

BOOK REVIEW

Gender Pay Gap. Vom Wert und Unwert von Arbeit in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Ed. by Wiebke Wiede, Johanna Wolf, and Rainer Fattmann. [Archiv der sozialen Demokratie der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Reihe: Politik- und Gesellschaftsgeschichte, Bd. 113.] Dietz, Bonn 2023. 287 pp. € 32.00.

This edited volume gathers contributions to a conference (with the same title as the book) that took place online in April 2021. The conference was held under the auspices of the “Neue Perspektiven der Gewerkschaftsgeschichte”, sponsored by the Hans-Böckler-Stiftung and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. Wiebke Wiede and Johanna Wolf introduce the volume and its twelve chapters discuss themes and topics related to the causes, circumstances, and consequences of the gender pay gap. As indicated in its section headings, the main themes are: the understanding of unpaid and paid work over time; the institutionalization of pay inequality through laws and labor contracts; and the thorny national and international trade-union politics surrounding the valuation of work. The chapters cover a wide sweep of history, from the early modern period through to the modern era, with a heavy emphasis on the twentieth century. They span various geographical spaces, from the local community, regions and provinces to the nation and international organizations. Eight chapters focus on the history of the gender pay gap in several locations within (West) Germany.

Wiede and Wolf open with a brief survey of the gender pay gap in today’s Federal Republic of Germany before providing an overview of major theoretical and historical arguments regarding the sources of and challenges to the gender pay gap. As they (and several chapter authors) point out, scholarship has long seen the gender pay gap as rooted in triangular interactions among: cultural norms about masculinity, femininity, and productive labor; the types of labor that women and men do; and the perceived moral and monetary value of each type of work. The gender pay gap, they remind us, is not only multi-determined but dynamic and replicating. Historically, women in Europe and elsewhere worked in unpaid or financially low-valued work associated with the household and reproduction/family care and, ever since, have found it difficult to break out of undervalued economic sectors despite gaining political citizenship and making gigantic leaps in educational achievement.

Wiede and Wolf present a thought-provoking and plausible semi-revisionist argument about the provenance of early efforts to address the gender pay gap. They note that the pay gap was already a target of criticism among socialists, most significantly by the Social Democratic leader August Bebel in his influential book *Die Frau und der Sozialismus* (1879). They contend, however, that nationally based, male-dominated trade unions were far from being the first to take up the torch against the pay gap.

Rather, as shown by recent research (including some presented in this volume), criticism, debate, and demands for legal redress of the gender pay gap were advanced by supranational propaganda and legal campaigns initiated in the early twentieth century and accelerated after World War II by the women's movement, on the one hand, and by the International Labor Organization (ILO) and other multinational union federations – often working within the orbit of the League of Nations and then the United Nations – on the other. In 1919, the ILO's constitution included the radical principle of “equal wage for *equivalent* work” (my emphasis), a formulation that trade unions in many countries long eschewed in favor of calls for “equal pay for equal work”, which, given gender segmentation, were fairly useless.

Five chapters address the theme “conditions and recognition of unpaid and paid labor”. Several do so from a social-historical perspective. Michaela Bräuninger, for example, discusses the history of the full-time unpaid work of the “*Pastorenfrau*” (the pastor's wife) within parishes of the German Lutheran (Evangelical) Church, focusing particularly on this official arrangement after 1945. The pastor's wife (often the mother of multiple children) was expected to visit the sick, help organize religious activities and education, and devote herself to the congregation's social needs. Indeed, she could only *become his wife* after being vetted by the *Landeskirchenamt* (state-level church bureau) and the bishop. In 1956, the parish law of the United Lutheran Churches of Germany included the following clause: “If the wife is active in an occupation, the pastor has to declare this. He is required, on demand [*auf Verlangen*], to ensure that the wife give up exercise of her profession for the sake of his calling.” Bräuninger tells the story of *Pastorenfrauen* in Hamburg who gingerly questioned and eventually challenged church control over the pastor's marriage and his wife's labor. In the wake of increasing internal pressure in the 1970s, the church excised the statutes prohibiting paid labor by *Pastorenfrauen*. In her chapter on the pay of housemaids in twentieth-century (West) Germany, Marieke Witkowski analyzes material from writings by housemaids, while also discussing their professionalization and their achievement in securing union representation and contracts in the 1950s.

Under the section title “Institutionalization of inequality in and by legal and contractual regulations”, four chapters consider the impact of state law and union contracts on pay inequality. Leonie Kemper, for example, examines the blatantly discriminatory regulation of pay and discourse concerning the value of male and female elementary school teachers in Prussia. Andrea Jochmann-Döll, Christina Klenner, and Alexandra Scheele bring the issues of pay inequality up to the present in discussing gendered assumptions about digitalized work. Karin Schönpflug sketches a complex picture of pay disadvantages and advantages among queer people from an intersectional perspective. How, she asks, did race/ethnicity, sexuality, gender, and class interact to influence the compensation of LGBTQI+ people? The empirical evidence she analyzes in detail comes from a US study. She does not address whether and how that study's findings might compare to a hypothetical study in Germany, where the categories of race and ethnicity do not map onto hierarchies of race and ethnicity in the US, in terms of ethnic composition, legal status, and, most significantly, historical construction.

The chapters in the final section, “The politics of national and international trade union organizations in the valuation of work”, directly or indirectly address Wiede and Wolf's introductory argument about the significant role played by transnationally

active women's associations, international labor groups, and international organizations in generating national discussion, legislation, and labor activity around the gender pay gap. Wolf's chapter provides direct evidence to support the introduction's claim. She highlights the activity of women within international committees concerned with women workers in the immediate postwar years. This included participation in committees within the UN Women's Rights Commission and within the women's department of the ILO. Wolf's focus is on the increasingly fraught but real cooperation between "Western" left-oriented unions (social democratic, socialist, and communist) and "East Bloc" communists within the World Trade Union Federation (WTUF) between 1945 and 1949 (when the WTUF split along Cold War lines). The WTUF Executive Committee, she argues, devoted considerable attention to women's work both internally and within relevant UN Commissions, in part due to pressure from the Soviet communist Nina Vasilievna Popova, who fought with mixed results for the WTUF to adopt a strong position in favor of equal wages for women's workers.

In their chapter, Silke Neunsinger and Ragnheiður Kristjánsdóttir argue that "1975", UN International Women's Year, unleashed a wave of women's activism around multiple issues in many countries, including organizing, demonstrating, and striking around the question of equal pay. They survey, on the one hand, the ILO's attention-grabbing campaign in favor of "equal pay for equivalent work" and attention to women's equality in general throughout the Year of the Woman and at the UN World Women's Conference in Mexico. On the other hand, they offer compressed micro-studies of a surge in local activity and propaganda around the question of wage equality in three very different countries – Iceland, India, and, most surprisingly, South Africa. In Iceland, women workers carried out a general strike, which was certainly impressive but not as risky as a local strike by women textile workers in South Africa. In contrast to these transnationally focused chapters, Judith Holland analyzes the varying emphasis of French trade unions on women's wage equality. Trade unions that made much of French "universalism", she contends, resisted addressing the gender wage gap in contractual negotiations. The French case, thus, seems to support Wiede and Wolf's argument that national unions tethered to national "gender neutral" political traditions were less likely to take up the banner of gender wage equality than internationally oriented women's organizations and international organizations.

While the chapters cover many important topics, two themes are missing that, for different reasons, strike me as significant to the treatment of the gender pay gap in the postwar era. No chapter focuses on industrial workers or explores the social-historical question of how, why, and to what effect male industrial workers have often opposed and even sabotaged state or union efforts to address the wage gap. Except for a brief discussion of gendered wages in the USSR (in Wolf's chapter), there is no consideration of the gender pay gap in any state-socialist country. I realize that a volume based on conference presentations is limited to the topics submitted. Perhaps, though, the editors could have raised these topics in the introduction.

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