the dictation is finished, the letter itself is ready for dispatch"), and the quality of the typewritten product ("... fairly comparable to a printed proof ..."). The speed of typing was an attribute that was emphasised early on, and this was to become the dominant element in the feminised occupation of typist that was constituted during this period. However, at its first introduction the typewriter was not specifically aimed at women, again as early advertisements show, e.g. "The merchant, the banker - ALL men of business can perform the labour of letter-writing with much saving of valuable time."

The typewriter was introduced into offices of the New Zealand civil service in which there were very few women employees, and was initially used by male clerks. Soon after its introduction, the specialised clerical occupation of "shorthand and type writer" began to emerge. These were engaged, without the need to pass the Civil Service Entrance Examination, as temporary employees. The first such employee, a male, was employed in the Land and Income Tax Department in 1892, and the first female in 1896. Over the period 1887 to 1908, 4 male shorthand writers, 16 male shorthand and type writers, 6 female shorthand writers and 4 female shorthand and type writers were so employed. These employees essentially replaced the temporary "writers" and performed the same task of copy transcription.

Typewriters, or "typists" as they later became known, were also employed on the permanent staff of the civil service from the 1890s. By 1907, 5 male and 36 female copy transcribers were employed in 17 of the classified departments of the Civil Service. As can be seen from these figures, by the early 20th century these occupations within the civil service were becoming dominated by females. Following the introduction of typewriters a wide range of other machines, to facilitate copy transcription, accounting and copying, were also introduced. The operation of these new office machines was delegated to a new, exclusively female, occupation of "machinist".

Associated with the mechanisation of office work was the creation of feminised occupations of "detail" workers (Glenn and Feldberg, 1979). In the work of these the conceptual element of human labour was "... reduced to so small a factor in the work process that the speed and dexterity with which the manual portion of the operation can be performed dominates the labour as a whole" (Braverman, 1974, p.324). The introduction of typewriting and copying machines had thus facilitated the separation in the office of "mental" work (i.e. the production of copy in the form of reports, memoranda, correspondence, etc.) from the routine "manual" tasks of transcription.

The feminisation of office work

The period from 1880 to the 1920s saw the growing involvement of women in paid employment. As the clerical workforce grew, women were employed in increasing numbers within it. In 1874, when only 3 percent of the total (European) workforce were in clerical occupations, less than 0.1 percent of the "actively engaged" females were employed in such work (Population Census, 1874). By 1896 the clerical workforce had grown to 3.5 percent of the total workforce but still only 0.6 percent of the female workforce was employed in this area. However, by 1926 when 7.7 percent of the workforce was involved in clerical work, females made up 40 percent of the office workforce. A large proportion of these (38 percent) were employed in the new feminised office occupation of typist/stenographer.

This growing involvement of women in the clerical workforce was due to both supply and demand factors. On the supply side, an increasing number of women became available for paid work due to demographic factors. As Olssen (1980, pp.159-161) has pointed out, from the 1880s the colony's sex ratio began to lose its strong male bias, and in the main urban centres there began to be more women than men, particularly between the ages of 15 to 35. These changes, in conjunction with the wider availability of education, created a growing pool of qualified women which could be drawn on to meet the demand for clerical labour. But whether women offered their labour for such paid work was socially conditioned. Underlying the decision to enter paid employment was "the dull compulsion of economic forces". For both those women who remained unmarried and those who moved from one situation of domestic dependence (the parental home) to another (the marital home), economic necessity required that women without independent means had to seek paid work. Over and above this material motivation was an "ideological shift", through which it became more socially acceptable for women to enter paid employment. Clerical work was relatively well paid and enjoyed a higher status than most of the other areas of employment open to women, so was seen to be particularly suitable for those from a more educated "middle-class" background (Davies, 1975; Barker and Downing, 1980).

The increasing availability of female labour coincided with the expansion in demand for clerical labour. The growing number and size of offices in the public and private sectors required ever larger numbers of clerical workers, and the pool of educated women was a source of cheaper labour to meet this demand. In the civil service, this demand was boosted by World War I which decreased the availability of male clerical labour while at the same time increasing the demand for clerical labour within the state apparatus. The war necessitated the employment of women in departments that had previously been staffed exclusively by males. The experience of this helped break down the resistance toward employing women office workers. In 1916, the public service Commissioner noted:

The employment of women has assumed a new aspect, and Departments which prior to the war objected to female officers are now utilising women for such work as assisting auditors, ledger work and other minor accounting and clerical work" (Annual report of the public service Commissioner, 1916, p.11)

But if one side of the "ideological shift" was the growing acceptability of the notion of women in paid employment, the other side was their acceptance in workplaces which were male dominated and controlled. Initially there was considerable reluctance to employ women in offices, but this reluctance was partly eroded under conditions of necessity and then gradually declined as a niche for women in the office hierarchy, based on socially defined attributes of female labour, was first constituted and then expanded.

At the 1874 census, only 3 European women were recorded as employed in "government administration", and by 1896 this figure had only increased to 15. But from

the late 1890s onward, the employment of women in public service offices began to increase. By 1907, of the 37 distinct agencies classified under the Public Service Classification Act 1907, 22 employed at least one permanent female office worker. In these departmental offices there were 16 female clerks (2 of these were "clerk-typists"), 21 cadettes, 12 shorthand writers and typists, and 22 typists. So, at this stage, women's employment in the offices of the public service had become established. During the first part of the twentieth century, the proportion of women employed in public service offices increased markedly. In 1914, 13 percent of the office staff in the Clerical and General Divisions of the service were women; by 1922, while the number of staff in these divisions had nearly doubled, the proportion of women had increased to 28 percent. But although increasing numbers of women were being employed in the public service, their entry was controlled by various administrative restrictions, as I discuss below.

4. Segregation and control in the "modern offices" of the public service

Occupational differentiation and strategies of exclusion

By the 1920s, the small all-male civil service offices of the 19th century had been replaced, as the state expanded the range and scale of its operations, with offices of many employees and in which there was a complex division of labour. Occupational differentiation had created 2 hierarchies of office occupations. One was a clerical hierarchy, staffed largely by males and at the top of which were the exclusively male specialist and managerial positions. A subordinate hierarchy was of "detail" workers, staffed predominantly by females, performing the routine and standardised tasks of copy transcription. Simple face to face control over office workers had largely been superseded by impersonalised bureaucratic controls, but within this framework patriarchal relations of control confined women either to subordinate occupations or to subordinate positions. The women who had moved into the offices of the public service from the late-19th century were employed in areas, often of temporary employment, with lower wages and limited or no chances for career advancement, mostly separate from men.

The 2 hierarchies of office occupations were formalised in the classification of the service by the public service Commissioner. At the top of the clerical division hierarchy were the specialist (i.e. inspector and accountant) and managerial (e.g. chief clerks, principal clerks, first clerks, etc.) positions with the highest salaries and staffed exclusively by men. In the middle were the various types of clerk, from the non-differentiated "clerk" to specialised occupations (e.g. ledger-keeper, book-keeper, cashier), with a wide range of salaries and including some women. At the bottom, with the lowest salaries, were the male cadets plus a few female "cadettes". Entry into this division as a cadet was by examination, and the structure provided that those who entered could progress up the clerical career ladder. Although this hierarchy, as originally constituted by the 1912 Act, did not formally discriminate between males and females, the exclusionary administrative practices of the male-dominated office of public service Commissioner first restricted and then precluded women from entry.

Restrictions on the employment of women in the public service pre-dated, but were continued after, the establishment of a formal bureaucratic structure in 1912. Even the legislation creating this structure discriminated against women, in that under section 42 it proscribed the appointment of married women if they had a husband already employed in the service. This provision was extended in the first regulations made under the Act by the public service Commissioner: on her marriage, a female employee was required to resign, although special cases could be sanctioned by the Commissioner.

The bureaucratic structure introduced under the Public Service Act 1912 created a career service for most employees. But it also provided a framework within which the entry and employment conditions of women could be systematically controlled through the administrative practices of the public service Commissioner. Three sources of control were available to the Commissioner's office: it could control entry via cadetships, it had control over the classification of occupations, and it was able to employ temporary labour.

By administrative decree, the Commissioner regulated the entry of women via cadetships into the clerical and professional divisions. The 1912 Act and its regulations did not differentiate between males and females in awarding cadetships on the basis of a pass in the entrance examination, but the regulations did give the Commissioner the power to determine which jobs were suitable for "girls". In 1913 the Commissioner decided not to permit females to sit the entrance examination from that year. This decision was reversed in 1916 when women were increasingly being employed to perform clerical work in the face of staff shortages caused by the war.

However, the gains to women resulting from the war were short-lived. In 1921, under a policy of retrenchment, women were precluded from permanent employment in the public service. The Commissioner, using his powers under the 1912 Act, decided to appoint no further women clerical cadettes, a new class of (almost exclusively female) temporary clerk the "office assistant" was created with the same pay scales as typists and machinists, and these latter were relegated to the status of temporary employees (Polaschek, 1958, p. 178). It was to be some time before this particular exclusionary practice was to be reversed.

A second source of the public service Commissioner's control over women's employment was inherent in the legally-prescribed duty of classifying the public service. This involved dividing the permanent staff into the 4 divisions originally specified in the Act, i.e. Administrative, Professional, Clerical and General. The office occupations in which women predominated, i.e. shorthand writer and typist, typist, and machinist, were classified in the General Division and the salary scales for these were set by the public service Commissioner. The gazetted pay scales were much lower than those for the Clerical Division, and they discriminated between males and females in the same occupation, with higher maximum salaries being prescribed for men.

The principle of lower pay scales for women was also extended to other female clerical employees. Despite the salary scales for the Clerical Division set out in the Act (with no distinction between males and females), the Commissioner passed a regulation to limit the amounts payable to women performing clerical and transcription work. Later appeals by women clerks, supported by the Public Service Association, to the Public Service Appeals Board against the Commissioner's regrading decision in 1919 led to a ruling that women must be paid the same salaries as men providing their work was "equal in quality and quantity" to that of male clerks (Corner, 1988, p. 14). This ruling, in turn, resulted in the revoking of the contentious regulation in 1919. Retrospectively, this was a hollow victory, given the Commissioner's decision on female employees in 1921.

Third, by virtue of his ability to appoint temporary employees, the public service Commissioner had control over many women who entered into, and were discarded from, the public service under this provision. This was an important source of control during World War I when large numbers of temporary female office employees were engaged. In 1919 there were 502 male and 748 female temporary clerks in the service, as well as 212 temporary shorthand typists/typists. By April 1921 the number of temporary employees had been reduced to 382 male clerks, 187 female clerks and 122 shorthand typists, typists and machinists. Later in that year, with the creation of the temporary "office assistant" and the relegation of the transcription occupations to temporary status, the Commissioner's powers became an even more important source of control over female employees. Women entered into the offices of the public service during the early 20th

century in increasing numbers but in the face of restrictive entry conditions set by the male managerial hierarchy. It was through these exclusionary practises that women employees were controlled as a flexible "reserve army" of office labour, to be drawn on or discarded as required.

Feminised occupations and the social construction of skill

The hierarchy of occupations of "detail workers" in the General Division was subordinate to the clerical hierarchy, and employees therein were paid much lower salaries. There were separate entry conditions into these occupations, and it was extremely difficult, if not impossible, to move from this into the Clerical Division.

Two features of this division of labour were a product of patriarchal relations of control. The first was vertical segregation by gender within the clerical hierarchy. No women were employed in the managerial and specialist positions, and most were employed among the junior and middle grades. The second feature was the horizontal segregation of occupations by gender creating the "feminised" copy transcription occupations. These new occupations resulted from the introduction of the typewriter and other copy transcription machines into the office followed by task specialisation. This specialisation and segregation occurred over a period of time. Initially "type writing" was performed by male clerks, as were the other copy transcription tasks of shorthand writing and copying. In 1890, the occupation of typewriter did not exist. But in the late 1890s and early 1900s this was gradually differentiated from other clerical work, and made an exclusively female occupation. By 1907, 3 distinct copy transcription occupations existed (i.e. shorthand writer, shorthand writer and typist, and typist) and of those employed in the public service 80 percent were females. But at this stage, the task specialisation was still not complete for there were also a number of "clerk-typists", a transitory occupation that persisted until the 1920s. In 1922, specialisation and feminisation were more or less complete with nearly 99 percent of the copy transcription work being performed by women typists.

A central aspect in the constitution of this occupation was the social construction and valuation of skill. As Phillips and Taylor (1980, p. 79) have argued:

Skill definitions are saturated with sexual bias. The work of women is often deemed inferior because it is women who do it. Women workers carry into the workplace their status as subordinate individuals, and this status comes to define the value of the work they do. Far from being an objective economic fact, skill is often an ideological category imposed on certain types of work by nature of the sex and power of the workers that perform it.

This can be seen in the devaluation of the skill of shorthand writing as it gradually became the exclusive preserve of the feminised occupations. Before mechanisation, shorthand writing had been a valued clerical skill in the public service. The specialised clerical occupation of shorthand writer existed alongside that of typist into the 1920s, but as this disappeared (assisted by technological change in the form of dictation and stenography machines), the skill remained mainly as part of the typist's repertoire and so was devalued in relation to other clerical skills. Of importance in this process was the male monopoly over the social construction of skill in the feminised occupations of copy transcription.

Patriarchal relations of control and ideology

As a result of male exclusionary practices, the controlled entry of women into the public service ensured they did not enter into direct competition with men. Underpinning these practices were various ideologies about the role of women and the unique attributes of female employees. The appropriate place for women was seen to be in the home performing unpaid domestic duties, and it was men's role to provide for the household through paid employment. It was therefore expected that for most women paid work would be an interlude between leaving school and marriage (Olssen, 1980, pp. 164-165). The ideological perspective that women belonged in the home was used as a basis for managerial practices to maintain women in paid employment as marginal labour. The regulation that married women could not remain employed in the public service and restrictions on the promotion of women in the office hierarchy are examples of these practices. The relegation of women office employees to temporary status in 1921, with disadvantageous conditions of employment, was another. Such practices were rationalised by reference to the different domestic responsibilities of male and females:

The shortage of boys (as cadets) had been eked out by the appointment of girls as cadettes, but no matter how well this may answer in theory, it is found in practice that the employment of women as clerks is satisfactory to only a limited extent. In old-established institutions like the public service, where many officers retire annually owing to age, it is necessary that the wastage should be provided for from the bottom in such a way that a reasonably attractive career may be opened for young men who have to assume the responsibilities of matrimony at a proper age. To block their promotion by the appointment of girls, who rarely expect to remain in the service after about the age of 25, is likely to have far-reaching results (Annual Report of the public service Commissioner, 1919).

The expectation that women would leave paid work on marriage was confirmed by a rule which enforced their exit!

Also part of the ideological underpinnings were a set of unique attributes ascribed to female labour (Beechey, 1977, pp. 45-67). Associated with these was the relative cheapness of female labour. This was explicitly recognised as an advantage in the UK Civil Service during the late 19th century when females were first employed. For example, in 1871 the Post Office (the first department to employ women) noted the grounds for the desirability of employing women telegraphists and clerks. These grounds included the observations that for the low wages paid a "superior class" of females could be employed, and that women resigned on marriage thereby removing the 2 problems of having to pay more (on the grounds of seniority) for work which was of no greater value and of having to pay pensions. The result:

On the whole, it may be stated without fear of contradiction that, if we place an equal number of females and males on the same ascending scale of pay, the aggregate pay to the females will always be less than the aggregate pay to the males; that within a certain range of duty, the work will be better done by the females than the males, because the females will be drawn from a somewhat superior class; and further, that there will always be fewer females than males on the pension list (Martindale, 1938, pp. 17-18).

Later, in the 1880s, the UK Inland Revenue Department was the first to employ women typists, and the permanent head of that department in extolling their virtues noted "... they are cheap and there is no superannuation" (Martindale, 1938, p. 66). On the basis of the lobbying of that permanent head, the Treasury issued a Circular Letter recommending that all copying of documents and correspondence be carried out using typewriters and that women or boys should be employed to operate these in order to

reduce expenditure on clerical salaries (Holcombe, 1973, p. 169). No doubt the cost advantages of female copy transcribers was similarly recognised in the New Zealand public service.

Women were seen to have particular feminine attributes that made them suitable for certain forms of employment. For example, they were considered "... to take more kindly than men or boys do to sedentary employment, and are more patient during long confinement to one place ...", and they were "... less disposed than men to combine for the purpose of extorting higher wages ..." (Martindale, 1938). Of particular importance were feminine skills of manual dexterity (emphasised after the introduction of the first office machinery) which rendered them suitable for performing routine work using machines, thereby emancipating male clerks from such "manual work". For example, with the first introduction of "mechanical office appliances for adding, billing and the listing of results" into the New Zealand public service, training courses for women to operate them were established:

Classes of women have been established and taught the use of office appliances ... Experience elsewhere has proved that the work of manipulating the machines was one specifically fitted for women, and it was decided to teach suitable women already in the service, so as to allow the male staff to be engaged on work of a more important character and enable them to be trained in matters of organisation and administration (Annual Report of the public service Commissioner, 1913, p. 18).

But this attribution of female characteristics was also used to rationalise the restrictions placed on the employment of women. For example, in considering the valuation of female employees in the public service, the Hunt Commission (1912) argued:

There are a number of these in the service as shorthand-writers and typists, and also as clerks. It would not do, we think, to rank them equally with male officers in the matter of salaries. It is doubtless true that some women would excel many men in capacity for work, but, taking them on the average, while they are often good, steady workers, they cannot stand the strain of a rush or pressure of work in the same way that men can, and we think, therefore, that female officers should be paid at a reduced rate. They could be given a male officer's pay less a certain percentage. Then, again, female officers, as a rule, do not readily take responsibility in the same way that men do ... Except, perhaps, in exceptional cases, the bulk of them would remain permanently in the lower classes of then service (Report of the Hunt Commission, 1912, p. 28).

Such, then, were the rationales given for the employment of women in the public service and for the restriction of that employment to particular jobs and subordinate positions. Fundamental to these rationales was the ideological construction of the "family wage" with its assumption that the appropriate role for women was marriage and domestic duties, with the husband as the sole or principal household wage earner.

5. Conclusion

This paper has sought both to demonstrate the utility of a particular theoretical perspective (one that has to date received little attention in the study of industrial relations in New Zealand) to analyzing social relations in the workplace, and to provide a historical perspective on gender relations within offices of the New Zealand public service. The neo-Marxist approach to the labour process, in conjunction with feminist theorisation of

gender relations and a historical analysis, can contribute much to an understanding of the relationships between different groups within the modern workplace.

However, this was a preliminary study, requiring further theoretical development and investigation, particularly on the response of public service employees - both male and female - to managerial initiatives. Hopefully, the study will contribute to, or open up, 3 research agendas in the analysis of industrial relations. The first of these is for a social constructivist history of the origins and development of the first machine in the office, the typewriter, covering the crucial period from the early workable prototypes in the 1860s up to 1905 when the "QWERTY" keyboard became "cemented in" as the standard design. In this analysis there is a need to move beyond technological determinism and the "technological success stories" in the existing historiographies, to examine the social and political processes through which the typewriter was first created and then stabilised in a particular form. The second agenda is for more research on the "ideological shift", beginning in the late-19th century, by which women's involvement in paid employment started to become more acceptable. This shift continues today with the increasing participation of women in the paid workforce and the gains made in the struggles for "equal pay for equal work". Thirdly, more detailed research is required on the differentiation of clerical work in the late-19th and early 20th centuries, and particularly on the social constitution of the feminised occupations of typist and machinist.

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