



LONDON FREE PRESS ARTICLE – March 31, 2005

New Legislation Proposed to end Gender-based Pricing

A long and well-kept commercial "secret", of sorts, was recently brought into the public domain by Liberal back bencher Lorenzo Berardinetti.

Until recently married, and shopping for clothes with his wife, Berardinetti did not notice that a men's suit cost 30 per cent less than a similar women's outfit by the same designer.

He further noticed that his wife paid more than he for dry cleaning clothing of similar size and fabric. And according to marketing consultant, Joanne Thomas Yacatto, Canadian women are overcharged a total of \$750 million for their hair cuts and styling.

Alarmed at what he saw as "gender-based pricing", Berardinetti recently introduced a private members bill that, if it becomes law, would impose fines of between \$2000 and \$5,000 for charging women more than men. "It's a form of discrimination... that should have been removed a long time ago", says Berardinetti.

California passed similar legislation in 1996, and other American states such as Washington and Massachusetts are introducing or have introduced legislation banning 'gender-based' pricing.

When I spoke with my "former" dry cleaner, the explanation for charging three to four times as much for cleaning a cotton and silk shirts was that my smaller-sized shirts would not fit on the pressing machine. When I laid my shirt over that of my husband's shirt, demonstrating that the dimensions were virtually identical, the cleaner's response was that women's shirts require more hand pressing.

These explanations may no longer be acceptable if Berardinetti's bill, "An Act to Prohibit Price Discrimination on the Basis of Gender" passes into law. Second reading and debate of the bill is scheduled for April 14th.

In the interim, customers can ask their dry cleaner or hair dresser to post or review their price list for providing services and negotiate more equitable pricing for comparable services.

As Yacatto suggested, the customer's footsteps out the door may be as effective as the legislation in correcting inequality in retail pricing. She reported canvassing a number of dry cleaners and taking her business to the cleaner that only charged twice as much for her shirts, as opposed to men's shirts.

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