

Pay-equity supporters say 'gap' still exists



By [Elliot Ferguson](#), Kingston Whig-Standard
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Canada needs to make changes to steer the country away from the rise of the "gig economy" and ensure good jobs remain available, said one of the people running to be leader of the New Democratic Party.

Charlie Angus, the MP for Timmins-James Bay, was at Queen's University Tuesday to lend his support to a rally for pay equity between men and women.

"We've seen the disappearance of the middle class in this country," Angus said.

"The reality is we're seeing the rise of a new working class. And that working class is actually white collar, professional. It presents a sea change in the economies of communities and families."

Angus said precarious work, which federal Finance Minister Bill Morneau has warned is becoming the new normal, and the "hamster wheel of short-term contracts" only exacerbates the wage gap between men and women.

Contract and freelance work that provide no pensions or benefits, when matched to high levels of student loan debt, present a difficult equation for recent graduates to solve, Angus said.

"The prime minister, Justin Trudeau, is the ultimate champion of 2017-style trickle down economics," Angus said. "I think he applies the Bobby McFerrin school of economic theory: don't worry, be happy, everything is nice. Well, it's not. When you get outside of Ottawa, it is not sunny ways."

Data from the Ontario Ministry of Labour and Statistics Canada show that in Ontario, the average hourly wage earned by women is 87.4 per cent of that earned by men.

"The gap has been closing slowly over the year, but no matter what metric you use, there is still a gap," said Jordan Morelli, the rally organizer and a continuing adjunct professor in the university's department of physics, engineering physics and astronomy.

The wage differences between professions are also obvious when they are dominated by one gender or another.

"There are ghettos. Certain fields you do see lower salaries," Lynne Hanson, a continuing adjunct law professor at Queen's, said.

Pay levels can change as the demographics of workers in a specific field change, she added.

"As males move into a particular field, the wages go up. If females move into the same field, the wages go down," she said. "It kind of depends who is dominating the area. It is intrinsic. It's this idea that women's work is not worth as much."

Morelli said an example is comparing wages for the male-dominated field, such as firefighting, and nursing, a female-dominated field.

"We can argue if the work is the same or not but they are both professions, they both require some level of qualifications that are similar," Morelli said.

The rally was held Tuesday in part to symbolize how far into 2017 that a woman, on average, would have to work to make the same as a male colleague made in 2016. The rally was organized by the Public Service Alliance of Canada Local 901, Queen's University Equity Office, Queen's University Faculty Association (QUFA), United Steelworkers of America Local 2010, and the Alma Mater Society (AMS).

The rally was meant to educate students about the differences in pay between men and women, Morelli said.

Progress on closing the gap between what men and women earn happens at a "glacially slow" pace, Hanson said.

The only time men and women on average earn the same amount is during their teenage years, when they are all making minimum wage, Morelli said. After age 18, the pay gap starts to open up and it only gets worse as people age.

"If every year you are making 30 per cent less, by the time you've reach the end of your career you have accumulated substantially less," he said.

That inequity results in women having to work longer to earn enough to retire.

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