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News Release

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For Release: Immediately

Northwest Labor History

High Voltage Women tells the story of groundbreaking Northwest tradeswomen

High Voltage Women: Breaking Barriers at Seattle City Light, by Ellie Belew, Red Letter Press, 2019, Paperback, \$20.00, 224 pages, photos, notes, index, ISBN: 978-0-932323-34-7

In *High Voltage Women: Breaking Barriers at Seattle City Light*, labor and community historian Ellie Belew captures the drama, the events, and the personalities of a landmark affirmative action effort in the electrical trades that began in Seattle in the early 1970s. The extensively researched account covers 25 years of city politics and combined union and civil rights activism. The book will be released March 1, 2019 for Women's History Month and is published by Seattle's Red Letter Press. Belew's other works include *Fully Involved: A History of the Washington State Council of Firefighters* (2004) and *Bringing Power to the People* (2013), the history of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local #77.

Through interviews and original source material, Belew tells the story of women's fight to gain entry into the male, largely white, electrical trades at Seattle's publicly owned utility. As part of the Electrical Trades Trainee (ETT) program, ten female pioneers put their bodies on the line to implement affirmative action in the face of life-threatening sexism and racism. Some saw the trades mostly as a means to a better paycheck. But

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other, more radical, participants sought to build alliances with men of color, white male union members, and office staff to change the culture of discrimination at City Light and in the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), Local 77. Their battle took many turns through union grievances, discrimination charges, on-the-job injuries, and notable victories. The initial coordinator of the women's program was Clara Fraser, a gutsy feminist who the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* called "Seattle's grande dame of socialism." Fraser fought and won her own long-running discrimination case against the utility with substantial support from labor.

High Voltage Women offers insights into early Seattle battles for integrated job sites. It explores the role of feminists in Seattle's social justice and labor movements of the 1970s and '80s. It examines the record of city politicians and managers such as Mayor Wes Uhlman and City Light Superintendent Gordon Vickery, notable labor and community leaders including Fraser and Tyree Scott, and key organizations including Radical Women, the Ad Hoc Committee for Fair Employment and Open Housing, and the Committee for Equal Rights at City Light.

Today, City Light remains embroiled in controversy as Seattle Silence Breakers, a local manifestation of the #MeToo movement, shines light on sexual harassment and discrimination. But some significant changes have come about including IBEW #77's support for the book and Business Manager Louis Walter paying tribute to the "ten brave and daring women [who] met with relentless resistance and overwhelming challenges that tested their minds and their bodies but never broke their spirit."

The book can be ordered at www.RedLetterPress or other book sources.

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Author Ellie Belew and several of the tradeswomen profiled in the book are available for interviews. Contact Red Letter Press to make arrangements.