Southern Exposure

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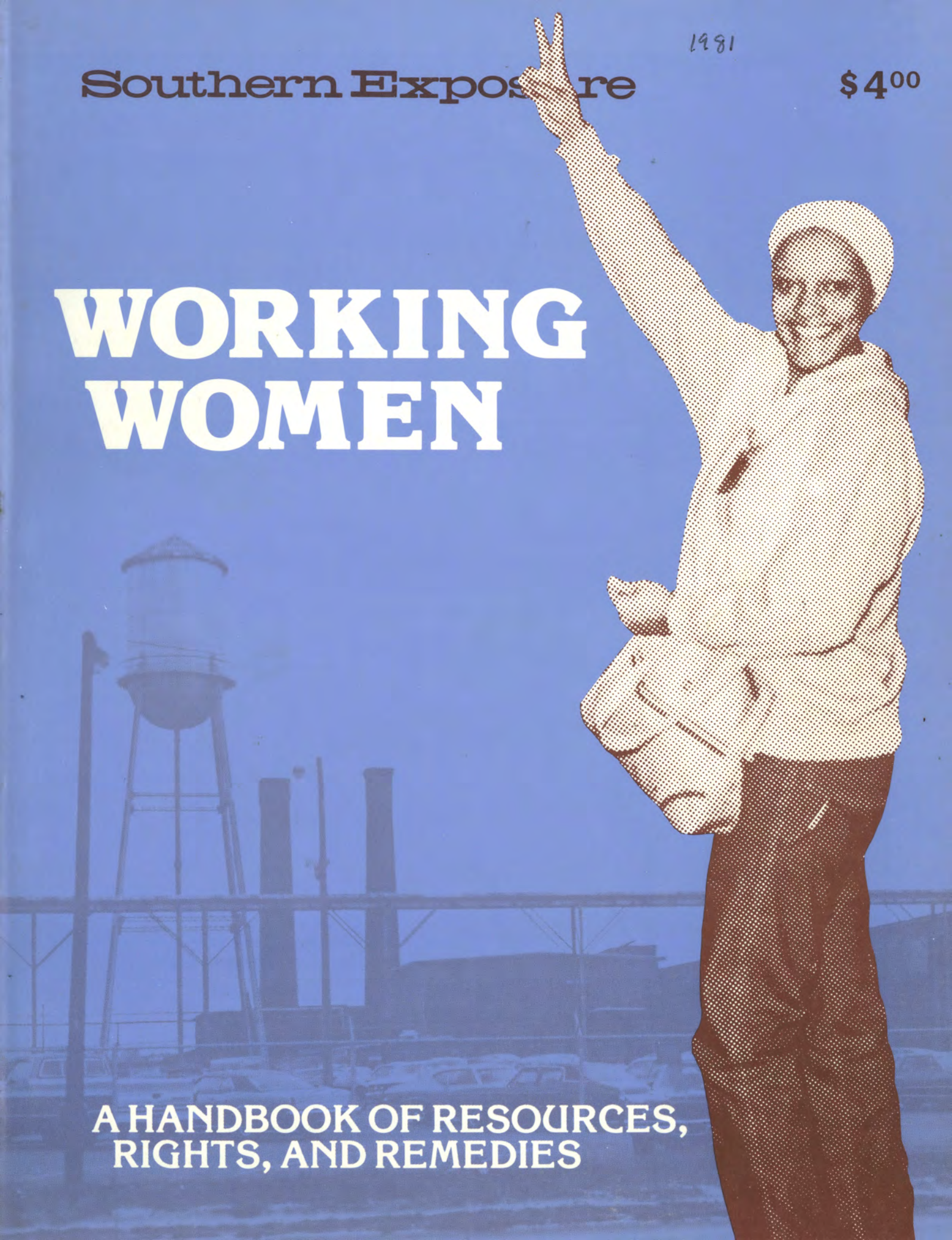
WORKING WOMEN



A HANDBOOK OF RESOURCES, RIGHTS, AND REMEDIES

Southern Exposure

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Working Women: A Handbook of Resources, Rights & Remedies brings you the inspiring energy, spirit, leadership and creativity of Southern women fighting for personal dignity and collective justice: women behind typewriters in Atlanta office buildings, underground in Appalachian coal mines, on the sugar-cane plantations of Louisiana, beside sewing machines in Tennessee garment plants, on the ship docks of Virginia, in hospitals and schools, fast-food restaurants and furniture factories.

Through interviews and profiles, ***Working Women*** shares the persistence and strength of Southern women as they demand – and win – fair and equitable treatment in their workplaces. Other articles on nontraditional job training centers, summer schools, advocacy projects, legal and support services, and displaced homemaker programs demonstrate the variety of collective efforts through which women empower each other. Throughout these pages, we celebrate the energetic building of networks, associations, organizations and unions across the region. But the stories here represent only a slice of the larger battle Southern women are waging for justice on their jobs. There are uncounted numbers of our sisters in offices and factories, in professional and service jobs, whose stories we could hardly begin to tell. These sisters may well include *you* – or your co-workers, your neighbors, your relatives, women whom you meet everyday, women who are underpaid, overworked or stuck in dead-end jobs, women who work eight or nine hours and go home to put in another shift as an unpaid homemaker and mother.

This special handbook was designed to support and encourage working women

everywhere, but especially the thousands of women sewing, typing and waitressing in Southern communities. We need your help to ensure its widespread distribution among our sisters. Please share ***Working Women*** with others and encourage your local community college, public library, women's center, church, NAACP chapter, union, sorority, job-training program, YWCA and bookstore to buy copies. Ask your local newspaper to review it. If you know of a meeting, workshop or conference where this handbook should be sold, let *Southern Exposure* know in advance. Put an announcement or review in your group's next newsletter and announce its arrival at your group's next meeting.* Most of all, encourage others – especially your working sisters – to read, borrow or buy a copy.

This book has itself been a collective venture of Southern working women. Special recognition for their creative ideas and enduring support goes to Betsy Brinson and Betsy Mahoney. Liz Ketelle and Elisa Wolper were responsible for the tedious and essential task of compiling the resource lists of useful organizations, publications, films and extras like buttons and T-shirts. More than 40 other women contributed articles, drawings, songs, interviews, poetry, photography and editorial assistance to make ***Working Women*** a reality. Together, we offer this handbook as a humble guide and a proud salute to the working women who sow the seeds of change and who inspire others to carry forth their own collective struggles in workplaces throughout the South and the nation.

– Tobi Lippin, Guest Editor

*Quantities of five or more may be purchased at a 40 percent discount, or $2.40 per copy.

Saturday Afternoon When Chores Are Done

photo by Alma Blount

I've cleaned house
and the kitchen smells like pine.
I can hear the kids yelling
through the back screen door.
While they play tug-of-war
with an old jumprope
and while these black-eyed peas
boil on the stove,
I'm gonna sit here at the table
and plait my hair.

I oil my hair and brush it soft.
Then, with the brush in my lap,
I gather the hair in my hands,
pull the strands smooth and tight,
and twist three sections into a fat shiny braid
that hangs straight down my back.

I remember mama teaching me to plait my hair
one Saturday afternoon when chores were done.
My fingers, stubby and short,
could barely hold three strands at once,
and my braids would fray apart
no sooner than I'd finished them.
Mama said, "Just takes practice, is all."
Now my hands work swiftly, doing easy
what was once so hard to do.

Between time on the job,
keeping house, and raising two girls by myself,
there's never much time like this,
for thinking and being alone.
Time to gather life together
before it unravels like an old jumprope
and comes apart at the ends.

Suddenly I notice the silence.
The noisy tug-of-war has stopped.
I get up to check out back,
see what my girls are up to now.
I look out over the kitchen sink,
where the sweet potato plant
spreads green in the window.
They sit quietly on the back porch steps,
Melinda plaiting Carla's hair
into a crooked braid.

Older daughter,
you are learning what I am learning:
to gather the strands together
with strong fingers,
to keep what we do
from coming apart at the ends.

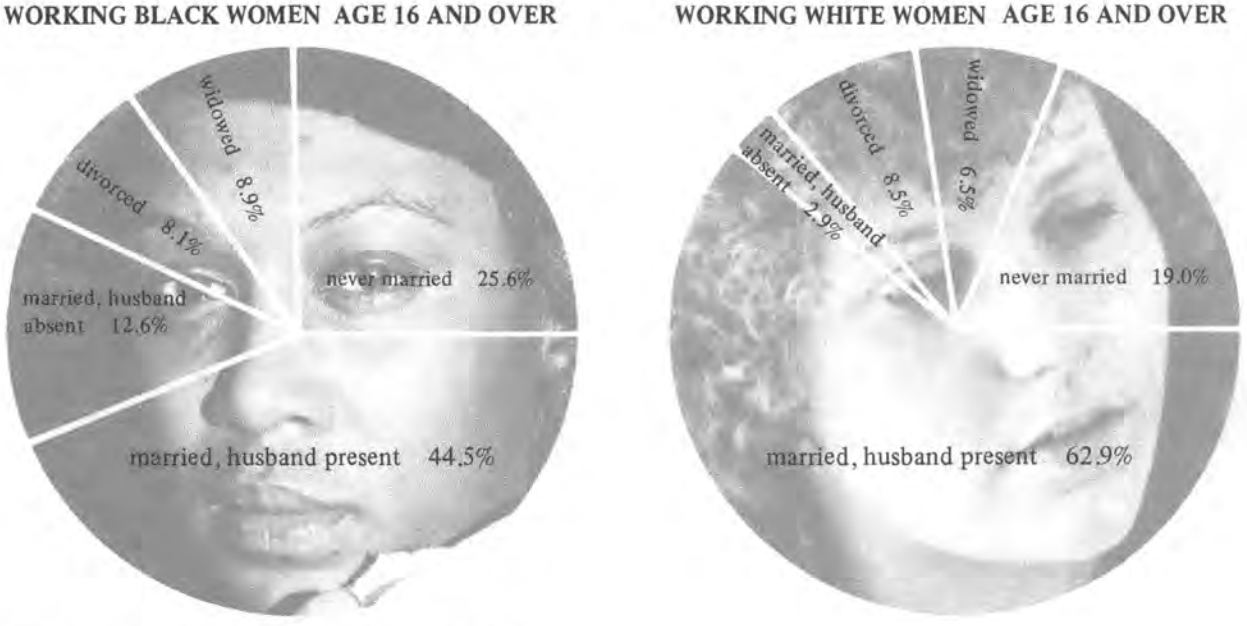
—Harryette Mullen

The Facts Behind the Myths

by Betsy Mahoney
with statistical update by Cate Riley Wineburg and Bob Wineburg

The average Southern working woman has two full-time jobs — in the home and in the workplace — and she is not appropriately rewarded for either.

Table 1: Women in the Southern Labor Force, by Marital Status (1976)



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Report 545 (1976)

Anyone who reads about female bank presidents and airline pilots probably thinks that women are making significant gains in the work force. They might also believe that women, in general, are making good money, holding prestigious jobs and even putting men out of work. The reality for most Southern working women has been, and continues to be, one of long hours and low wages. Many Southern working women bear the double burden of providing for their families and providing a cheap source of labor for Southern industry.

The notion that women's earnings have "caught up to" or surpassed men's earnings is a myth. Women are still far behind men in earnings, authority and prestige in the working world. Statistics on women in the work force show more women working than ever before, but they are, for the most part, poorly paid, lacking in advancement opportunities, and still stuck in the same low-paying, low-status jobs in which they have always worked. Black women have it worse than white women because they have to face both racism and sexism in the workplace. In addition, most working women finish their paid work only to do unpaid work in the home.

The myths about working women in the South and across the nation underlie the relationship between women's low status in the workplace and their status in society as a whole. To this end,

Table 2: Women Represent an Increasing Proportion of the Labor Force

1950-1960: 12% increase in total workers
26% increase in women workers
women were 66% of total increase

1960-1970: 20% increase in total workers
36% increase in women workers
women were 61% of total increase

1970-1979: 25% increase in total workers
36% increase in women workers
women were 54% of total increase

Source: U.S.D.O.L. Women's Bureau, April, 1980. U.S. Report for OECD High Level Conference on the Employment of Women

Table 3: Portion of Family Income Contributed by Married Women (1976)

	South Atlantic	East South Central	West South Central
For all married women who worked	29.6%	29.4%	25.5%
For married women who worked 50-52 weeks, full-time	39.2%	39.0%	36.0%
For married women whose husbands did not work	56.4%	66.4%	52.6%
For married women who worked part-time 50-52 weeks or full-time 1-26 weeks	13.0%	12.2%	10.3%

South Atlantic states: MD, DE, DC, VA, WV, NC, SC, GA, FL
East South Central states: KY, TN, AL, MS
West South Central states: AR, LA, OK, TX

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Report 545, 1976

Southern Exposure examines four commonly held myths about working women. The figures show that working women put far more into the Southern economy and into family life than they get in return.*

Myth 1: Most adult-age women do not work outside the home. Only a few married women are employed in the work force.

Fact: In 1978, 48 percent of Southern white women and 52 percent of Southern black women were in the labor force. Almost half of all Southern women living with their spouses were employed.

Southern women are entering the labor force in greater numbers than ever before. Women made up a hefty 42 percent of the entire Southern labor force in 1978. Over the past decade, women have accounted for 54 percent of the total increase in workers nationwide, a proportion likely to increase during coming years. This trend is illustrated in Table 2.

Black women are especially likely to be part of the labor force, and they have always worked in large numbers. In every Southern state, since the turn of this century, at least one in three black women over age 15 has worked. In the past, Southern black women were more likely to work outside the home than white women. However, during the last two decades, this disparity has virtually disappeared.

Contrary to the stereotype that women only work until they marry, most Southern working women *are* married. These women cannot afford and in some cases are unwilling to stay home full-time to care for their families. In 1976, for example, 68 percent of the white women in the Mississippi labor force were married and living with their husbands. In most Southern states, three out of four female workers are or have been married. Never-married women might still make up an important segment of the female labor force, but they are not a majority. In the South, 75 percent of divorced women and 62 percent of women separated from their husbands work. Table 1 illustrates the proportions of Southern white and black women by marital status participating in the work force. In addition, many women head households which they must support. Almost three-fourths of women who head families and have children under 18 work to support their families.

Myth 2: Women don't need to earn as much as men because their wages are for "extras."

Fact: Full-time working women in the South living with their husbands contribute almost 40 percent of their families' incomes. When their husbands do not work, the figure jumps to 60 percent.

Southern women who work outside the home earn little money, but it is not extra, nor is it spent on frills. The wages that female earners bring home are often what keep Southern families above the poverty level. Table 3 shows the 1976 figures for women's contributions to family income in the South. The figures dispute the myth that women don't need to earn as much as men.

Table 4 shows that, in 1979, women nationally

* The figures are the most recent from the Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U.S. Department of Labor.

were working to keep their families out of poverty. The table shows, for instance, that for a greater percentage of black women than white women, the woman's income is needed to keep the family above the poverty level.

Another revealing fact is that more than half of Southern married women in the labor force have children under age 18. Actually, according to 1979 U.S. Department of Labor figures, women with children under age 18 – those with the heaviest workload — are slightly more likely to be working than women with children over age 18. This is most likely caused by the fact that such families are more dependent on the woman's income for economic survival.

Myth 3: Women now do the same jobs men do. Under affirmative action programs, women, especially black women, take jobs from men.

Fact: Seventy-nine percent of Southern working women still work in four low-paid, traditionally female occupations: clerical, service, sales and manufacturing.

"Women's work" and "men's work" are still very distinct in the South and in the rest of the nation as well. Only a few Southern women work at jobs once considered to be for white males only. Table 6 illustrates that, despite the myth that women have replaced men because of affirmative action, 53 percent of Southern female workers in 1978 held clerical or service jobs in domestic or food service areas. These jobs, along with blue-collar jobs, are not only low-paying, they offer little or no opportunity for advancement. Table 6 illustrates the occupation for all Southern women and for two states, Texas and North Carolina. Because these two states represent the extremes of differences among the states, they show how little the pattern varies from state to state.

Myth 4: The earnings gap between men and women is closing.

Fact: In 1955, the average full-time woman worker earned 64.3 cents for each dollar earned by the average male worker. In 1980, the average woman earned only 63.3 cents per dollar earned by the average man.

An examination of the earnings ratio of women to men over the past 30 years leads to the conclusion that women are running twice as fast to stay in the same place and sometimes they have even fallen behind. By 1960, women were earning 61 cents to men's one dollar. Ten years later, in 1970, women's earnings were 59.4 cents per men's one dollar. The 63.3 cents women made for each dollar men made in 1980 translated into a weekly salary ratio of $204 for women compared to $322 for men. Given the trend of the past 30 years, one would be hard pressed to claim rightly that the earnings gap is closing.

Table 5 shows occupational and salary distributions by sex for 1980. Women's earnings were highest for professional and technical workers. A look at Table 6 is a reminder that Southern women by and large are clerical, service, sales and blue-collar workers.

Southern women's earnings, especially when compared to men's earnings, have historically been lower than those for women in other parts of the nation. Southern black women have had it even

Table 4: Portion of Family Income Contributed by U.S. Married Women, by Race, Family Income and Work Status (1979)

	White	Black
For married women working full-time	37.2%	41.3%
For married women working full-time where family income is less than $10,000	62.3%	69.8%
For married women who worked part-time 50-52 weeks or full-time 1-26 weeks	10.7%	15.9%

Table 5: U.S. Women's Weekly Earnings (1980)

Occupational Group	Median weekly earnings		Women's earnings as percent of men's
	Women	Men	
Total employed	$204	$322	63.3
Professional-technical	287	406	70.7
Managers-administrators except farm	257	435	59.1
Sales	176	337	55.2
Clerical	199	305	65.3
Craft	213	334	63.8
Operatives, except transport	174	275	63.3
Transport operatives	213	290	73.5
Nonfarm laborers	172	227	75.8
Private household service	93	(1)	–
Other service	155	225	68.9
Farm workers	141	173	81.5

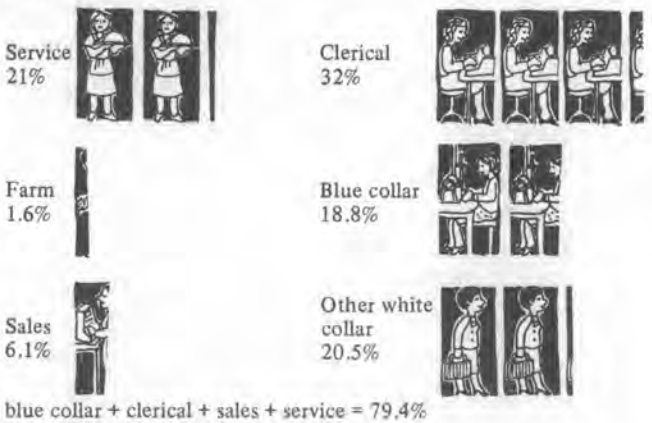
[1] Median not shown where number employed is less than 50,000.

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Report 647, 1981

tougher. In 1975, when the national ratio of women's to men's earnings was 59 cents to one dollar, Southern black women earned 46.8 cents to Southern white men's one dollar. In some states, like Louisiana, Georgia and Alabama, the figures were even lower – 38 cents, 44 cents and 45 cents, respectively. In 1977, black women nationally earned 59.3 cents for every one dollar earned by white men. These figures tell only part of the story. In 1978, the unemployment rate for Southern black women was 15.9 percent. For black men, the figure was 8.7 percent, 6.0 percent for white women and only 3.5 percent for white men. Furthermore, these figures do not account for those people who were too discouraged to seek work actively – most likely blacks and women!

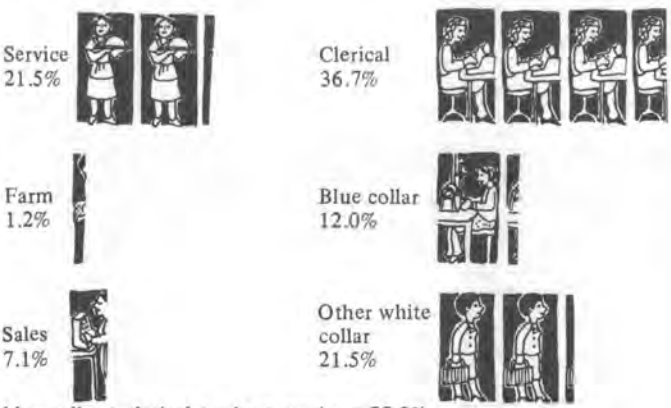
Table 6: Occupational Distribution of Southern Working Women (1978)

SOUTHERN WOMEN:



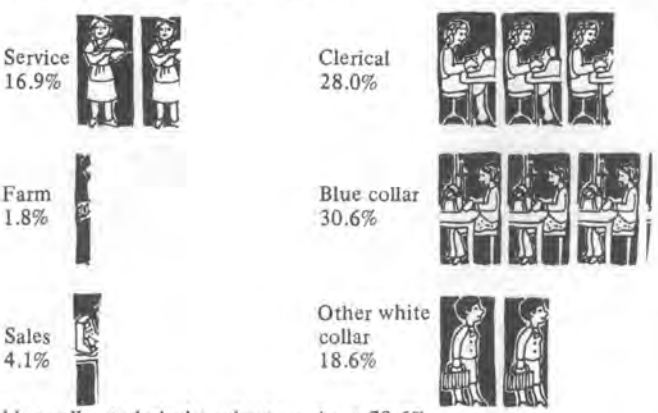
blue collar + clerical + sales + service = 79.4%
total white collar 58.6%

TEXAS WOMEN:



blue collar + clerical + sales + service = 77.3%
total white collar = 65.3%

NORTH CAROLINA WOMEN:



blue collar + clerical + sales + service = 79.6%
total white collar 50.7%

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Report 571, 1978

Contrary to the myths, the average Southern working woman is neither single, nor is she the professional "career girl." She is a full-time worker in a traditionally low-paying woman's job. She probably is, or has been, married, works to hold the family together and keep it out of poverty and genuinely has little hope for career advancement. She may likely be a single parent bearing the full economic burden for her family. She is the backbone of the Southern economy, providing the low-paying labor to keep its businesses and factories running. She is the backbone of Southern families, in both the economic and nurturing capacities. The average Southern working woman works two full-time jobs and is not appropriately rewarded for either.

Despite her labor inside and outside the home, the Southern working woman remains one of the most expendable, least rewarded and least recognized contributors to the Southern economy and way of life. Her lowly economic status is a reflection of women's secondary status in society as a whole. If she is to gain the rights and privileges enjoyed by men, she must be better compensated for *all* she does.□

Betsy Mahoney has done community and union organizing and is now studying labor law at New York University. Cate Riley Wineburg is studying social work in North Carolina and was formerly a research assistant at the University of Pittsburgh Women's Center. Bob Wineburg teaches social policy at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

The Shorter Workday

by Betsy Brinson

In the early part of the century, middle-class women banded together with working women to fight for a shorter workday.

American workers today take for granted the eight-hour workday and the 40-hour workweek. So established are these principles that few people ever question the long and arduous struggle to make them a reality. But this social goal took many years and countless legislative challenges in every state before the eight-hour day was ultimately realized. This major social reform can be attributed in large part to the organizing and public education efforts of American women.

By 1920, some eight million women worked full-time, but they had little to say about their working conditions. Most toiled 10- to 12-hour days in factories and sweatshops where little attention was given to employee health and safety. Production was the key concern. For the most part, organized labor showed little interest in bringing women into the trade unions. Several explanations are offered as to why, but ultimately we have to conclude that unionists suffered from the male bias which held that women's real place was not in the workplace but in the home.

So women workers looked to legislatures rather than trade unions for reforms. Laws were drafted to protect women only; men were to be included later after the laws became acceptable in the public mind. Coverage for male workers was perceived as less likely to pass, and indeed many men were already covered under labor union contracts. Laws were proposed to guarantee a minimum wage, shorter hours, restrictions on child labor and health and safety protection on the job.

Having just recently won the right to vote, women felt they could exert more influence in the legislature. In 1922, the Virginia League of Women Voters sponsored a bill for the nine-hour workday and the 54-hour workweek. However, due to strong opposition from business and industry, the struggle was to last 16 years; the Virginia General Assembly finally passed a bill for a nine-hour workday and a 48-hour work week in 1938.

In the course of the effort, the League argued that legislation was necessary because a "10-hour day meant lowered vitality, premature old age, liability to disease, decreased efficiency after a few years of work, no time for social or home life and exhausted mothers of the next generation." The women lobbyists were successful in persuading some Virginia employers who had voluntarily moved to a nine-hour workday to testify. These employers argued that under shorter hours employees were "more regular, loyal, cheerful and efficient, production is not impaired and there is less labor turnover."

When the campaign moved to the 1924 legislative session, the lobbying efforts included letter-writing campaigns, a petition drive organized by students at Hollins and Sweet Briar Colleges and public meetings sponsored by community coalitions of groups like the League, the YWCA, the State Teachers Association, the Business and Professional Women's Clubs and the Virginia Federation of Labor. These meetings were promoted by newspaper publicity, mailings and posters boldly titled "When Women Work They Need Protection." A second large black-and-white poster showing a woman tossing a baby argued: "America will be as strong as her women."

Audiences who gathered for the educational forums were often shown a U.S. Department of Labor film "Why Women Work," which illustrated industrial conditions in different factories across the country. Sometimes a skit was presented for women-only audiences in which women facing various crises in their lives talked of happiness. The line "Love is the best thing in life" was heavily applauded by audiences everywhere.

In addition to these lobbying techniques, women used printed material as another means to educate voters. Most widely distributed for the 1924 campaign was a 26-page study titled "The Shorter Day and Women Workers,' authored by Lucy Randolph Mason, who chaired the League Committee on Women in Industry. The pamphlet, which sold for 10 cents in order to raise revenues for future League publications, was funded by six Virginia women including the Viscountess Nancy Astor.

The pamphlet spoke about the need for legislators to protect "women in industry or women engaged in manufacturing and mercantile establishments and in laundries." "The Shorter Day" pointed out that "one out of every four persons employed in the U.S. is a woman." It reminded readers of history: "For the last century the factory has been steadily taking over women's traditional occupations" like home-sewing and hypothesized "that civilization needs their work in an era of the factory system just as primitive society needed it before the dawn of history." Most revealing was the argument that women workers needed their wages because as single women they were sole supporters and as married women they needed an income to supplement the family budget.

While efforts for nine-hour-day legislation continued unsuccessfully for the next decade both in Virginia and in the South, other events served to re-emphasize the need for worker protection. During this time, the Virginia Women's Council for Legislative Chairman of State Organizations was developed. The council's goal was to share information and to secure the cooperation of organizations promoting legislation. In an effort to assuage any legislative fears of their being overly assertive and therefore unladylike, the council members promised "to promote legislation without overlapping effort, thus conserving the time of the legislators." The council included representatives from 20 statewide organizations as diverse as the Florence Crittenden League, the DAR, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, the Housewives League, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the YWCA and the American Association of University Women. While the full council membership did not support shorter work-hours legislation, the organization did provide regular updates which were useful to individual supporters and groups.

In 1927, women's groups helped establish the Southern School for Women Workers. Based in Richmond, the school provided workers' education for women from the textile and tobacco industry across the South. The students used their education to organize support groups and educational programs in their own communities and to become part of the drive to secure improved conditions for women workers.

Undoubtedly, the 1930 massive strike by 4,000 textile workers, mostly women, against the Dan River Mills in Danville increased the public understanding of the intolerable working conditions found in most textile manufacturing plants. Mill employees began their day at 6:15 a.m. and worked a 10-hour day at a pay rate of $13.75 a week. In addition to low wages and a "stretch-out" system – a work schedule which called for increased production by fewer people – the mill ran a spy operation which served to keep the union out. In support of the strike, the Women's Trade Union League,* in a campaign to arouse public opinion, sent Southern staff representative Matilda Lindsay into her home state of Virginia to organize traveling road shows in which women spoke first-hand of their workplace problems.

Virginia women's organizations were quick to support the workers in the drive for better conditions. They collected money for relief for the Danville workers, and community meetings were held to discuss the strike issues. Endorsement of the strike had its own consequences for the women's groups: for instance, the Richmond YWCA noted a decline in corporate contributions to its operating programs.

In 1930, a group of women from across the region convened in Atlanta to share information and to develop a regional strategy to arouse public interest in securing improved legislation for working women and children. From this networking came the umbrella organization of the Southern Council on Women and Children in Industry,

* The WTUL was a national organization founded by female unionists and upper-middle-class reformers. It was geared towards getting working women to join trade unions.

photo courtesy ACTWU

whose goal was to work with and through existing women's organizations rather than to create a new legislative group.

The council's objectives were to lobby regionally for six legislatively mandated standards. First on their agenda was the nine-hour workday and a 50-hour work-week for women in manufacturing, stores, laundries, restaurants and similar occupations. Elimination of night work for women between 10 p.m. and six a.m. in certain occupations was second. Bills on all six standards were introduced into every Southern legislature which met in 1931. Council members found that the most bitter opposition was aroused by bills seeking to limit women's hours of work.

In 1931, as part of its lobbying action, the council released a 46-page educational study written by Lucy Randolph Mason titled "Standards for Workers in Southern Industry." It was paid for by the National Consumers League, a New York group founded in 1892 to organize the buying power of women to change conditions of female factory and department store workers. Mason was granted a three-month leave from her position as director of the Richmond YWCA to prepare the publication and to develop the informational network through which the council would function regionally.

In addition to regular action reports, the council conducted personal appeal interviews and corresponded with manufacturers, bankers, lawyers, editors, legislators, governors, ministers, bishops, sociology and economics professors and industrial commissioners in many parts of the South. It sent news stories to 18 major newspapers, which used them to write articles and editorials about the council's goals. A bibliography of educational reading material was prepared and disseminated, and the council solicited and received endorsements for legislative action from state Parent Teacher Associations, Women's Missionary Societies, YWCAs, Leagues of Women Voters and Professional Clubs and Federated Women's Clubs, as well as numerous local groups.

During the Depression of the 1930s, manufacturers attacked the proposed legislation as a threat to industry itself. One manufacturer argued in a public address, "Thoughtful women should see that these are no times to try to force lower hours upon an already burdened industry." By 1931, most Southern states had laws limiting women's work to 10 to 12 hours per day. But enforcement of those laws was lax: even where departments of labor existed in the South, they were underfunded and employed few inspectors.

After being repeatedly introduced, the bill for a nine-hour workday for women finally passed both branches of the Virginia legislature in 1938,

photo by Lewis Hine

culminating the campaign begun some 16 years earlier. The Virginia Labor Department estimated that over 100,000 women were expected to receive shorter hours under the new law. Virginia editorials boasted that the Old Dominion had "once again shown its leadership" within the region for its role in offering women workers the best state coverage of its kind regionally, and counseled other Southern states to follow Virginia's lead.

However, the eight-hour workday came several months later that year when Congress enacted the federal Fair Labor and Standards Act. This legislation protected all workers involved in interstate commerce. It provided for a minimum wage and for the eight-hour day and the 40-hour work-week with time-and-a-half pay for overtime. Beginning in 1940, American workers finally received the protection they had labored so long to achieve. Always intolerant of federal interference, however, Virginia lawmakers left the irrelevant state law specifying nine-hour days on the books until 1974 when it was finally repealed as part of a general code revision.□

Betsy Brinson is an organizer and educator with an interest in helping women learn their own history. She is the executive director of Southerners for Economic Justice and former director of the ACLU Southern Women's Rights Project.

ACCOUNTS OVERDUE

by Tobi Lippin and Debby Warren

A survey of working women in a North Carolina factory town reveals that discrimination, poor pay, hazardous working conditions and disrespectful treatment are facts of life.

High Point is a city-sized mill town in North Carolina's Piedmont. Furniture feeds the town. Its factory owners and workers, furniture-related industries, hotels and restaurants all survive on the twice-yearly furniture markets. Indeed, High Point's license plates proclaim it the "World's Furniture Capital." Besides this major industry, hosiery and apparel factories dot the city's industrial center. Opportunities for low-wage, unskilled factory and service jobs are plentiful.

No single employer dominates. Rather, High Point's nearly 300 manufacturing firms are as much family-run businesses (though increasingly conglomerate-owned) as branches of large corporations. Yet a common interest among employers prevails in keeping wages low, unions out and benefits few. The average person in 1978 made only $5,067. More than half (54 percent) of the work force in High Point is women. This is significantly more than for the state as a whole – 43 percent in 1978.

Women in the Work Force, a project of the American Friends Service Committee, opened its doors in early 1979. (See page 58 for a profile of Women in the Work Force.) To find out firsthand what conditions High Point's working women face, Women in the Work Force conducted a survey in the summer evenings of 1979. Both black and white neighborhoods were canvassed to locate women who worked outside the home. Twelve weeks of interviewing four nights each week produced 219 responses. Only one woman refused to talk; most were curious about what other women had to say. More than 50 questions were asked about wages, working conditions, discrimination and personnel policies.

"They were all a little defensive to start off with," Betsy Mahoney, an interviewer, recalled. "'My job's fine, I've no complaints,' was how they usually began. But when I asked them about their benefits, that was the turning point. They stopped and looked at me." What followed was most often a story of low wages, limited benefits, little opportunity, unfair treatment and lack of respect. Discrimination was perceived as a fact of life, as were lint, lack of lunchrooms and unsafe equipment. Many women, however, were proud of the work they did – their gripes were with the setting in which they work and the lack of respect for their accomplishments.

Although this survey is not exhaustive, it is a fair representation of the conditions and thoughts of working women in High Point.

Discrimination

High Point women had a lot to say about discrimination. Three-fourths of those interviewed said that their job was done entirely by women. These jobs, they said, were typed as either male or female. In the furniture industry women sew, sand and work machines in the finishing departments while men do upholstery and operate rib saws. The jobs that women do pay less than those that are called male jobs. For example, in the business world women complained of being on a straight salary while men had the chance to compete for higher commissions. In hosiery, women knit socks and are paid by the number of pieces they produce, while men are fixers and are paid an hourly wage. One woman who worked as a toe seamer said, "I know a mother, been there [the hosiery plant] 25 years. She's a knitter and is paid $3.85; the father, who's been there three years, makes $6.20. He's a fixer."

These women are victims of occupational segregation. When asked why they thought their jobs were done mostly by women, they explained,

photo by John Spragens, Jr.

"Men won't do it for our pay," and, "They can work women for nothing." Others said that the jobs were work men would not do. A nursing home worker said, "No man is going to wipe people's butts."

Wages

Discrimination was also apparent in the low wages paid to High Point women. For those interviewed, the average wage was $3.43 an hour (minimum wage was $2.90 at the time), even though these women had worked for their current employers an average of nearly six years. More than one-fourth of the women had not received any raises on that job, and nearly half (41 percent) were not receiving yearly wage increases. Wages were often set at the minimum wage, with raises awarded only when government-mandated increases went into effect. Often only a 10- to 30-cents-per-hour difference rewarded employees with years of experience and loyalty to the company.

Another form of discrimination confronted by women was being paid for production at piecework rates. The rates varied from piece to piece but usually were based on the minimum wage. While women had the opportunity to earn more money, they were pressured by being paid by the piece into working faster and faster. This was usually not the case for men who were employed in the same plant; they were paid an hourly wage regardless of their output. One woman explained how this directly affected her wages at the hosiery mill: "I work 36 machines, sometimes six are broke. I can lose money because it doesn't get fixed." She was complaining to her supervisor that the male fixer was too slow getting around to repairing her machines.

A woman employed at an apparel factory said, "Most women make $3.70 an hour. The most anyone has ever made is $4.80 an hour and that was without any breaks." Service workers seemed to fare the worst in pay. They usually worked for the minimum wage without any chance at earning beyond their 40 hours. As a matter of fact, most worked part-time.

Working Conditions

The High Point women shared more gripes about working conditions than about any other issue surveyed. It is interesting to note that only 59 percent thought the chemicals they worked with were safe. Only 60 percent thought the air quality was satisfactory. This figure dropped to 43 percent for factory workers.

The comments about lint, dust, dirty restrooms, lack of protective gear, heat and crowding tell their own story. Women in hosiery said: "We need guards on the machines. One lady got her hair caught on the knitting machine, another hurt her knuckles on the toe seamer. There aren't any ear plugs." And: "The room's cold, there's no locker room. You have to eat with the cotton and there's lots of lint and dust. I bet you could get brown lung."

Women employed by the furniture industry had this to say: "Silicone's sprayed on some materials. It burns and smells awful. Sometimes I feel it's all in me. I bet it's dangerous." "Some of the floors have holes in them. It fogs up after you spray [the furniture]. Things on the conveyor belts move fast so you could be hit. The stain causes skin irritations." "I've been using an electric screwdriver since 1975 and I've been having [eye] trouble ever since. They [the company] say that the sawdust didn't cause my glaucoma. I can't see out of my right eye. They still haven't offered

How to Do a Survey

A survey of working women in your area can be very useful in documenting working conditions, wages, benefits, discrimination and opportunities. The results can be used as the basis of a press event, as an organizing tool and to educate the public about women's work. It can also provide information needed to get outside money to help begin an organization.

More than the results of the survey can be used. Asking questions will trigger questions from women such as: "Retirement? I never thought about that before." "Job posting? Where do they do that?" The survey can be the first step in educating women about their rights on the job and creating interest in your organization or project. And it can help your organization set an agenda for dealing with the main concerns of local working women.

Atlanta Working Women, an organization founded to improve working conditions for office workers (see page 36 for a profile of Atlanta Working Women), kicked off their effort in that city with a survey. Publicized through a press event, the survey was distributed at busy corners to clerical workers. Eight hundred women responded to the 36 questions concerning job descriptions, salaries, working conditions, training and promotion opportunities and affirmative action.

How to conduct your survey depends upon the size and political climate in your city. In High Point, anonymity seemed necessary, so the surveys were conducted door to door in the evenings while women were at home. Such precautions were not necessary in a city the size of Atlanta.

The survey should be as simple and uniform as possible so that basic statistical work can be done. It is important to know how work conditions vary with particular jobs and how the age, race and seniority of the women affects their awareness.

In conducting the interview, give the women the chance to respond in their own words to each question. In our experience, asking for a single-word answer often doesn't yield the same information as an open-ended question.

Lastly, it is helpful to find a friendly researcher at a local college who will help you develop your survey and analyze the information you collect. This can help you avoid frustration if you have never worked on such a project before.

For more survey tips, contact:

Women in the Work Force, PO Box 2234, High Point, NC 27261, (919) 882-0109.

Atlanta Working Women, 1419 Healey Bldg., 57 Forsyth St. NW, Atlanta, GA 30303, (404) 522-5444.

me goggles." "It's such a small [work] area, it's easy to stumble over things. My daughter cut her finger with the electric knife. It's so dull that she put her hand in front to cut the fiber."

A laundry worker had this to say: "The temperature's about 90 degrees and there are just fans. The equipment sometimes doesn't work. A washing machine busted, and hot water spilled all over. We couldn't get out. A worker hurt her back, but she didn't get any money."

Work situations also create stress in the lives of women. A knitter complained of having no breaks and a waitress said, "The schedule changes often, and you never know when you are going to work." A city employee said, "It's been real tense with the change of the computer system to terminals. We need to relearn our jobs, things get hectic, but we can't hire any more because of the recession. The work load is too heavy."

Grievance Procedures

Four-fifths of the women reported that some procedure exists for dealing with problems and complaints at work. More than one-third, however, said that it does not work fairly. A furniture worker spoke of retaliation: "I once complained about partiality. I've been doghoused ever since." A day-care teacher experienced favoritism: "You don't get anywhere unless you go to the church where the day-care center is at." A school bus driver indicated that the grievance procedure on her job did not work: "It's just a lot of screaming and hollering. It does no good." Some accepted the failure of the system and left: "People don't usually say anything. They get another job," said a laundry worker.

Benefits

The women were asked about their current benefits. Fifty-seven percent mentioned vacation – some paid, some not. Forty-eight percent mentioned insurance, 22 percent mentioned retirement. Only 17 percent said anything about paid holidays. Sick leave was only noted by seven percent, profit sharing by eight percent, bonuses by three percent and credit unions by two percent. A laundry worker listed a free meal, and a knitter noted that she gets a 10 percent discount on socks. Other women mentioned social security, Christmas and flower clubs and a handful listed school loans. For some, the benefits could use improving, as a furniture factory worker explained: "Retirement could be better. I'll only get $62 a month after 21 years." And there were those who indicated that they had no benefits: "There aren't any benefits. It's a small place, but they ought to carry insurance," said a snack bar worker. The wish lists of other women included: "paid vacation," "time-and-a-half for overtime," "raises," "weekends," "anything like retirement or profit sharing" and

"everything."

Benefits have been improving for some of these High Point women. Thirty-nine percent reported that their benefit packages have changed since they began their jobs. Insurance, paid vacations and holidays were most frequently cited. A few mentioned profit sharing, bonuses and time off for birthdays and funerals.

First Steps

High Point women know that their pay is low, their work conditions hazardous, their treatment disrespectful and their jobs poorer in all ways than men's. They don't know much about retirement benefits, nor do they know much about OSHA. But perhaps most importantly, they don't know much about working together to change their conditions. Stuck in a barely unionized factory town, High Point women seem powerless, but organized action – with the help of groups like Women in the Work Force – can make it possible to challenge workplace inequities. As the experience in High Point shows, one powerful first step is simply finding out what local working women think about their jobs.□

Special thanks to the 219 women interviewed and to Betty Ausherman, Emily Levy, Leila Lombardi, Betsy Mahoney, Bertha Roman and Janice Stroud for helping conduct and analyze the survey.

Where High Point Women Work

Furniture	33%
Textiles and Apparel	21
Services	
White Collar	6
Other Service	20
Retail	5
Other Manufacturing	3
Schools and Government	6
Household Workers	6

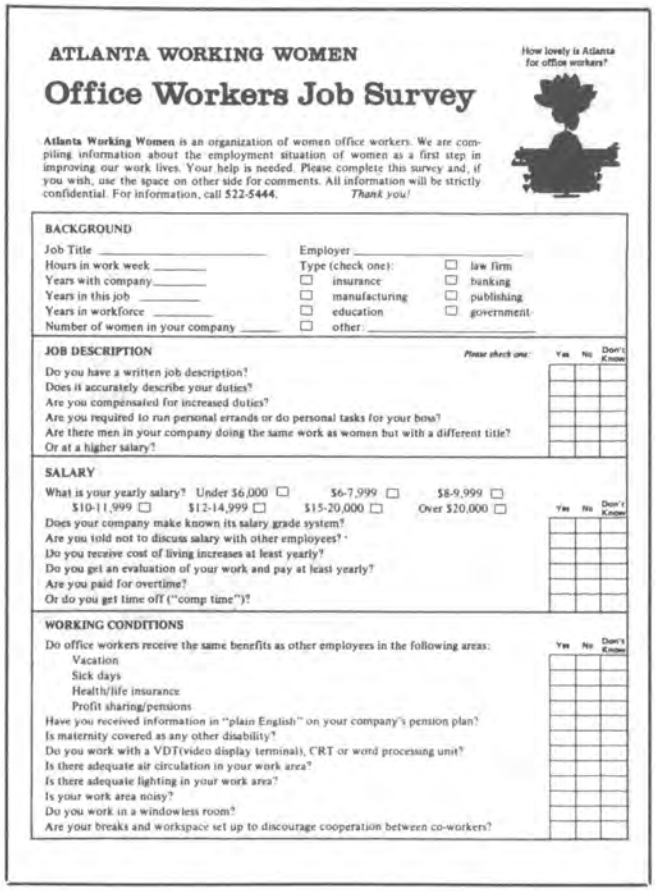
High Point Women's Occupations

Professional/Paraprofessional	8%
Non-factory Supervisors	2
Factory Supervisors	1
Clerical	8
Factory Skilled	12
Factory Unskilled	39
Service	26
Sales	4

High Point Women's Wages

Service Workers	$3.04
White-collar Workers	3.33
Furniture Workers	3.69
Other Factory Workers	4.03

(These are the median hourly wages per occupation; the minimum wage at the time was $2.90.)



ATLANTA WORKING WOMEN

Office Workers Job Survey

How lovely is Atlanta for office workers?

Atlanta Working Women is an organization of women office workers. We are compiling information about the employment situation of women as a first step in improving our work lives. Your help is needed. Please complete this survey and, if you wish, use the space on other side for comments. All information will be strictly confidential. For information, call 522-5444. *Thank you!*

BACKGROUND

Job Title _____ Employer _____

Hours in work week _____ Type (check one): ☐ law firm

Years with company _____ ☐ insurance ☐ banking

Years in this job _____ ☐ manufacturing ☐ publishing

Years in workforce _____ ☐ education ☐ government

Number of women in your company _____ ☐ other: _____

JOB DESCRIPTION *Please check one:*

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Do you have a written job description?			
Does it accurately describe your duties?			
Are you compensated for increased duties?			
Are you required to run personal errands or do personal tasks for your boss?			
Are there men in your company doing the same work as women but with a different title? Or at a higher salary?			

SALARY

What is your yearly salary? Under $6,000 ☐ $6-7,999 ☐ $8-9,999 ☐ $10-11,999 ☐ $12-14,999 ☐ $15-20,000 ☐ Over $20,000 ☐

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Does your company make known its salary grade system?			
Are you told not to discuss salary with other employees?			
Do you receive cost of living increases at least yearly?			
Do you get an evaluation of your work and pay at least yearly?			
Are you paid for overtime? Or do you get time off ("comp time")?			

WORKING CONDITIONS

Do office workers receive the same benefits as other employees in the following areas:	Yes	No	Don't Know
Vacation			
Sick days			
Health/life insurance			
Profit sharing/pensions			
Have you received information in "plain English" on your company's pension plan?			
Is maternity covered as any other disability?			
Do you work with a VDT(video display terminal), CRT or word processing unit?			
Is there adequate air circulation in your work area?			
Is there adequate lighting in your work area?			
Is your work area noisy?			
Do you work in a windowless room?			
Are your breaks and workspace set up to discourage cooperation between co-workers?			

Please copy this survey for your friends!

TRAINING AND PROMOTIONS

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Does the company offer advancement-oriented job training programs?			
If so, are they available to office workers?			
Does the company offer tuition reimbursement for college courses?			
If so, is it restricted to strictly job-related courses?			
Are all job openings posted and circulated through all departments?			
Does the company promote from within?			
Have you been passed over for a promotion given to a man with less experience?			

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Do you feel there is discrimination in your company?			
If so, on what basis? ☐ Sex ☐ Race ☐ Age			
Does your company have an Affirmative Action Plan?			
Are most low-paying positions held by women?			
Do minority women tend to hold the lower-paying positions?			
For older and long-term employees:			
Are starting salaries close to or more than yours, despite your years of experience?			
Have you been passed over for a promotion given to a younger person with less experience?			

COMMENTS

Are there other problems – such as sexual harassment, job changes due to automation, need for child care, others – that are important for you and the women in your office? Please use this space for any comments you may have.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

(This section will be detached for confidentiality.)

☐ I will help compile the returns of this survey.

☐ Please send me a copy of the survey results.

☐ I want to know more about Atlanta Working Women. Please contact me.

name

address

zip

home phone work phone

(fold)

PLACE STAMP HERE

TO:

ATLANTA WORKING WOMEN
1419 Healey Building
57 Forsyth Street, N.W.
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

BREADMAKER TO BREADWINNER

When homemakers are forced into the labor market, the transition is often rough. Displaced homemaker programs offer vital services and support.

Kentucky: Creative Employment Project

by Daña Alder

Pat Travis is 25 years old. She was married when she was 17, and has two children, seven and six. She and her husband tried through eight years of counseling and separations to make their marriage work, but have recently decided that divorce was the best solution for everyone.

Faye Eagle is 50 years old, has been married for 32 years and has four children, now ages 19 through 31. Her husband was a truck driver until 1973, when an injury and a series of subsequent heart attacks left him disabled and for a number of years confined to a bed. So, after about 20 years of not working outside the home, Faye had a family to support and a job to find.

Eva Wheatley is 39 years old; she separated from her husband of 10 years when she discovered he had been sexually molesting their 16-year-old daughter for the entire time they were married. She is getting a divorce, and she and her daughter are helping the state prosecute for rape.

In spite of differences in individual circumstances, these women share the common bond of being "displaced homemakers." Each has devoted most of her energies over a significant number of years to unpaid work in the home, and has been dependent on someone else for income. Now that income has been lost, and these women, along with thousands of others, are having to face an unsteady job market to support themselves and their families, many for the first time in their lives.

Typically, the displaced homemaker is between the ages of 35 and 64, though rural displaced homemakers tend to be younger. And, though she may have organized Girl Scout cookie drives, church suppers for 250, volunteered in a hospital, school or library, or been a Democratic precinct captain, she also typically will tell you she has no skills – she is "just a housewife."

In recent years, programs have begun throughout the country to help displaced homemakers get ready for the job market. The YWCA Creative Employment Project (CEP) in Louisville, Kentucky, has served about 250 women, including the three mentioned above, since January, 1980. In workshops and through counseling, skills acquired in the home are translated into "marketable" skills and the displaced homemaker may begin to have a different sense of her self.

Faye Eagle says, "I came to the Workshop – found out more about myself in those two short weeks than I had in my lifetime up to this point. I found out I was employable and unemployable at the same time. We were taught . . . to use our homemaking skills to an advantage and to use the experience we had to the best advantage. It gave

photo by John Spragens, Jr.

me the incentive to get my GED and the confidence to be placed in Work Experience." The Work Experience Program [funded through CETA] allows participants to rotate though actual jobs in their area of interest for 60 days. They can be paid the minimum wage for up to 1,000 hours through these rotations, and the program is used to upgrade skills, to give displaced homemakers current working experience and to let them try out a particular field before pursuing a training program.

After years in the home, answering to everyone else's needs and wants while being economically dependent, the homemaker who must find employment often has problems with a low self-image and with learning how to make choices with herself in mind.

But, as she meets other women like herself and goes through exercises such as skills assessment and vocational interest tests, she begins to learn that she does have choices – that she can set a goal and work towards it. (A skills assessment involves using a checklist to translate skills used in the home into marketable skills: for example, making a dress from a pattern is similar to reading a blueprint.)

"I learned the different opportunities open to me, such as education," Pat Travers said. "I plan to be a nurse. I've learned the steps to get there, such as going to school to be a nurses' aide, to see how well I do in the medical field and to help pay my way later when I go back to school for a degree in nursing."

CEP's Displaced Homemaker Program serves women in Louisville, Jefferson County and the six rural counties surrounding Jefferson. The Jefferson County program began as a national demonstration model funded under CETA, but one of the first acts of the Reagan administration was to eliminate the CETA provisions which funded many displaced homemaker programs. CEP staff decided to make sufficient cutbacks in the overall program to carry the Displaced Homemaker Program through the year, and submitted a combined proposal to CETA for the next year.

It is estimated that there are at least four million displaced homemakers throughout the country. Less than 10,000 of them had been served by organized programs before the programs were defunded.

For women who have been served, or who are being helped by those programs that have managed to stay alive, an organized program such as CEP's can make a difference.

"I was about at the end of my rope," Faye Eagle said. "I'd reached the point where I just didn't care anymore, and I didn't think I could do anything to make things any different. But now I look at things in a whole new way. My confidence in myself has grown, and I know that I can handle just about anything."□

Daña Alder is a program analyst for CEP. She has been a feminist activist for about seven years.

North Carolina: Choices

by Candy Hamilton

The North Carolina Council on the Status of Women established local Career Development Centers for Displaced Homemakers in September, 1979. Eligible displaced homemakers who are often in personal crisis situations can enroll in small classes to learn about themselves and how they can translate their homemaking skills into marketable job skills. Participants are paid for attending the six-week sessions, which consist of four weeks of classroom training and two weeks of subsidized job search.

Jane Ball-Groom and Janice Moore are associate directors of the center in Oxford, North Carolina.

Jane Ball-Groom: A lot of these women had spent their young adulthood at home raising the children, taking care of the home. A lot of them did not have time to continue their education, to finish their education. They do not have the knowledge of what a job market is all about. They have a lot of emotional problems that need to be dealt with. They have suffered the loss of their spouse. They are women in their early twenties to their late sixties. These women are faced with "How can I work? How can I find a job?" The Career Development Center enables them – is a way, a tool to deal with themselves psychologically, emotionally and vocationally.

The program is comprised of a seven-week training course. The first four weeks mainly deal with the building up of their emotional strength. Janice heads the classroom activities, which pretty much involve getting that woman to face herself. She gets into the why and why-nots of her life. She learns to be assertive (as opposed to aggressive). She learns what her skills are and she brings them out. She learns to look at herself and say to herself, "You are an OK person!" The next two weeks consist of a job search. By this time, she knows what kind of field or endeavor she wants to get into. Finally there is the placement and follow-up phase.

The women receive an average stipend of $3.35 an hour to attend our classes. They are in class for five hours per day. We also pay mileage. So for a woman who wants to get ahead, who wants to find out about herself, we help her get started.

Janice Moore: The center also provides a system of support, a support network for the emotional traumas they are experiencing during this transition. Not to underplay the situation, these women have lived somewhat comfortably according to their standards. Regardless of what socio-economic background they come from. And all of a sudden they are not going to live that way anymore and that is a very traumatizing experience.

A large percentage of the women that come into our program are already on the incline. They want to make some changes and want to get into one of the primary focal points of the program, that is, elevating their self-esteem and taking charge of their lives. Through testing, creative activities and discussions, the women find ways to get themselves together.

Ball-Groom: Take the displaced homemaker in her 40s and 50s. Twenty years ago it was not necessary to finish high school, which puts her in a dilemma today. There are women that come to us at 47, 53, 65 who want to get a high school diploma – without it they are not placeable in the job market. They don't have the experience except that of working in the home, and without the diploma it is difficult for them to find a job.

High unemployment is compounding the problem. Jobs are hard to find wherever you go. What we try to do at the center is to match careers with the individual's skills, personal interests and abilities. We just do not direct them into a job per se, but into a career. If a woman is interested in children and has a way with them, we talk about possibilities in education. If the experience of caring for an ailing parent or grandparent suggests it, we direct the woman to a health career. That's a field that is lucrative as far as employment

possibilities are concerned. So even though the unemployment rate is high, there are still places for women to work, if we can get them to pursue these areas with opportunities.

Moore: Women need these programs because we are the misbegottens. Women have traditionally caught it. Some strong women come to us and say, "I was just a housewife, I never did anything." However, they have taken care of children, been harmonizers, mediators, taken care of husbands, cooked, managed to organize their lives so they could accommodate several other people. We have a tendency not to see our own self worth. It has been smothered through a number of other roles we have played that were expected of us.□

Candy Hamilton is a producer of public affairs programming at WVSP radio. This article is excerpted from a longer interview broadcast on that station.

DISPLACED HOMEMAKERS

illustration by Grace Iglehart

Organizations

Displaced Homemakers Network, Inc.

755 8th St. NW
Washington, DC 20001
(202) 347-0522
(National Office)

PO Box 9013
Jonesboro, AR 72401
(501) 932-8178
(Southern Field Office)

The Displaced Homemakers Network is a grassroots organization which encourages development of job programs for displaced homemakers, refers homemakers to local services, provides technical assistance to other organizations and acts as a nationwide clearinghouse for information on homemakers programs.

Publications

Displaced Homemaker Program Directory (1981)

A listing of over 400 centers and programs providing services to displaced homemakers nationwide. ($3.00 from the Displaced Homemakers Network.)

Displaced Homemakers: Organizing for a New Life (1980)

by Laurie Shields. The story of the grassroots displaced homemaker movement's funding, evolution, strategies and future by a "founding mother," with perspectives and suggestions to sustain us in facing difficult challenges ahead. ($6.00 book rate, $7.25 first class; order from Displaced Homemakers Network.)

Economics of Aging Homemakers (1974)
Displaced Homemakers: Forced Retirement Leaves Many Penniless (1975)

The Older Woman's Educational Fund, 3800 Harrison St., Oakland, CA 94611, (415) 658-8701. Seventy-five cents each. Resource list available.

Legal Status of Homemakers

Available from Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Govt. Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402. Booklets for each state examine the laws from the homemaker's viewpoint discussing the legal status and rights of married, divorced and widowed homemakers. Covers property rights, credit, disability, abuse and more. Specify which state's booklet you need. $1.25 each.

Network News

Bimonthly newsletter of the Displaced Homemakers Network (see address above) with coverage of regional and national news, resources and fundraising. Sliding scale of $2.00 to $15.00 a year.

Films/Videotapes

Who Remembers Mama?

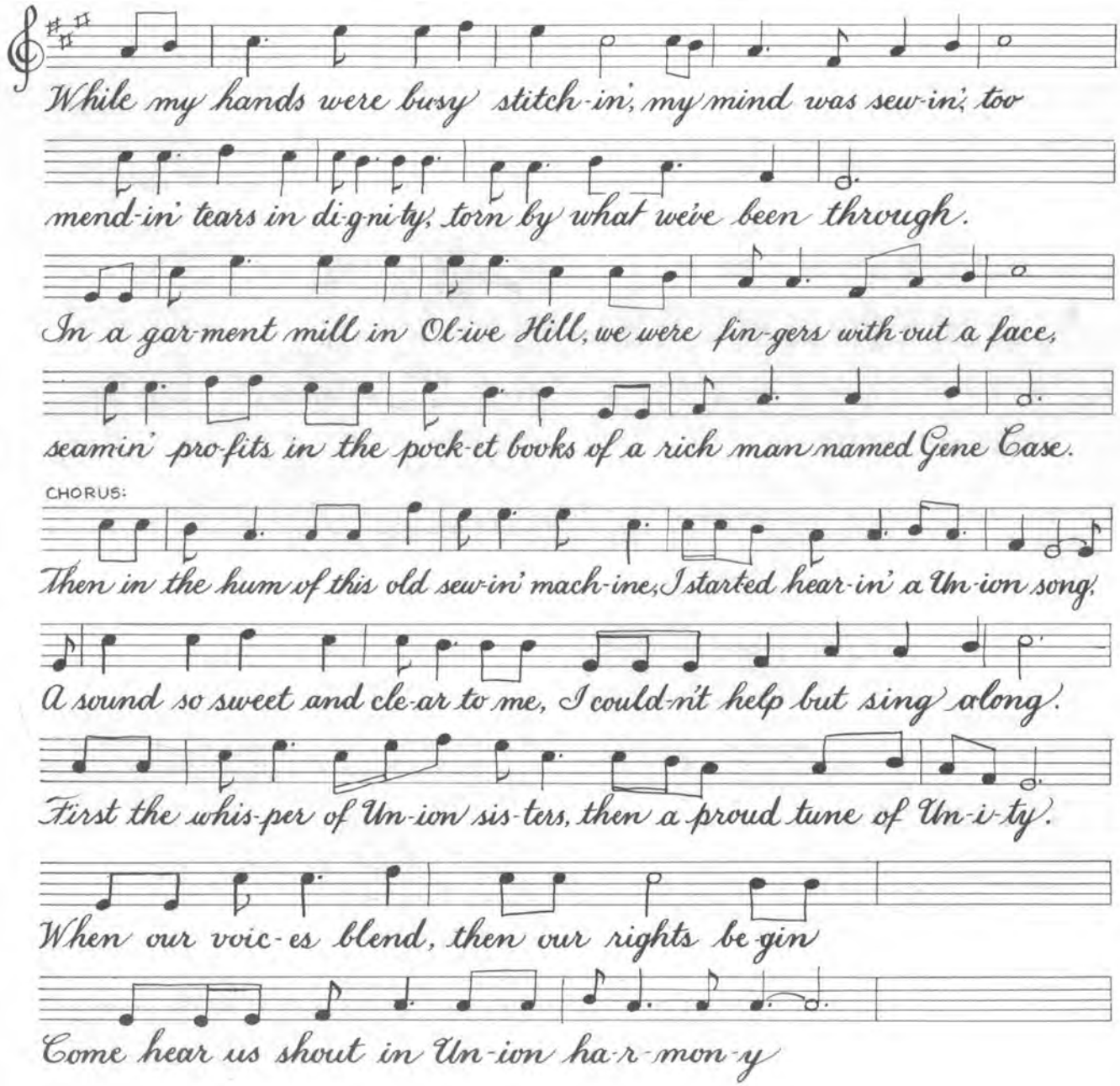
Fifty-nine-minute color film available from Women in Communications, 2515 Homer St., Dallas, TX 75206, (214) 826-3863. A film about divorced middle-aged women of all races and backgrounds. Dramatizes the aftermath of divorce, child custody and property disputes, particularly the economic and emotional devastation. Also includes a discussion of alternative options for the displaced homemaker.

16-mm: $75 for three-day rental; $550 purchase.
three-quarter-inch video: $60 for three-day rental; $150 for purchase.

See Resources on Legal Rights, p. 106

Threads of Justice

WORDS AND MUSIC BY MARY LOU LAYNE



calligraphy by Patricia O'Day

ADDITIONAL VERSES:

In the rhythm of the needle, in the pattern of the thread
I saw the plight of women workers – there our story could be read:
Eight hours a day and little pay for the clothing that we made
Gettin' no recognition for the skills of our trade.

As we bound the cloth together, now we join ourselves instead
With the ranks of united labor which Mother Jones has led.
From the company sign to the picket line, now we firmly take a stand.
We'll stay and fight till our workers' rights are signed by a Union hand.

FOLLY

by Maureen Brady

Spontaneous walkouts by angry workers are not unheard of. Their success and effectiveness depend on good organization and the ability of workers to maintain a solid front and act collectively.

The women in this excerpt from the novel Folly are fictional, but there are many Follys, Marthas and Coras working in real factories across the South. One such woman is Corky Jennings, who led two mass walkouts and a five-week strike of 800 workers. Fired by the company, she remains president of her United Garment Workers local union.

Folly knew something was wrong as soon as she sat down at her machine. She looked across at Martha and saw a wary look about her. There was something more in the air than lint dust.

The story came around in whispers. "Did you hear about Cora? Cora's baby? A horrible thing. . . . Cora's baby dead . . . during Cora's shift . . . with her daughter, Bonnie . . . tried to call Cora at the factory . . . Fartblossom, the fuck, he called the police . . . sent them to Cora's house . . . never let her know . . . told her to go home . . . told her her kid was sick (as if she didn't know) . . . last night this happened."

Folly felt sick. She stared at her zipperfoot which was stuck and hammering out a wad of thread at the same space. She knew she was behind already, but she couldn't think how to fix it. All she could think was were her own three children home safe, asleep and okay. Even though they were getting old enough to take care of themselves,

she pictured them younger like they had been when she'd first had to work nights and leave them alone.

The next round of whispers set Folly back in motion. "Cora fired . . . first arrested, then fired . . . keep your work up . . . Fartblossom's nervous . . . comin round . . . what's to be done . . . wait for coffee break."

Reasons. Folly wanted to know what were the reasons. Why did Cora's baby die? Why did they arrest her? Why did they fire her? Why was her machine getting stuck every time she looked up? She wanted to scream her questions. She wanted to bang her fists on her machine. She glanced over at Martha and saw that Martha was trying to give her the signal – patience, have momentary patience, hold on and wait and we'll think this thing out and do something. We won't just let them take Cora away. This statement was made by the serious look of justice in her eyes and by the way she sat, her weight looking stubborn in the chair. Martha, the rock. Folly swallowed her screams. She tried to set her mind to catching up production before the break.

It was not the first time that Fartblossom had ever stood his large, obnoxious self up there at the front of the room and swayed stupidly between line two and line three and announced that the first break would be skipped because they'd been working slow so far that shift. It was not the first time but still, the announcement had a grating effect, and in the light of Folly's need to have the break, it seemed momentarily impossible that he had dispensed with it. She thought about being a school child, about Mr. Hickey, the science teacher who went right on talking after the bell rang and no one dared move as long as he had stared out at their desks. She understood why Mary Lou might be tempted to drop out of school. At that age she had thought the faster you grew up, the sooner you wouldn't have to pay any attention to something like Mr. Hickey's eyes telling you what to do. But there was Fartblossom dispensing with their first break that they'd all been waiting for, and already crawling back into his plastic office before anyone had even gotten a mouth open to say, "No, you shit, you're stealing from us."

He sat behind his wall of plastic which was designed to keep the lint out of his nose and glared out at the women who cursed him, called him thief under their breath.

As soon as Folly caught Martha's eye, she rolled her own back toward the bathroom. Martha stood and inclined her head toward the restroom door so Fartblossom would know where she was going. Folly waited till Martha had been gone a few minutes, hoped he'd have forgotten she was in there, then stood and, putting a pained expression on her face to indicate she was sick, headed for the back, practically running down the aisle. It was not that one was actually required to get permission to go to the bathroom. Rather the management *highly recommended* one care for those needs on break time. But then, Fartblossom had made short of that.

As soon as Folly came in, Martha took two cigarettes out of her pack, put them both between her lips and lit them with the same match. She held one out to Folly and took a long drag on her own. Then she stooped down on her haunches and leaned her back and head against the wall. "Fartblossom see you?"

"Yeah. He's all eyes. I played sick."

"Shit."

"Damn right."

"That poor Cora," Martha said.

"This goddamned place," Folly said.

After that they smoked in silence, sadness and silence. Their thoughts were on Cora, who was a perfectly good one of them. Good worker, didn't bitch a lot, didn't cheat, didn't steal, didn't talk behind your back, didn't play up to the boss, didn't ask for anything special.

"What can we do?" Folly asked Martha.

"I don't know. Maybe find out more what happened later."

"I'm about ready to walk out," Folly said. "I'm about ready to not put up with this motherfuckin Fartblossom bastard. I'm about ready to stomp in there and I don't know what, Martha."

"Wait," Martha said. She closed her eyes so that Folly's being so excited wouldn't affect her so much. The house. Folly was forgetting about the house. In her anger Martha knew she was forgetting about all the time, the work, the saving, that she had done for the house. Martha got an empty feeling similar to hunger whenever she tried to imagine living without Folly and the kids in the trailer next door, but that didn't keep her from wanting them to have the house. She knew so well how happy Folly was going to be when finally she had it.

"Let's just think this thing out," Martha said. "You know we can't afford to be outa work much."

"Negligence, my ass. You know how many times I had to leave a sick kid at home? You tell me what right Fartblossom had callin the cops on Cora?" Folly's voice was husky and cracked and demanding.

"None," Martha said. "None of his business. It's all wrong. . . ."

"I'm going to ask him," Folly said. "I'm going to ask that bastard what right he had. You comin?"

Of course, Martha was coming. She followed with proud, sure strides. It was too late for the house. Folly was fired up and Martha might as well let herself get fired up too. This was one time they weren't marching back to their machines to sit and stew.

Martha marched behind Folly feeling in awe of her bravery. By the time they reached Fartblossom's door they were side by side.

He stood up, opened the door. He puffed his breath at them. No one spoke. It seemed a long time. The women stopped sewing one by one and the drone of the machines faded to silence. Martha put her hands on her hips in such a way as to make her body say "showdown" because facing down Fartblossom that way, being so close to his clammy skin and all, had taken her words away from her.

He exercised his jaw up and down a couple of times before he spoke. His double chin wobbled with the motion. "What's your problem, girls?"

"We want to know what happened to Cora," Folly said.

"You're holding up the work," he said. "If you'd like to speak with me when the shift is up, I'll see to it you have an appointment."

"What right you got stealing our break?" Folly asked. "What right you got callin the cops on Cora? What right you got makin her come to work when her kid was sick? Answer me that?" As soon as the words were out, Folly held her breath.

They hadn't even realized that Emily had come right up behind them until her voice came from there. "Yeah. Answer us that," she said with gravity. She was a tall, thin black woman who carried dignity in her bones.

Martha looked around and saw that several other women, black and white, had stood up at their machines.

"No one made Cora come to work," Fartblossom said. That was all he had to say for himself. His breath puffed away at them. His face was pink. Martha had a childish feeling of wanting to smear it with a mud pie.

"Every one of us has to come to work every single night whether our children are sick or not, or you wouldn't keep us on," Martha said, "and you know it." Because she was one without children she felt strange as soon as she had made this statement, but no one acted as if she shouldn't have said it. In fact, Emily said, "That's right," behind her, and Folly shook her head.

"We ought to have time off even if there's no pay for it so nobody's got to run off and leave a real sick baby just so's they don't lose their job. I know'd Cora since the first grade till now. Went all the way through school with her, sitting next to her most of the time because of our last names

photo by John Spragens, Jr.

falling together. She didn't do nothin none of the rest of us wouldn't have done. Ain't no fairness in your callin the law out on her. Law ought to be called out on you." It was Shirley White who made this speech and made it clear from the back of the room where her machine was located right next to Cora's empty one. Her voice echoed all across the room, the sound strong and strange in this place which usually had a hum to keep the whispers from being heard. Shirley might have been a preacher for the feeling of reverence that flowed behind her words. The concentration which centered on her, fluttering in the breast of each woman there, pulsed almost audibly while her statement hung in the air. This attitude of concentration completely transformed the sewing room. A factory was a place in which each woman's mind wandered off to its own escapes, meandered on voyages that were designed for passing time. Here, time was stopped. Every eye was on Fartblossom. Every woman could feel the others'

feelings and Shirley had spoken their minds.

Fartblossom worked his jaw for a second and Martha thought maybe he was going to say he was sorry about Cora's baby, but he said, "You girls can't afford to hang around chomping like this on work time. You've already shot your production to hell. You better get on back to your machines if you're fixin to hold down these jobs of yours."

Folly knew he was trying to scare them. She knew because the fright came on her immediately. Admit it? Never. She couldn't help the images that came right before her – her charge list down at the store growing quickly to several pages, Skeeter never really full, eating endless pancakes if you let him. She did as she had been taught as a child to do with a snarling dog – got a steady hold on her fear and hid it. Then she realized the other fear which was even worse – would the other women retreat, slide back into their seats, run the machines? Would the first foot press the pedal, start the whir of the zipperfoot, leave her standing face to face with Fartblossom, forget the sound of silence in the factory? She reached for her own control again as if another snarling dog had to be met on the other side of the street.

Shirley's voice came clear from the back again. "You ain't answered our questions, Mr. Blossom." She made the Mr. Blossom sound real polite.

"I've no intention to," he said.

"I've no intention to go back to my machine, then," Folly said. She looked over at Martha. So many times they had talked this out on the way home and said all the things they would say just before walking out on Fartblossom. Now Folly didn't feel she had anything more to say and Martha didn't look like she did either. Martha just nodded and made the first step toward the door. Folly followed. Emily had been standing behind them all along. She followed Folly, but Folly still wasn't sure Emily wasn't going back to her machine until she went right past it. A couple more women stepped out from the first row and made a single file line behind Emily. Folly couldn't believe it. She thought maybe she hadn't heard Fartblossom declare second break or something. The way people exit from a church they were getting up, one right after the other and falling into line. She didn't dare turn around to see what she knew was happening. There was silence except for the sounds of feet walking until they got past the door, and then there was everyone talking at once.□

Maureen Brady is a fiction writer and a physical therapist, currently working on her second novel, from which this story was excerpted. Her first novel, Give Me Your Good Ear, *was published by Spinsters Ink in 1979, and she has published stories and a one-act play in the feminist journals* Conditions, Sinister Wisdom *and* Feminary.

WE STOOD UP

by Jamie Harris and Brenda Bell

A group of workers in Tennessee struggled with their own solidarity and with management and came out on top.

At the time the movie "Norma Rae" was being released across the country, a similar real-life drama was taking place in the small city of Maryville, Tennessee, just south of Knoxville. On two different days in 1979, mass walkouts were staged by 800 Levi Strauss workers – 90 percent women – members of United Garment Workers Local 402. The walkouts culminated in a five-week wildcat strike.

The strike was a victory, though a mixed one, for the employees: the supervisor who triggered the walkouts, the plant manager and the assistant manager were all transferred to other locations. But NLRB arbitration ultimately upheld Levi's suspension of four workers and the firing of two union officials, including the president.

Norma "Corky" Jennings, who is interviewed here, is that president. In a tribute to her leadership, members of Local 402 voted overwhelmingly after the NLRB ruling to keep her as their president and to pay her the same salary she was earning at Levi's. That agreement continues as the local looks toward contract negotiations in December, 1981.

When the Levi-Strauss management fired union local president Corky Jennings, the local fought to have her reinstated.

I was born here in Blount County in 1939, and married when I was 15. My husband was in the service, so we moved around for about six or seven years, and when we separated and divorced, I brought my three boys and came back here. I went to work at Levi's in 1963. I had 17 years in when I got fired.

I was born in an Aluminum Company house. My father and grandfather were instrumental in organizing the Aluminum Workers at Alcoa – later the local changed to the Steelworkers. But they had such a bad experience it was very rarely discussed in our family. They felt they were sold out by some of their friends.

When I started being active as president of Local 402, my father told me they'd sell me out. He told me when I got into it, when we struck the first time, "Now if you go again, Corky, they'll fire you, and you watch those people, they'll drop you like a hot potato." And of course, that didn't happen. That's been the good part of this: women sticking together.

In the beginning, I found it hard to talk in front of people. I hate to meet new people. I'm very self-conscious about my weight. I began to talk in front of crowds gradually.

Plant management was another thing. The plant manager told me the first time after I was elected that he'd be damned if I would run that plant. And that he had me pegged for a troublemaker and I probably wouldn't be there long. Now, any other way he would have handled me, I probably would have been terrified of him. I wasn't anything but damn mad after that. So, I got to where I would just talk to him like one of my kids when I wanted to chew him out. I talked to him just like he did me.

We won quite a few things. We got machines fixed, we got mechanics chewed out, we got supervisors off the girls' backs. And pretty soon people began to expect that to happen. And gradually we built a following, because people began to see if you *will* open your mouth, you can get it done – and so what if people say you're a troublemaker? If your paycheck's right and your machine's fixed, what difference does it make what *they* think of you?

The problem [leading up to the walkouts] was in one department with one supervisor. She had been moved from department to department all over the plant. They used her to keep the people down. She would be sent to a department and she would harass people there. Then the employees would get fed up, but as soon as they would get ready to fight her, the company would move her again.

Corky Jennings, president of United Garment Workers Local Union 402. *photo by Brenda Bell*

Up until May [1979], she was the supervisor in the "pfaff" department. The women in the department decided to do something about her, so they filed grievances. Then she got rougher with the ones who did file. We met with the company right up till the day we walked out, but they kept backing her. The employees got up in arms that the company would back one person in the wrong against 800 people, just to show that she had the authority.

One Monday – May 7 – the officials from Levi's regional office in Knoxville agreed to talk to all 25 of the machine operators in her department. When the operators came out of this meeting, they told us [union officials] that the company wouldn't do anything.

So we went to the line stewards in each department. Everybody was ready, waiting. In some areas we just walked through and held up one finger, meaning one o'clock was the time. The production manager told us to stop it or somebody would be fired. I left him and walked through the room holding up one finger. I got to my department at 10 till one and waited.

At one o'clock, a few machines were turned off, and then out of the double doors from the pfaff department came 20 of the 25 women. I joined them and so did other union leaders. Behind us we could hear shuffling and machines being cut off. The sound was something. At first it was real noisy as usual, but then one machine after another shut off. It was like in waves until all over the plant it was quiet.

At first when we got outside there was only about 35 of us and I thought that was it. We would be fired. I had hoped that half of the employees would come out. But then the doors opened and the people poured out! Finally, about 800 came out.

We settled it all by Tuesday noon and returned to work Wednesday morning at 7:00.

The company took the supervisor out of the plant and put her on leave. But we were *dumb*. Our international said, "Go with a verbal agreement because you were illegal." So we went back to work, and the company said that the supervisor "will never be over you in any capacity." Now, we took "over you" literally. What *they* meant was she'd never be a supervisor. Well, that left her wide open for a line manager, an instructor, time-study person, you know, breathing down your neck.

So we dickered for about five weeks over this. It just finally got hotter and hotter and the people said, "Well, they'll just show us that they'll do as they damn well please and we'll just walk out again."

When the company brought a video camera in and then stopped talking to us, it snowballed that day. By lunchtime, I knew it was getting out of hand – we were fighting supervisors making remarks, line managers threatening people. The final thing was, the manager came back to me and said, "Do you think you're gonna go?" and I said, "Yessir, I believe they are, in spite of what we can do," and he said, "Oh, *hell*," and turned around and walked away. Then he turned back and said, "Well, I've got this much to say to you, Corky, we did all we could do. It's out of our hands." And when he gestured like that [swinging his arms], some people standing in the door thought he fired me. That was 2:20. At 2:30, buddy, just as regular as clockwork, those machines went off. Eight hundred people walked out again. It was good! When the going got rough on the picket line, we'd rehash that!

And the company's videotape! Mickey Mouse could have done better! The cameraman was going to get these "80 wild-eyed radicals" as they walked out, and they'd fire em like that. Well, 800 walked out and the cameraman is going crazy! He couldn't cover all the doors. When they showed the film at arbitration, it was just panning from one door to another – sometimes at such speed it was just a blur.

They took me to jail [for refusing to obey an order to take down the picket line and return to work, July 11, 1979]. If I had buckled then, we'd have had a holocaust over here. We would have lost everything. I treated it as a joke. See, they put me in a cell that had a shower stall. I'm five feet, and the shower stall was over six feet. And on top of the shower stall is the toilet paper. Now there's the commode and the shower stall and a table with benches, and it's all concreted in the floor. I can't reach the toilet paper! In there by myself. I finally got a jailer to come in to get the toilet paper down.

When I finally get out of jail, there's this whole bunch of people, still kind of in a trauma. I could

have rabbleroused, or cried. Instead I said, "Well, it's nice to be out where you can reach the toilet paper." I made fun of the situation and they picked it up. That makes a difference in what reaction you get from your people.

We went back to work the last week in July, 1979. It was hard, very hard. It was really a pressure cooker in there, because the company was really very active, saying, "You didn't win a thing. You lost all that money and you're never going to make it up. We're going to get rid of this union." They fired me for leading the people out. I told people that, why not just kill a little time and then I'll say, "I choose not to arbitrate, I'll just take the firing." But they insisted that we follow it all the way through, that we'd learn from it. So they spent $21,000 on it. They raised their union dues two different times. And then [when arbitration upheld the firing] the next day we had a union meeting and they voted to pay me what Levi's was paying me and to keep me as their president.

I don't think you can straddle the fence. You're either union or you're company. I've had friends in management, we grew up together, we had our children together. I no longer go to their homes and they're not welcome in mine. That was the line I drew when I made my stand and they chose management.

I think one of labor's biggest problems is that they've sold themselves out to management just by getting a little closer and a little closer and a little closer. You can't be that close to people and not make concessions. It soon gets to be more important that Joe Blow, who owns a business downtown and whom you might get a favor from, is happier with you than your members. You get to where you're dividing your loyalties.

And local control is positive in keeping your union strong. Your people get more involved. But you *do* have a lot more power if you negotiate like the Steelworkers do. If you can shut down the whole steel and aluminum industry, you can do something, you've got some leverage. I'd love to see all the Garment Workers' plants in Levi's negotiate at the same time. But still each local have a say in that, absolutely.

I think primarily our local proves that women stuck together. All that hogwash about if it comes to their kids going hungry, they won't stick is just a bunch of propaganda. Because when you get into that "Babies and Banners" thing [a film about the Women's Emergency Brigade during the sit-down strikes in General Motors plants in 1937], those women stuck together. They never got any credit for it, but they stuck.

I don't care how you rationalize it, somewhere in you, you think, "Look at so-and-so, she stays home with her kids eight hours a day, and she does such and such with em" – and you feel so guilty about working. But if you've got a job, you've got to do it. You have to juggle somewhere. I have looked at end products now for 20 years, and the children whose mothers participated outside the home are better behaved, more well-rounded children. They learn to cope for themselves in a lot of situations. The mothers didn't slight them.

One of our leaders, her children in the next two or three years will be leaving home. Suddenly she's found something she can do besides have babies and work! She really enjoys the union. And she's been at Levi's long enough and had her nose rubbed in it when her kids were little and she had to take it: now she really gets the satisfaction out of seeing that they don't do it anymore. You never forget it.

One of the most touching things that has happened since the strike was what a 63-year-old woman said to me. She told me, "I'm so glad we did this before I retired. Now I can sit home and remember when we stood up to them."□

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"The friendliest picket line you ever saw." – May-June, 1979. photo by Bill Murrah

photo by Ernest C. Withers

FIGHTING SPIRIT

by June Rostan

On March 12, 1980, the workers at Memphis Furniture, members of United Furniture Workers of America Local 282 in Memphis, Tennessee, voted to strike rather than accept decreased benefits, poor working conditions and a weakened contract.

The United Furniture Workers had won a representation election in 1977 and signed a two-year agreement with management in March of 1978. From the time Local 282 began negotiating renewal of that first contract with the company, it was clear that management wanted to break the union. Twice before, in 1949 and 1962, Memphis Furniture had been able to block union attempts to get contracts after workers had voted for union representation.

Local 282 of the United Furniture Workers, headed by Willie Rudd, a dynamic young trade unionist, used a variety of tactics in the strike. The local sought and got union and community support, organized significant participation in Memphis's annual Martin Luther King, Jr., March, held numerous rallies, leafleted the communities and shopping centers, and organized informational pickets and a boycott of Memphis Furniture products at leading stores in Memphis, including Sears.

It wasn't tactics alone that won the strike. A big factor was the spirit and determination of the more than 1,000 Memphis Furniture workers – 90 percent of whom are black, 85 percent of whom are women – who held strong during the

In Memphis, a thousand workers won a 10-week strike by building strong support in the community.

approximately 10-week-long strike.

Emma Freeman is the mother of four, head of her family, a 12-year employee of Memphis Furniture and a union steward. Mary Higgins is the mother of two children, wife of a United Auto Worker, a four-year employee of Memphis Furniture and a steward.

Mary Higgins: Most of the workers are the only ones that can support their families. One woman supports her entire family. And if she is laid off, then she doesn't know how she is going to make it next, you know. But yet she was willing to put it all on the line during this strike. I think that took great courage on her part to do something.

Emma Freeman: Before the strike I think most of the people were making minimum wage or a little above. You wouldn't believe the seniority record out there. The people are staying because they want to work and they need to work. At most jobs, the longer you stay on the job the better you would have it, but it wasn't that way at Memphis Furniture.

Higgins: You could get hired today and fired today. You had to bring in all kinds of reasons why you were late or absent. The boss would even talk to you any kind of way. It was just really poor.

One lady had been with the company, I'm sure, 30 years. She was sick and she had to go home for a couple of weeks and she came back to work and the supervisor was telling some employees up front, "If she's that sick and can't build enough drawers to keep up, she oughta go on and retire." Before she got sick, he used to brag on her all the time: "Why don't you work like Annie there? She's a hard worker. She works steady. She can put out a thousand drawers a day. Here you are and you can only put out 600 a day." And once she gets sick they're ready to cut her loose. Just like you would a mule with the plow. All they wanted was just work.

Freeman: Some of the people were on food stamps and then they were getting AFDC. You know, for a person that worked – with the husband and wife working at Memphis Furniture – they shouldn't have to rely on food stamps.

Higgins: I am sure that quite a few of them were afraid they were not going to be able to make it during the strike, but they were willing to take a chance. It isn't any better in there, so it couldn't get any worse out here. So I think that was the attitude that most of them had – that we're going to give this a try. We're just not going to live under those conditions any longer. We simply refuse!

It really seemed to me that the strike was pushed on us, mostly by the company. And we did everything possible to avoid a strike. We went to the table in good faith. No, they laid down their last, best and final offer. Things were really getting tight. We didn't have anything else to give up. We'd given up as much as we possibly could.

Freeman: [There were other issues besides money.] There was the insurance, there were job classifications; there were other things as far as holidays, holiday pay; just about everything that makes up a contract, really.

Higgins: On the insurance, they said, "Blue Cross and Blue Shield." We said, "Furniture Workers Insurance." There was a great debate over that. The majority wanted the Furniture Workers, so that's why we went in there with that. Because they felt that the Furniture Workers gave them better benefits and more assurance than just dealing with the company, so they felt better with Furniture Workers than they did with Blue Cross and Blue Shield.

During the strike, we had a picket line. The stewards pitched in and helped organize things. Like I had some three-to-12 shifts at night – you did a shift and you were totally responsible for it. You were captain of that shift. It was your responsibility to see that everyone showed up, was on time, jot down their names and what time they

Emma Freeman
photo by June Rostan

got there and what time they would leave. And you wouldn't know that if you weren't there. It was your job to be there.

Freeman: We even had neighbors to come out there with us. And we had just a great turnout in the morning time and we sang songs and we let them know that we were determined to win. And not only did we have the support of practically everybody that worked in Memphis Furniture, we had the support of the community, of our churches and everybody else. Everybody was pitching in. The attitude with the people – it was just like you would see in a revival at a church. It was just remarkable!

We went from door to door in our different communities. The ones that were active in church – we went to our church and talked, got up and asked the pastor could we have a word about our strike. We talked about our strike in the church and anywhere else. We let them know how Memphis Furniture was treating us. We let them know approximately the salary that people made out there, the conditions in which we worked. And they weren't aware of this. And so when they became aware of it, you know, naturally being human, they felt our need. Before the strike, our president told us to talk to our bill collectors and let em know that we might go out on strike. And if we do that we wouldn't be able to pay our bills. And I went to where I have my car financed and I talked to them and let them know that I might not be able to pay it. I called where my house is financed. I just called all of them, to let them know that we weren't trying to avoid paying our bills, but that we might be a little late paying them. And our union helped us out. They footed some of the necessary bills. The union was just great.

I didn't have any problem with my children. Before the strike, we anticipated the strike because of the way they were negotiating. They weren't trying to do anything, be fair at all. So I told my children that we would possibly have to go out on strike and if we did there wouldn't be any money coming in. The things they were used to getting would have to be cut out and we would really have to cut down on everything. The bills probably would get behind, but don't worry about it, that everything would be okay, but they had to work with me. And they were understanding.

As a matter of fact they came out with me. They were in school at the time, but when we had a big turnout, when we had to get there in full force and we was asking our neighbors and our friends to come out, I had my family with me. And they were wearing United Furniture Workers T-shirts. They were carrying signs and carrying water to various people that needed it. And they were just helpful; if someone wanted to go to the bathroom, they would walk in their place until they got back.

Some of the people who were out on strike and were walking, they weren't even members of the union before we went out on strike. But they knew the need and they knew what the union was for. There are a lot of young people who work at Memphis Furniture who had never worked at any other job before coming to work at Memphis Furniture, so they had never been involved in a union. They didn't know what a union was or how it would help them. So when we voted the union in, a lot of them didn't join because they felt they could get along without it. But after we went out on strike and they saw just the way the company felt about them, they felt differently. They knew *then* what a union was for. We had so many joining the union while we were out on the picket line and the majority are still in the union.

We weren't sure we were going to win the strike, but we were determined. We had that extra fight in us to continue. Some of the people who weren't going to church joined and went to church. We had prayer and, you know, prayer changes things. I am a firm believer in that. We prayed together. We took "self" out. And anytime you take self out

Mary Higgins
photo by June Rostan

and just try to do what you can to help others – not only thinking that you are helping yourself – you're helping somebody else also.

Higgins: One woman had bought a house and she said, "I'm wondering how am I going to pay my house note." She told another lady, "Here I am out here without a husband, and I have a son and I'm not complaining. Why should you? I'm not going back in that plant and work under those conditions without a contract and I don't think anyone else should." And I think that was strictly beautiful. She had her job on the line, her house on the line. She had it all on the line because she believed in what she was doing. She believed that she was going to win. We knew that if one person could be that dedicated – then we could.

During the strike everyone was just out there doing their best. And they felt – "If I can do my best, then everyone else can do their best. At least participate in some way. If you can't march – sing. If you can't sing – just stand there. Just be there. You should be able to participate in some way." The ones who didn't participate in the strike, I think they felt a little bad about themselves because they went around and moped because no one would talk to them.

Freeman: When we walked the picket line we got gas money. We got $20 if we walked the full week. We were able to make it. It was hard, but so was it before the union came in and we were working 40 hours and sometimes 50, but it was still hard. So we were used to hardness. So we just had to deal with it. We were able to get more food stamps and some of them would get little part-time jobs to support us.

If it took going to jail, we did that. Whatever it took to win the strike that was legal and that was right, we did it. There were some of us who went to jail, but at the same time they couldn't get us on anything because we were in our rights. They were the ones that were doing the under-handed things.

Going to jail was funny because this was something that we never had to happen to us. It was four of us together. We had never been handcuffed before. When we were going inside the jail, we were singing, "We Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Us Around." We still had the fight. We still had the spirit, because we knew what we were doing was right. When we got inside the jail, the matron didn't even lock the cell door, because she asked us who were we and what were we there for. And we told her we were Memphis Furniture employees; we were out on strike. She asked us what we were out on strike for and we told her: conditions, wages, benefits and everything that we were out for. She said, "I don't blame you. Keep on!" She put us all in a cell together where we would feel together – feel good. She talked to us. It was funny to be there and see the inside of the jail cell – something you had been reading about and seeing on TV, you were a living witness of it. But after staying there many hours and seeing the food – Oh my God, the food was terrible! I was actually sick from eating that food.

We had to go through this ordeal of being fingerprinted and asked questions and notified of our legal rights and everything and we realized then that it was more serious than what we anticipated – what we thought – but at the same time we knew we hadn't done anything wrong. We just knew it was a matter of time. When our president came down there and we saw him, I started crying. I had had enough of that jail cell. We got out and he asked us were we scared; and we told him, yeah, we was afraid, but at the same time we had the strength to believe and we knew that "We Shall Overcome."

Higgins: If I had it to do over again, I would. It was worth it. Right now if I walked down through that plant, I'd feel it was worth it. Where you would normally say, "There's a hazard over there on that floor; it needs to be removed because somebody's going to fall on it." The supervisor might say,

photo by Ernest C. Withers

"Well, get it up then!" Now he'll say, "Okay, Mary, I'll go see about it, and I'll see what I can have done about it." The next minute or so he will have somebody to move it or straighten it out. Now he will ask, "What do you think about this?" I think that's great – to get your opinion about something before you would do it.

We definitely went out for respect – more so, I think, than money. It was just outrageous the way they would talk to you – like you was nobody. If you don't have respect in the shop, you don't have anything. You got to have respect. First, you got to respect yourself. Then you got to make sure he respects you. And you got to know that contract. You got to make sure that he lives up to that contract.

The strike made me see more about what the union is really like, what it's really about: dignity, self-respect. It just put it all there. And it just makes you want to say, "This is my job. I am proud of my job and I have a right to this job. I have a right to my opinion." I know I want to feel like this and my union feel like this. And we are the union. And it makes you feel like you have support. And I think we did a good job. We had to.

Freeman: The strike didn't actually change my life; at the time, you know, it changed my living standards from poor to worse, but it just brought my family even closer together. You know, children have a tendency to think that money grows on trees. They don't even think about where the money is coming from. Mama's going to provide when they need it.

Higgins: The first thing I would say to people going out on strike is, "Be together." That's number one. Be together. Don't go out there thinking now this might be over tomorrow. Put your head on right. Think about it. Say now, "I'm going to war. It's time to battle and I've just got to fight." It's a must. Just get on all your armor and say, "I'm headed out. I've got to do it." Don't think for once it's going to be easy. Believe it or not, the first few days people thought it was fun. Then things began to drag on, get longer and longer. You start getting depressed, tired, sleepy, hungry. You want to lie down and rest. There's no time for it. You got to think about all of that *before* you go out there. It's not going to be easy, but you put your all-and-all on the line; it's worth it. Think about it. You've got to do it for yourself. You're in a war – either you get them or they will get you. It's that simple. □

June Rostan is a staff member of Highlander Center, where she does labor education.

A Teacher's ABC

by Brenda Best

With the help of her union, a teacher learns that she is not just a professional, but also a worker with the right and responsibility to speak out in the workplace and in the community.

Brenda Best speaking at a rally against a Duke Power utility rate hike.

I was born in the South and raised in ignorance. I was taught to be a good girl and a hard worker – to be nice and polite and obedient. For years these imperatives – this cultural conditioning – worked and I walked the working-class chalk line unaware of my oppression and its true causes. Like a sleepwalker, I believed the myths about unions.

A college education only reinforced my anti-unionism. This was achieved by a *lack* of information. I passed through the public school systems of the South without ever being taught any of the accomplishments of the great unions of America. In history and education courses, I made As without ever knowing that the unions had worked to establish child labor laws, compulsory education laws, minimum wage laws, worker's compensation and health and safety standards. When I graduated from the University of North Carolina, I could identify the characters, the scene, the play for any line in Shakespeare's tragedies. But I had never heard of the Triangle Shirt Factory Fire and the tragedy of hundreds of women dying because the factory was unsafe and all the doors locked. Such facts would surely have confused a good Southern worker.

On one point, the School of Education broke the silence on unions. Prospective teachers were taught in the 1960s that unions and strikes were unprofessional, but it was okay to join the North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE). The NCAE was recognized as harmless because its non-threatening tactics of begging and complaining accomplished very little. Dominated by school administrators, the NCAE leadership still claims that it is not a union.

No beginning teacher wants to be accused of being unprofessional, so in 1970 I obediently joined the NCAE, served on the Political Action Committee and was soon appointed *by the principal* to collect the fees from the professionals and go to the meetings. The meetings were usually conducted or controlled by the president, an assistant principal or the NCAE paid staff. Such leadership is not conducive to independent thought nor receptive to contradictory suggestions or divergent viewpoints. Business usually consisted of deciding who would be delegates to annual Atlanta conferences and how much would be spent.

One night after we had interviewed all the school board candidates and were deciding who to endorse, we were told by the NCAE staffperson that we had to endorse the incumbent because he was going to be reelected and we had to pick winners. Many of the interviewing teachers were against the endorsement because the candidate hadn't done anything to help teachers during his previous term. Unfortunately, we endorsed him. Fortunately he lost. I began to understand why, in

photo by Sharon Duggan

Brenda Best, holding "AFT Loves Teachers" sign, and other AFT members.

spite of NCAE's 50-year existence, teachers were still oppressed and underpaid. In fact, I was beginning to feel downright unprofessional!

In fairness to this fine group of teachers who have good intentions but poor leadership, we did take a busload of teachers to Raleigh to "ask" for a raise. We had the whole Ambassador Theater full of teachers and we were mad! But we allowed ourselves to be herded into the theater and "talked to." Picketing or marching were unprofessional. Few legislators or citizens knew we were there or cared.

In spite of these experiences, the day I received a notice that the Organizing Committee of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) was holding a union meeting, I was outraged! "How did they get my name? Who could have sent this union stuff to me? I am a professional!" I tore the notice to pieces and flushed them. I had absorbed my anti-union messages well.

I will never forget the incident that changed me from a passive, docile, compliant, uninformed professional into an active, assertive, questioning and aware trade unionist. The former personnel director for the Charlotte-Mecklenberg schools made an arbitrary decision that vocational teachers – I teach graphic arts – were not entitled to the same amount of Easter vacation time as academic teachers. We were all telephoned on Easter Monday and told that we had to report to school for the remainder of the week. We went to school. There were no students, no work to do and no heat in the buildings. We decided to form a grievance committee. Most of the vocational teachers met, and more than 100 signed a petition to file a formal grievance. I was elected as one of six teachers to handle the grievance. Then we got the screws one by one and in groups. We were intimidated by our principals, supervisors and even other teachers. Teachers who had originally supported filing a grievance came to me whispering, "Just take my name off that petition." My own director of vocational education advised us not to "rock the boat. We may win this but they may take something else away." I was amazed and aghast. This was our leader? What else could they take away? Where was the NCAE? A myth died that day. Nobody was taking care of things for us. We had to do it ourselves.

The grievance procedure, designed to frustrate and discourage, took from Easter until June. Before the end, all teachers except the six on the committee had been coerced into withdrawing their names from the petition. We were "unreasonable" and carried the grievance to the superintendent, and he knew that our next step was to go to the school board. We had done our homework under the direction of the chairperson of the committee, Bob Doster, who combed the books and found a law that not only gave the vocational teachers equal holidays but three additional sick days. We won the grievance and were given the last days of school off for compensation. All teachers now get eight sick days instead of five. Another myth was dead. Sometimes, you *can't* be nice.

I began to wonder about other myths I had been taught. I even thought about going to a union meeting, but I didn't want to get involved with gangsters. That myth died when an English teacher in my school said that she was a member of the AFT and thought it was the organization for me. I liked and respected her so I agreed to join. She assured me we wouldn't get fired because the names of the members were to remain a secret until we were chartered. We wouldn't be chartered until 200 teachers joined.

At first I was delighted to be a secret union member. Then something happened that made me so proud of the union that I wanted everyone to know I belonged to a group that would stand up and fight for the rights of teachers.

One day as the custodian was adjusting an overhead heating unit, the entire sheet metal door crashed down from the high ceiling, hitting my head and knocking me to the floor. I had a concussion and headaches for several days and missed two school days. When my paycheck came at the end of the month, $40 was missing. I had been docked two days for the substitute teacher. I went to the principal and asked him if the school board didn't have worker's compensation for workers hurt in the line of duty. He said that the coverage didn't go into effect until the sixth day. Because I had come to work instead of staying home with my headache, I had to pay for the substitute teacher. "But what teacher can afford to pay $20 a day for five days?" I asked. He said that it was my problem and he couldn't help me. I went to the phone and called my union representative.

He assured me that I would get my $40 back. He said he'd make an appointment with the superintendent and publicize the fact that teachers were being denied their rights. He explained the importance of documentation. "Get it in writing" that I had suffered a pay loss for performing my duty. I wrote a letter to the principal telling him what had happened and asking him to reimburse me $40. I memorized his reply: "Dear Mrs. Best, I am sorry to learn of your accident and will see to it that you receive a check for $40."

I came out of the union closet, and when the AFT local was chartered in 1974 I ran for vice-president. Since then I have served my union and plan to be a union member till I die. There are thousands of AFT members and through the central labor councils in each city and the state and national AFL-CIO, we are linked with all other union workers – parents of the children we teach.

Our local union has blossomed into the most vocal, visible and respected voice of Charlotte teachers. We have helped elect school board members who have changed the climate of the board room. Our presentations to the board and superintendent's advisory council have helped shape and change such important policies as discipline, transfer, testing and grievances. Our union has successfully handled hundreds of individual grievances and supported teachers and their rights with picket lines and due process. With our support, teachers have documented the incompetence of administrators, which has resulted in their retirement, transfer or demotion.

Active AFT members usually enjoy a cordial relationship with the administration. There is more likelihood of duty-free lunch and voluntary extra-curricular activities. There are elections of faculty councils, and the principals no longer believe they hold the title to the school building and the birth certificate of the teachers. The atmosphere has changed. In union schools, teachers and administrators function as equals to serve the same purpose – to help children make the most of themselves for a better life for us all.

Joining the union and standing up for my rights has made it clearer to me that there are other groups that are organized around equally vital issues of survival. It has given me the courage to join Carolina Action, a neighborhood group, to protest Duke Power rate hikes as inflationary to school and personal budgets; to march on the Democratic convention for more low- and moderate-income representation; to petition the city council for an evacuation plan for Charlotte because of the nearby nuclear plant.

The union has taught me how the system works and how to work the system for changes. It has taught me the true meaning of democracy – now I never miss a precinct or a union meeting. I've learned that when something bugs you, go to the appropriate meeting and make a motion. If it carries, something can get done. If the motion fails, give the people information, raise the level of awareness and, eventually, if the idea has merit, it will pass.

Many union members have been sent to seminars and conferences at various universities, the Carolina Labor Schools and the AFL-CIO's George Meany Center for Labor Studies, and our eyes have been opened to dreams we never knew we had. We have seen collective bargaining contracts that unionized teachers have negotiated; we have studied the economics of North Carolina and the South. We have learned about past labor practices, grievances, arbitration, the Occupational Safety and Health Act and strikes. (Yes, I said the dirty word!) We have learned not to fear these things. They are our bargaining tools, our equalizers. We have learned the difference between myth and reality.□

Brenda Best has taught graphic arts and industrial communications to high school students in Charlotte, North Carolina, for 12 years. She is the mother of two teenage sons.

Editors' note: *Southern Exposure* recently participated in workshops conducted by the North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE), and found that dramatic changes inside the organization have turned it into a far more effective instrument for protecting teachers than it was a decade ago. In the last three years, progressive teachers have taken over leadership of the 44,000-member organization; the supervisors' and superintendents' division of NCAE was dissolved; and most administrators have left. Since state law prohibits collective bargaining for public employees, the NCAE has made itself felt through impressive lobbying – winning a wage increase from reluctant legislators in 1981 – and through legal challenges to infringements on individual member's rights. The latter range from suing a county school board for racial discrimination in its hiring of coaches and other extra-curricular faculty, to defending teachers' right of free speech, to successfully opposing attempts to censor curriculum materials. NCAE is also in the forefront of the ERA fight in the state, providing office space to headquarter North Carolinians United for ERA and conducting workshops throughout the state on women's rights. Other subjects in the organization's aggressive leadership development and workshop program include political skills and campaigning, multi-racial leadership building, and understanding and combatting the Moral Majority and new right. □

RAISES, NOT ROSES

by Diane Teichert

Women office workers organize to win raises, rights and respect.

"When my son graduated from high school, I decided it was time for me to do something for myself after years of doing clerical work. I wanted to work helping women in dead-end jobs like me. I had learned a lot about employment counseling during my years as a secretary for job-training agencies, but when I told my supervisor that I wanted a position as counselor, he laughed. To save money, I was downgraded to typist even though I retained my duties as secretary. Every time I think about it, it makes me mad. Now I'm an organizer of women office workers and we're going to put an end to these types of things!"

So explains Verna Barksdale, one of the two organizers for Atlanta Working Women (AWW), the new membership organization of office workers started in the fall of 1980 to "win raises, rights and respect" for the 200,000 clerical workers in metropolitan Atlanta. Atlanta Working Women is one of 13 affiliates of Working Women, the National Association of Office Workers. AWW's first activity was to conduct an "office workers job survey," which asked questions about salaries, benefits, promotions, job posting, training programs, affirmative action and working conditions.

Like office workers across the country, women office workers in Atlanta have begun to realize that low wages, little respect and even less opportunity are not individual problems. And individual solutions to these problems do not work. While a few women "climb the ladder," the hard truth is that 83 percent of the 800 women office workers surveyed by AWW earn less than $15,000 yearly. While each woman must be assertive in getting what she needs on the job, one woman alone trying to combat sex discrimination, sex stereotyping and historically low wages for "women's work" is going to be very frustrated.

"The minority woman office worker faces a deeper problem than those already terrible ones of white office workers: race discrimination," says Barksdale. "Often we are not hired into low-paying, low-status pink-collar jobs. When we

photo by Susan Lazarrus

are, the fact that the pay is so low hurts more because often minority women are the sole support of their households. After being hired we are often excluded from promotions and job training. Add to that the possibility of being paid less than other women doing the same job and the personal prejudices of co-workers and bosses. All this means increased job-related stress and frustration.

"The bi-racial makeup of AWW and other working women's organizations is crucial to the success of the women's labor movement. In Atlanta, as in most major cities, most organizations are not segregated, per se, but they are not really integrated either. Consequently, the issues of these groups and their goals are viewed as only for blacks or for whites. However, when women come together from different races they begin to realize that the feelings of powerlessness and frustration are a common thread that runs between them. Their lack of knowledge of one another gives way to feelings of WE CAN DO IT. We can accomplish our goals together." Or, as AWW member Katrenna Smith said at the close of AWW's public hearing on the status of women office workers, "There's strength in numbers."

That strength is building, through the involvement of young and old and black and white office workers. In its first year, AWW concentrated on raising the issues, educating the public about the problems faced by office workers, and educating women about their rights and real value in the work force through visible public action. This step was crucial, to create a climate in which women will have the knowledge, confidence and support to speak out or to demand better working conditions.

The public needs to know about the situation of Vicki Hyde, an early member of AWW, a full-time accounting clerk for one of the large retail department store chains. Her husband left her with three young girls to support on less than $8,000 in 1980. When she applied for a credit card from her employer (thinking that would help her establish

credit under her own name), her application was refused. "Insufficient funds," they said. "But insufficient *salary* is the real problem," explains Hyde. "Women have all kinds of reasons for joining Atlanta Working Women: sexual harassment, having to make coffee, discrimination in promotions and extra trouble if you're a black woman. But my problem is low pay."

Low pay affects black women most significantly, as shown by the responses to the AWW survey question, "Do minority women tend to hold the lower-paying positions?" More than half the women in insurance, banking, education, government, utilities and communications said "Yes." Interestingly, only 17 percent of the law firm office workers said minority women were in lower-paying positions. However, more than one legal secretary noted, "There are no blacks at all."

Next to low pay, one of the most common complaints brought by office workers to AWW is lack of respect for the value of the work performed. One legal secretary reported being asked to sew a button on her boss's shirt – while he was wearing it. AWW member Susan Miller was told to take the boss's wife's penny loafers to the shoe shop for a shine. However, she no longer does any personal errands for her boss after telling him that she felt demeaned by his requests, which also wasted time needed to fulfill her more important job responsibilities. Miller says it was her involvement in AWW that gave her the self-confidence to protest treatment she previously felt obliged to endure.

Atlanta Working Women also works with groups of co-workers seeking advice about how to deal with job problems such as no promotions for women and minorities or lack of adequate fire

CLERICAL WORKERS

Organizations

Working Women
1224 Huron Rd.
Cleveland, OH 44115
(206) 566-9308
(National Office)

57 Forsyth St. NW
1419 Healey Bldg.
Atlanta, GA 30303
(404) 522-5444
(Atlanta Field Office)

Working Women is a national membership organization for women office workers. Based in Cleveland, it has affiliates throughout the country. If you live in the Atlanta vicinity, you may want to join Atlanta Working Women. As a member, you will receive regular notice of activities and meetings, reduced fees for events, workshops and literature. Individuals outside Atlanta should join Working Women to receive the bimonthly national newsletter covering local and national campaigns, legal information, statistics and history relevant to office workers. Groups of Southern office workers desiring organizing assistance, information on legal rights, speakers or materials should contact Atlanta Working Women directly.

Annual dues are set according to income:
$8,000 or less: $5
$8-12,000: $10
$12,000 or more:$15

Resource Lists

Working Women (address above) has a resource list and also stocks the following publications: *Becoming A Priority: Organizing Guide for University Office Staff* ($1.50), *Minority Office Workers Today: Where We Stand* ($1.00) and *Race Against Time* ($4.00), a study of office automation.

Other lists are available from:

National Commission of Working Women
1221 Connecticut Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20036

Union of Radical Political Economists
41 Union Square West, Room 901
New York, NY 10003

Women Employed Institute
5 South Wabash, Suite 415
Chicago, IL 60603

Publications

Women Organizing the Office (1978)

Covers discrimination and reviews various worker organizations. Available for $2.30 from: Women in Distribution, PO Box 8858, Washington, DC 20003.

Not Servants, Not Machines: Office Workers Speak Out (1976)

By Jean Tepperman; published by Beacon Press. Contains a series of statements by women office workers about their jobs and work experiences. Many are involved in the movement to organize the clerical work force and stand as encouraging examples to other office workers. A resource list is included. Available for $2.95 paperback or $8.95 hardback from: 9 to 5, 140 Clarendon St., Boston, MA 02116.

escape plans. In such cases, the women are advised of their rights, protected by the National Labor Relations Act, to pursue the desired improvements as a group. They are assisted in deciding how to get enough support rallied behind them and how to successfully approach management about the problem. One group in an insurance company in Atlanta succeeded in getting the company to initiate a job posting program, so that employees could find out about openings within the firm and apply before they were filled. AWW also helps women evaluate the possibility of unionizing as a way to secure better working conditions.

Other affiliate organizations of Working Women have won considerable improvements for office workers as a result of bringing public pressure to bear on employers with discriminatory personnel practices. Cleveland Working Women's campaign against National City Bank resulted in a $15 million settlement issued by the Department of Labor for back pay for women and minority employees. Baltimore Working Women's "Clean Up Banking Campaign" resulted in pay increases at five banks totaling $2 million and the institution of a job-posting program at one bank with a record of discrimination against women and blacks. In Boston, 9 to 5 Organization for Office Workers has exposed the John Hancock Insurance Company for its key role in an employers' organization called the Boston Survey Group which 9 to 5 alleges sets clerical wages in violation of anti-trust laws. 9 to 5

Office Hazards: How Your Job Can Make You Sick (1981)

A 250-page book by Joel Makower; published by Tilden Press. Takes a hard look at the modern office, covering air quality, stress, lighting, video display terminals, radiation and the future for office safety. Available for $6.95 in bookstores or from: Tilden Press, 1737 DeSales St. NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 638-5855.

Working Women and the Law: New Issues (1980)

This packet contains workshop materials covering sexual harassment, comparable worth, maternity regulations and health and safety. Available for $10.00 from: Women Employed Institute, 5 South Wabash, Suite 415, Chicago, IL 60603.

Films/Videotapes

The Wilmar 8 (1980)

A 55-minute documentary about eight female bank employees in Wilmar, Minnesota, who organize their own union, strike to protest low wages and picket the bank for months. The film shows the strength and courage of ordinary women in their personal struggle for justice. Rental of a 16-mm print is $75. Available from: California Newsreel, 630 Natoma St., San Francisco, CA 94103, (415) 621-6196.

Why Aren't You Smiling?

A 20-minute slide show on the history of office work and the organizing movement of working women. Rental price is $20; order from: Working Women Education Fund, 1224 Huron Rd, Cleveland, OH 44115.

9 to 5 (1976)

A 28-minute color documentary in which secretaries and clerical workers talk about the need to organize and their frustrations in their jobs. Very useful for organizing and for discussions of economics and the social status of women in our society. Rental is $5 (specify exact screening date) from: AFL-CIO Department of Education, 915 16th St. NW, Room 407, Washington, DC 20006, (202) 637-5153.

Extras

"Women Make Policy, Not Coffee"
"He's Pretty, But Can He Type?"

Buttons available from: Northern Sun Merchandising, 1519 E. Franklin Ave., Minneapolis, MN 55404, (612) 874-1540.

"Rights and Respect for Office Workers"
"Raises Not Roses"

Buttons available for 50 cents each from: 9 to 5, 140 Clarendon St., Boston, MA 02116.

"Raises Not Roses"

T-shirts are available for $6.50 each (specify small, medium or large). Posters are $4.00. Order from: Working Women, 1224 Huron Rd., Cleveland, OH 44115, (206) 566-9308.

See Resources on Unions, p. 87, and Job Safety and Health, p. 122.

A Union for Office Workers

In March, 1981, Working Women, the National Association of Office Workers, announced a joint organizing effort with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). Called District 925 (after "nine-to-five," the working hours in many offices), it creates a union option, a collective bargaining alternative, for office workers. District 925 will be a unit within SEIU's Clerical Division and will lead in the organization of new groups of office workers throughout the country. SEIU already represents 35,000 office workers and has a higher percentage of women on its executive board than any other AFL-CIO union. SEIU represents many other traditionally low-paid workers such as hospital, service, maintenance and custodial employees.

Karen Nussbaum, president of Working Women and acting president of District 925, announced the joint venture. "Working Women knows the problems of office workers and we know how to communicate with the women who largely comprise the office work force. SEIU knows how to collectively bargain for and represent workers and how to pry decent and humane contracts from the toughest of employers. We think it is an unbeatable combination."

Interested office workers may call District 925's toll-free phone number for information – (800) 424-2936.

has targeted the company, demanding across-the-board pay increases for clericals, child-care provisions, training programs and resignation from the Boston Survey Group.

From Boston to Seattle and Los Angeles . . . and now Atlanta, 13 organizations of women office workers (all affiliates of Working Women, the National Association of Office Workers) are winning changes that bring about improvements in the working lives of clerical workers. But women in small cities and towns scattered in companies around the country are finding that smaller efforts bear fruit as well. "The Department of Labor told me to get in touch with Working Women for action on my job problem. Working Women helped me win $50,000 in back pay for myself and six other women who had all suffered discrimination at my bank. We also won salary increases and more promotions," boasts Faye Hewlett, assistant cashier at a Kentucky bank.

Another victory for collective action was at a small savings and loan association in Georgia where the women employees called a meeting with the association president to present their feelings about the poor promotion record of women in the association. Recognizing that he would soon lose the backbone of his operation, he developed a new organizational chart and a plan that resulted in the first promotions for women. As the association's first female branch manager explained, "My salary certainly is not competitive and all this turnover of women at my branch is poor management. The pay is too low!" Now, 16 months later, the promoted women are working on a "game plan" to get 25 to 30 percent pay hikes for all employees.

In Knoxville, Tennessee, a group of office workers sponsored a series of workshops on "job survival skills" which inspired one woman to convince the clerical staff in the photography company where she works to meet with their boss and negotiate for sick days, cost-of-living increases and other improvements. After winning some of what they wanted, their next question was, "What union can we join?"

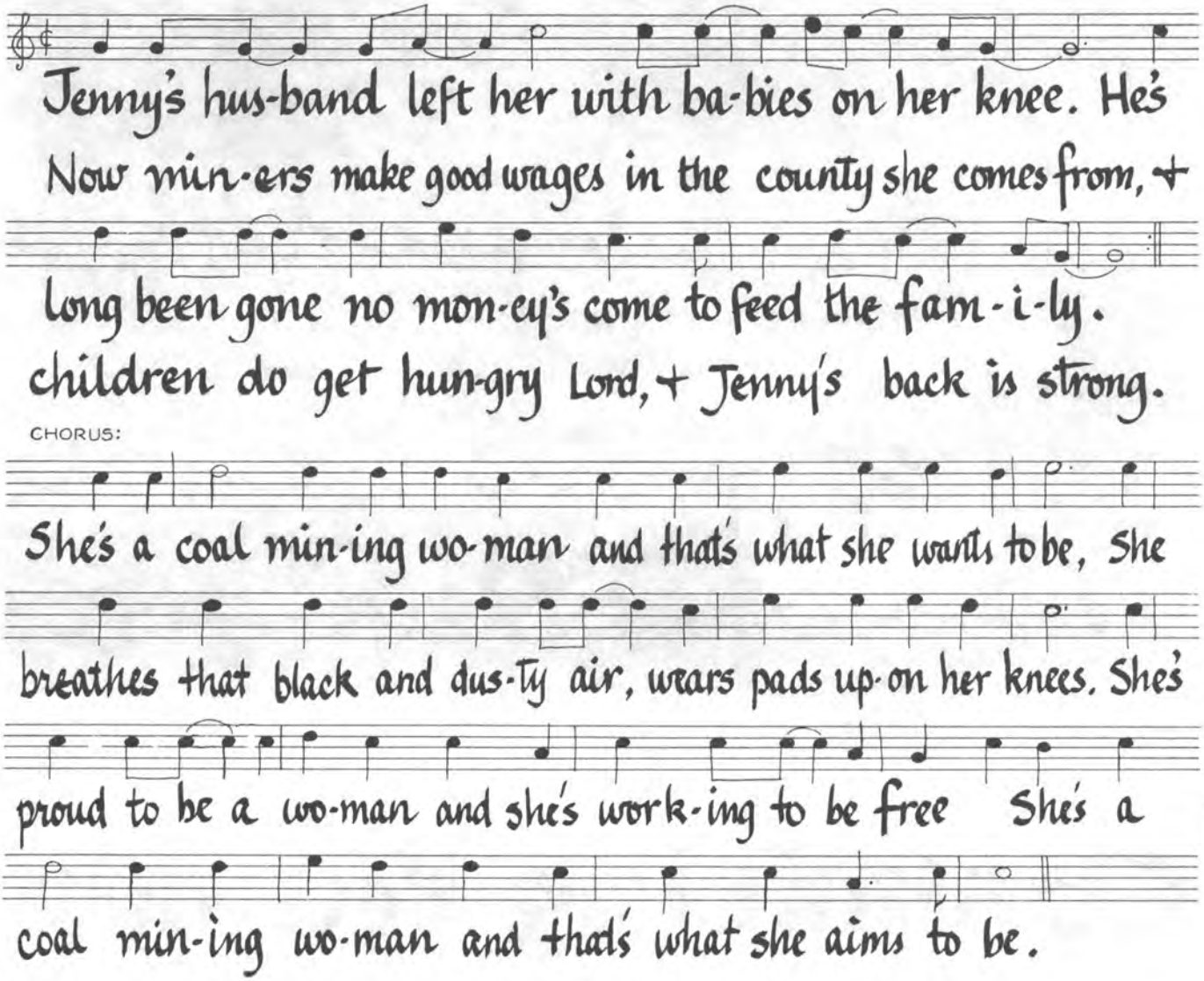
Not every Southern city has a large enough clerical work force to support a staffed, citywide organization of office workers like Atlanta Working Women. But it is clear that the word is getting around that women are no longer putting up with discrimination, dead-end jobs, low pay, sexual harassment or running personal errands for the boss. Office workers are getting together with co-workers, forming committees, asking for raises, taking public action, holding workshops, researching the union option and learning how to organize.□

Diane Teichert is staff director of Atlanta Working Women.

Verna Barksdale (at right) at a rally for Atlanta Working Women.

What she aims to be

SONG BY SUE MASSEK



calligraphy by Patricia O'Day

Second Verse

Robin's learned it's hard to find a job that satisfies
A woman needs to use the strength that in her body lies
It's a rough and rocky journey from the kitchen to the mine
But strength is gained from struggle and now Robin's doin' fine.

Third Verse

It's dark and cold and dangerous down in that dusty mine
And the fear of fire and cave-in are hard to leave behind
But the life that woman faces down in that lonely hole
Would be brighter now if you'd respect that woman loadin' coal.

Elizabeth Laird, employed at Alabama By-Products' Mary Lee No. 2 mine. *photo by Marat Moore*

Coalmining Women

by Marat Moore

Elizabeth Laird

It is late afternoon in the Rebel Queen cafe in the crossroads coal and cotton town of Cordova, Alabama. Elizabeth Laird spends much of her free time here since her children have grown and gone. The jukebox blares as two teenaged boys feed quarters into the blinking lights, but she continues talking, slowly, deliberately. The contours of her face, like those of her speech, are plain but gentle and belie her 59 years. Just a half hour before, she looked exhausted. Lines of fatigue creased the layer of coal dust on her face as she sat down heavily in the bathhouse, drawing solace from a cigarette. Now, she has recovered.

My father worked in the mines in Aldridge, Alabama, just a few miles down the road. He dug coal with a pick and shovel. He worked from can to can't, you know – before daylight to after dark.

I never thought about it then, but now I wish I had went in the mines earlier, younger. I started keeping house after my father died, at 15. I'm 59 now. I've been working nearly 45 years.

I went in the mines when I was 54. Been there five years. Five years more and I'll get a 10-year pension. That's what I'm planning on. Then I'm going to write my book and buy a kiln and do ceramics.

When I was 20, I was working in the cotton mill. That's textiles, here in Cordova. I worked 23 years as a weaver. When I first went to work, I made $14 for five days, eight hours a day. Before that, I kept house for people. Three dollars a week, Monday morning till Saturday morning, taking care of two children.

I would have loved to stay home with the children when they were small. But I think when you once work, you're used to your own money and get too independent. It's not a bad thing. When I married, I was making more money than he was.

The 10 months I worked as a spinner liked to got the best of me. It was the hardest work I've ever done. Face ventilation in the mines is the easiest job I've ever done, and it's some of the hardest work in the mines. Spinning was hard because each spool had a brake on it, chair level off the floor. You had to brake them with your feet. So if your work done bad, you hopped around on one foot all night.

The divorce was 11 years ago. I picked up a moonlight job in a cafe, and did two jobs a day. I had three kids, two in college. My husband paid child support for the youngest, but child support in Walker County is just not that much, about $20 a week. The mines was the only place I could work on one job and have time with my youngest son. He was about 14 or 15. He was so proud. He was the first kid in school who had a mother as a miner.

When I went in the mines, I no longer had to work 16 hours a day, which is what I was working when I went in. Six days a week at the factory, and seven days a week at the diner right down the street. The other eight hours I slept.

If I had a daughter, I would give her an education, but it wouldn't be that bad if she wanted to go in the mines. I would agree to it. I want my children to do what they're best at. Two of my sons are in white-collar jobs. I couldn't stand that. I can't tolerate being dressed up, with my face fixed and my hair fixed. I like to feel free, and when you've got on hose and high heels and makeup, you just can't feel free.

Ethel McCuiston

Long before women were listed as miners on company payrolls, they worked alongside brothers, fathers and husbands when the need for their labor outweighed the taboo against their presence underground. Ethel McCuiston was among the largely uncounted numbers of women in this century who handloaded coal in small family or contract mines. Women were employed under the care of some male relation, their contribution acknowledged as a bonus in the male paycheck.

I was always told that it was bad luck for a woman to enter the mines. My grandmother told me about women being bad luck when I was a small child. After I got married, that was in 1937, my husband was a timberman. Times was very hard back then. We'd been married about two years when the mining started booming, and he got a job in the mines. That's where it all started.

I didn't start work regularly until about 1941. My oldest was two years old, and my other was one, when I first went in. I was 21. I borrowed one of our boarders' belts. I had long hair, and I stuffed it all up in the cap. The boarders would laugh. They got a kick out of seeing me dressed up like that.

I just couldn't stand the thought of Arthur

Ethel McCuiston worked over 14 years underground with her husband. *photo by Marat Moore*

working over there by himself. During the war, there were about half the miners there as were there before. About all the miners were drafted into service. Arthur knew how desperate they were for coal. He would go in there and undertake to do the whole job himself. The other wives called me a fool. I told them, Arthur's life is just as sweet and precious to me as it is to him.

I'd come over there and help my husband shoot coal. I'd make the dynamite dummies to put in the holes, so we could shoot the coal down. I would be in the back shoveling dust and watching those big stell poles holding the top up, and if I seen them a-giving, I'd always holler. That way, he had a buddy to tell him to cut the machine off and jump. When we were cutting coal I got down on my knees and I shoveled that coal just like any man. I really helped him.

Some of the men would come out in the morning and find out I'd been in there that night, and they'd be a-cursing and going on. But the boss, he was a wonderful man. He said, "If Ethel didn't help Arthur cut coal last night, there wouldn't be no work today. What would you think if your payday came up small?" Some of them said, "I'd just quit." And he said, "Go ahead. I'm not going to tell her not to. She can work any time she wants to." He told them he'd call it a great honor that a woman would come into the mines to work, so they could work and make bread for their families. After a while, they didn't mind my being there a bit. Some of them would quit, and then think better of it and come back in two or three months' time.

When I was working regularly, I worked about three nights a week. I would work all night from about seven in the evening until about five in the morning. I would go home and build a fire in the coal cookstove and boil me a big kettle of water, and take a bath and clean up. When I washed my things out, they'd be just as black as that dust I shoveled. Then, quick as I got cleaned, I'd start cooking breakfast for the day shift [boarders] and the school kids. I'd get the day shift off to the mines, and the kids off to school, then I'd get the beds made and the dishes washed and the cows fed, then cook breakfast for my husband about nine o'clock. Then I'd go to the field, or do whatever I had to do. I never did need much sleep

One thing I'm bothered with [now] is smothering a lot. I call it sinuses. There has been a lot to suggest it was black lung. They've kidded me and told me I should go get x rays. But there's no record of me working. They just put a bonus in Arthur's pay. So I wouldn't have anything to show.

When these [new] women went to working in the mines, it was terrible what people would say. I don't blame women a bit for going where they can make the most, if they have to get out and work for a living.

See, I know what it's all about. I've been back in there, and I know. I just say, "Lord bless em! Help em! Don't let them get hurt."

Sandra Bailey

As women miners with experience move up from shoveling the belt to becoming equipment operators, foremen and safety inspectors, one of the most coveted positions is with the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) as a federal mine inspector.

Thirty-three-year-old Sandra Bailey of Mayking, Kentucky, was one of six women hired nationwide in the agency's coal mine inspection program. The other five were part of an "upward mobility" program that allows clerical workers to gain inspection training. With nearly six years' underground experience, Bailey is the only woman with mining experience training to become an inspector.

Sandra Bailey with her children. *photo by Marat Moore*

I have been a waitress, school bus driver, and have worked in a shoe factory and a school lunchroom. There's very little work here other than the mines. I put in applications for a year, just on a lark. In the meantime, I found a CETA job with Senior Citizens, driving a van. I really enjoyed the work, but it didn't pay anything at all.

At first I was afraid of the grueling work, afraid I couldn't do it, although I'd always felt that I was emotionally and physically strong. But I did it. After the first week, I felt pretty confident that I was going to make it.

At first I was so ignorant about the mines that I didn't know the danger. It took awhile, maybe three weeks or a month, and then one night I was sitting there thinking while on a break that there must be a thousand ways to kill yourself in a coal mine. To get killed. Just by touching the trolley wire, just by putting your hand in a belt roller. Just by so many things that you had to constantly be on your guard against. I was lucky that people tried to teach me the safe way to do things. I became more and more interested in safety, and I started studying up at home on pamphlets that the federal inspector would leave around.

I'd see people run through unbolted breaks sometimes, for short cuts, and I would try to tease them into realizing the seriousness of it. I'd say, "You sure did save yourself a lot of steps. We could have been off work tomorrow for your funeral."

I used to take those very same chances. I really did. And I didn't realize the seriousness of it until one night when I was running the scoop and went through an unbolted break, and just as I went through it, it fell in. That really made an impression. So I became more and more safety-conscious, and was on the safety committee at our local, the first female officeholder in the local.

When a man quit the safety committee to become a federal inspector, he suggested to the president that I be appointed to fill his unexpired term. The president was a little bit leery of such a radical move, and he asked the membership to speak up if they had feelings against it. No one spoke up. It was carried by the majority.

Being on the safety committe was really frustrating, because you have all kinds of responsibility and no authority. You have no authority to enforce the law. You have to convince people to do what you would like to be done. Sometimes I felt I was in the middle with everybody against me. It was a good education.

I'd worked about a year and a half when the first-aid team got started. When they came and asked if I'd be interested, I asked why we couldn't have a mixed team. But they said when they had tried the year before, some of the wives made their husbands quit when a woman came to the practices. They decided that mixed groups would not work, because of arterial pressure points and such.

It was wonderful, getting to know the women, becoming better friends. We had all been isolated from each other at different mines – within a general 50-mile radius, but totally isolated from each other. It was wonderful to be able to talk about the same problems that we all had. And we really worked hard that year. There was such team spirit.

We should have won first place. As it was, we won second. But one of the judges told me that we deserved first but they were afraid to give it to a woman's team, especially a first-year team.

I had been working real hard to get a district safety inspector job, like the woman in District 17. But then, very unexpectedly, after three years of applying, and struggling, and begging, the federal people finally hired me. This has been my goal. I began thinking about it when I was on the first-aid team. The judges were federal inspectors, and I was impressed with their knowledge. I needed to establish some goals, and I thought that would be a good one, to become a federal mine inspector. Now I work in the lab with dust samples, and only get out in the field occasionally. That's been a big change and a big disappointment. I just couldn't settle in to working with the government at first. I had achieved this apple pie in the sky that I had been working for for so many years, and suddenly I was without goals. But I definitely won't stay where I'm at.

I've never, ever done office work before. You have so much independence as a miner, to do the job, not necessarily at your own pace, but to choose your priorities as to what to do first with very little supervision. You can see the fruit of your labor, it's visible. Whereas answering the phone all day, you can't see anything visible that you've done.

And I miss watching the coal being cut. It is really beautiful. I really miss seeing production. And I began to realize how many, many women there were out there who would like to have the same opportunity that I was having, but the opportunity was just not there without a little encouragement. One night at work, it just hit me that if this hadn't come along, I would probably still be a waitress, or working in a school lunchroom.

I will never ever be the same person I was before I went underground, never in a thousand years. I feel now that whatever life has to thrust upon me, I can handle it. I'll just never be the same again.

Dan Howard, Bonnie Howard and Martha Howard.
photo by Marat Moore

Bonnie Howard

In Ermine, Kentucky, Bonnie Howard was raised with the old ways, by grandparents who cared for her until she was of age to go to work and care for them. It was a mutual relationship that has continued into her marriage, and Bonnie sees nothing unusual in the fact that her husband, Dan, does all the housework and child care for their daughter, Martha, while she puts in her eight hours underground on the "hoot owl" shift.

"When one gets sick, the other works," she explains, and points out that Dan, also a miner, worked until illness forced him to leave work. Martha is accustomed to seeing her father wash the dishes, sweep the floors and work the garden, while her mother leaves the house for the mines and a union paycheck.

Bonnie was still sleeping the afternoon I arrived, unannounced, on their doorstep, but Dan ushered me into the bedroom and we began talking. Dan and Martha shared in the conversation the way they shared the workload because, as Bonnie put it, "That's just the way we do things."

As far as working, I've done a little bit of everything. I've been a waitress, cook, secretary, school bus driver, butcher, nurse's aid, house cleaner. Now a coal miner. I started work when I was a freshman in high school. I worked on the weekends and after school.

I never imagined me a-goin into the mines. What got me into it, I was working as a butcher, and came up from being a trainee, but my pay didn't raise none. Right there, that killed me ever being a butcher.

At the first mine I worked at, they asked me why did I want to start working at the mines. And I told them I was a butcher, and my work went up but my pay didn't get any higher. My husband was sick, I had a child in school, and I needed a job that paid good money.

I guess it was about a week later, they told me, we have to hire a woman, and your work record is good. I went straight into the mines. They hired me on a Friday, and I went to work that Sunday night. I'd never been in a mine before. I was nervous and scared. I kept watching the top and the sides so hard I got a crook in my neck. Going in on the mantrips, I kept my head way down below my knees. I was really scared, to tell you the truth. Still am scared.

I never told Dan I was going into the mines until after I took my physical. He about swallowed his tongue. He thought I was kidding. But he told me, if you can be a butcher, I know you can be a coal miner.

They worked me real hard at first, to see if I was man enough to take it, as the old saying goes. The first 30 days, they about bruted me to death. I didn't think I could stand it. I worked every day. I'd be so tired that I'd come home and could hardly put one foot in front of the other.

If it wasn't for my husband, I don't think I would have made it. That's the truth. He done all the housework. He took care of the kid. He did all the cooking, all of it. All I did was come home and bathe and go to bed. I'd hit that bed and they wouldn't wake me up, because I'd be so grouchy they couldn't stand me.

Dan: It's a shame, a shame, the way the men talk about a woman going into the mines around here. A shame.

Bonnie: They start lies on you. The women were jealous. I knew one woman, made her husband move on day shift. She didn't want him to work with women. They had day shift full of men whose wives were jealous.

Dan: The way I see it, you're buddies. She's my buddy if we work side by side. I don't care what she wears, whether it's a two-piece bathing suit. When she does her job and I do my job, that's it. We get the same pay.

Bonnie: After I got laid off from the first mine, I was a rockpicker. I picked rock right beside of Dan. Me and him worked together. There was one other woman. Dan was the one helped to get that woman on. A lot of the other men were against women.

Dan: My boss said if he had five men like Bonnie, he could run 500 tons of coal a day.

Martha: I thought it was a new experience for Mom. I thought it was neat. When she told me, I said, "Hey, my mom's a miner!" But I was really scared the first two weeks.

Bonnie: She still has nightmares. She started that when I first started working, having nightmares and crying for me, afraid I'd get hurt.

Most people, they don't explain mine safety to their kids. I tell her, if you do your job cautiously and right, you are not likely to get hurt. But I ain't saying you won't.

Martha: I don't think I have enough nerve to go in there like my mom does. I ain't got enough backbone. I keep a light on at night and everything.

Bonnie: Well, the reason I'm in there working is to keep her out. I want her to have the education that I didn't have. I'd like to see her make a doctor, if it's possible. And as long as I'm working, I'm going to see that it's possible.

Lord, if I didn't have Dan, I don't think I could survive it. I'd just have to let everything go until the weekend. I'd be so tired. I never worry about my kid, whether she's hurt or anything, because I know Dan will take care of her. He does all the housework. When I go to bed, the house is clean. Even if he works, he comes in, and we do it together. You may think it's fantasy, but it's the truth.

Dan: I think a husband should help his wife. I don't give a heck what that woman does. If a man comes in after working all day, and the woman's been there at the house, she's got more work there than the man who's gone out to a job. If I come in from work, I still help her. I grew up under my mommy's coattails. She taught me how to do it. I can bake anything I want to, cook anything, sew anything, mop, wax, clean windows, anything.

Bonnie: It's 50-50 in a marriage, if it is a marriage. I'm in there to make a living for my young'un and my husband if he's sick. If I was sickly, he'd take care of me, so what's the difference in me taking care of him?□

Marat Moore is a writer and photographer who worked in the mines of West Virginia.

COAL EMPLOYMENT PROJECT

by Sue Thrasher

Thanks to a legal, organizing and media strategy, coal mining jobs have been opened to women.

The Coal Employment Project (CEP) is a story of success. In 1973, there were virtually no women miners. Today, there are over 3,000. The organization has grown from a one-person project of a public interest research group into an independent organization with a full-time staff of five. It publishes a monthly newsletter, runs training programs for women miners and is now developing a program to teach mine personnel how better to work with women miners. For the past three years, it has held an annual conference for women miners and their supporters. Having successfully gained access for women in the mining industry, it has increasingly turned its attention toward specific issues that affect women on the job: health and safety – especially reproductive hazards and rights – sexual harassment and child care.

Although it was paid scant attention by the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) during its early efforts, a mailgram blitz by women miners and their supporters in 1978 resulted in the support by the Executive Board of the UMWA of a resolution to widen opportunities for women in the mines. In 1979 a similar mailgram campaign persuaded the union to pull its international convention from Florida because of the state's failure to ratify the ERA. Approximately 35 percent of women miners attend union meetings as compared to 12 percent for male miners. Three women have been elected local union presidents, and last year nine women were among the 1,200 delegates elected to the international convention. Women members and their supporters are now

pushing for a maternity/paternity clause in the union contract: new mothers and new fathers would be able to take up to two months' unpaid leave around the birth of a child.

Until now, CEP has concentrated on the Eastern coalfields, but as large-scale stripping of Western coal reserves appears more and more inevitable, it has moved to expand its base nationally. The newest women miners' support team is the Lady Miners of Utah, and CEP plans to open a Western office. They also hope to establish ties with women in other mining industries such as malignium, potash and copper. In addition, CEP is turning to the international arena. Last year a delegation from CEP visited China, and the organization has begun to establish contacts with would-be women miners in several other countries.

Perhaps most importantly, CEP is beginning to transfer its model of attacking the coal industry to other industries. It is now cooperating with the Southeast Women's Employment Coalition in a concentrated effort to apply its successful organizational and legal strategies to the nation's road construction industry. However, since the cooperative road construction effort began in November, 1980, Executive Order 11246, the key to the CEP strategy, has been considerably weakened by the Reagan administration. The order places companies that hold federal contracts under an affirmative action obligation. Without 11246, hopes for the road campaign have dimmed, as have other possible industry-wide efforts.

The success of the organization is a tale of hard work, popular grassroots support and a group of smart women using whatever resources they could muster at the right time and in the right way.

It started in 1977 when an east Tennessee coal operator (and criminal court judge) responded to a request for a tour of an underground mine by the East Tennessee Research Corporation, a public interest group, by saying:

> *"Can't have no woman going underground. The men would walk out; the mine would shut down. Now, if you fellows want to come, that is one thing, but if you insist on bringing her, forget the whole thing."*

According to Betty Jean Hall, one of CEP's founders, that "got people to thinking," and the following day she received a call in Washington, D.C., asking her to do a "little research." The following is her description of the efforts to build the Coal Employment Project.

The first thing we did was get the summary reports that all federal contractors are required to file with the federal government about their employment patterns. And sure enough, the most recent report showed that 99.8 percent of all coal miners were men, and that 97.8 percent of all people in the coal industry *including* secretaries and file clerks were men.

We then started tracking down the laws and how they were enforced; we came up with two or three that were really obvious. The one that really struck our eye was Executive Order 11246, a presidential directive which said that companies holding contracts with the federal government including TVA – which meant most of the medium- and large-size coal companies – are under an affirmative action obligation. Another was Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the state human rights acts. There are other protections, but these were the basic ones.

Executive Order 11246 appeared to be a way of attacking the whole industry. If that law were really being enforced, things would be very different from what they appeared on paper. We finally tracked down the official who was in charge of enforcing the executive order for the coal industry and he said, "Young lady, I can assure you there is no discrimination in the coal industry – race or sex." That was the day I knew we were on to something!

But I didn't know quite *what* we were on to, because I had a couple of concerns. I had grown up in eastern Kentucky and I never knew a woman who had expressed an interest in a coal mining job. We might have had a great legal case, but what was the point if there weren't people who really wanted the jobs.

The second question I had was what we called the brute strength issue. You know, we still have those images of picks and shovels, and could the average woman really do the job? But we decided that there was enough that we had to explore and see what we were on to.

Within a couple of weeks I was getting more and more intrigued. After I had sent Neil McBride of the East Tennessee Research Corporation some of the basic information, he called and said, "Would you be willing to go on a fundraising trip to New York?" I had never done this in my life, had never been in a foundation, and had no idea about writing proposals. But we took off and went to New York to about five foundations. I will never forget going into the Ford Foundation with all of its brass stands for telephones! But it was a very comfortable situation for me because Neil had experience in this area and I was learning from him. We came away with a couple of good leads, and by mid-summer we had a grant of $5,000 from the Ms. Foundation to start the Coal Employment Project. That September I moved to Jacksboro, Tennessee, and spent the first few months tracking down some of the women miners we had heard

Participants at the Second National Conference of Women Coal Miners, 1980, Beckley, West Virginia. *photo by Marat Moore*

about.

If I ever had any doubts about what we were on to, they melted away when I started meeting women miners. It became real clear to me that in the opinion of these women there were some jobs in the mines that some women couldn't do; there were also some jobs in the mines that men couldn't do, and there probably were *no* jobs in the mines that *some* women couldn't do.

The other question I kept focusing on was: "Are you an exception to the rule? Are there other women here who would be interested in these jobs?" Invariably they would say, "I could tell you 50 women here tonight that would love to get these jobs." When you asked the women where they got the idea to apply, they would either say, "I heard on radio or TV that the coal companies were going to have to hire women," or, "Oh, I had a girlfriend who got a job in the mine and I figured if she could do it, I could do it." We started realizing how important publicity was about these cases. The more publicity, the more women started thinking about it.

One woman that particularly impressed me was a woman named Mavis from eastern Kentucky. She had been married for a number of years, had four teenage children, and had recently been divorced and come home to eastern Kentucky. She *had* to get a job; she had no child support coming in. She got a job operating a posting machine in a bank and had a long drive each day to make minimum wage, and she soon realized that she was not going to be able to support four children on minimum wage.

She heard on television that a particular company was going to have to hire women, and she applied. She kept pursuing it, and going back demanding to know why she wasn't being hired because she knew that men were being hired with no experience.

She went to talk to one official and he said, "Well, working in a mine is just too hard for a woman." First she got mad, but then had to smile, thinking about the time when her two youngest were in diapers and they had no indoor plumbing. And she told him, "If you can imagine taking two babies and diapers down to wash in the stream and bringing them back every morning, don't you think I have worked in conditions as bad as a muddy mine!" And she got the job.

She told me about the tension the first day she went to work, and that clearly nobody wanted her on their crew. Finally she spotted a fellow she had gone to high school with and said, "Look, you've got five kids; I've got four. I think I can do this job. If I can't, I will get out, but I want to try it." And he asked to have her on his crew. From that day forward for the first time in her life Mavis has had a job that she really enjoys. For the first time in her life she gets up and looks forward to going to work, and she is finally able to support

those children in a way she feels good about. For her it has really been a good thing.

Mavis was the one that made me realize we were on to something important. From that evening on, there was no question in my mind about what we were doing.

In October of 1977, we started gearing up to file a big complaint with the Office of Federal Contract Compliance, the agency within the Department of Labor charged with enforcing Executive Order 11246. First I put together a study that documented the extent of discrimination against women in the coal industry. By May, 1978, we were ready to file our complaint. Based on what we had learned about the value of publicity, we held a press conference in Knoxville, Tennessee. We had two women miners there in their hard hats, steel-toed boots and safety belts, as well as a woman who had been trying to get a mining job – all explaining why they didn't want their daughters and sisters to have to face the same kind of problems they were facing. Then we announced the filing of the complaint against 153 coal mines and companies that represented over 50 percent of the nation's coal production. We asked the Department of Labor to do two things: investigate all the companies we had listed in our complaint, and target the nation's entire coal industry for a concentrated review based on apparent patterns of sex discrimination documented in our study.

The *New York Times* carried the story; it hit the wire services and was in a lot of major publications. Within a matter of days we started getting phone calls and letters from women who had been trying to get jobs; it had never occurred to them that they had a legal case. Three weeks after we filed the complaint, the Department of Labor announced they would investigate our complaint company by company as well as target the entire coal industry for a concentrated review.

The first big settlement came in December of 1978 when Consolidation Coal Company, the nation's second largest coal producer, signed a conciliation agreement agreeing to pay $370,000 in back pay to 78 women who had been denied mining jobs in Virginia, southern West Virginia and Tennessee.

We didn't know any of these women at the time. The beauty of using the Executive Order is that it was the only route we could go without knowing exactly who these women were. The *only* way a small group like ours could take on the nation's entire coal industry was to get the government to do our work for us. So we convinced the Department of Labor that we had a solid, valid complaint, that we had done a good bit of their homework for them, and basically developed their case for them. They took over responsibility for pursuing the complaint and negotiating a settlement with our input. The settlements are still coming down and the investigations are still going on. Other agreements and settlements brought on more and more publicity which got more and more women lined up for the jobs.

According to federal records, there was no such thing as a woman miner in this country until 1973, when the first woman was hired. In fact, we know that women worked as miners in small family operations during World War II and as gold miners in the 1800. But statistically speaking, there were no women miners.

When we started there were less than a thousand women miners – very scattered and isolated. The women that did work were generally the only woman on the crew, usually the first woman in the mine. They had virtually no contact with other women miners. We discovered as time went on that these women were facing incredible problems.

When I first went to Tennessee, I thought if we couldn't get the government to take this over, there was nothing a couple of us in Tennessee could do. In fact, we discovered there was a heck of a lot we could do on our own, like helping women organize local support groups. We started getting phone calls from women a long distance away asking for help. We would say, "Are you the only one? Are other women having this problem?" Invariably, they would say, "No, it's not just me, there is a whole bunch." And we would say, "We can't take care of this for you, but if you will get these women together, we will come and work with you to organize your own support group to solve your own problems." That started happening a lot of places, and now a number of very active support groups are banded together into a larger, umbrella organization called the Coal Mining Women's Support Team – Coal Employment Project's sister organization.

We are one of the few organized groups in the country that has dealt with an entire industry. It was all done one step at a time. When we went on the first fundraising trip, we had never written a proposal. We'd never filed a complaint like this. We'd never done a press release. We had never put together a conference. We learned everything as we went. We realized early on that even with the federal government coming to bat for us, a small staff could never take on the entire nation's coal industry. But with all those women out there, organized all over the coal fields, together we could do an awful lot!□

Sue Thrasher works for the Highlander Research and Education Center. She is a former staff member of Southern Exposure.

COALMINING

ORGANIZATIONS

Coal Employment Project

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FILMS/VIDEOTAPES

Women Coal Miners

A 45-minute film available for a rental fee of $50. Order from: Appalshop Films, PO Box 743, Whitesburg, KY 41858, (606) 633-5708.

We Dig Coal: A Portrait of Three Women

A 58-minute film available in 16-mm or video-cassette format for a rental fee of $70. Order from: Dorothy McGee, Executive Producer, 315 S. Church St., Charleston, WV 25414, (304) 725-4746.

MISCELLANEOUS

Coal Employment Project Newsletter

The newsletter of the Coal Employment Project (address above) is available for a $5 subscription fee ($8 with membership).

Also available from CEP are T-shirts bearing the slogan "Coal Miners Can Dig It Too" ($6.50 each) and a calendar entitled "Coal Mining Women: 1982," ($5.00 each). Many of the photographs shown here are included in the calendar.

See Resources on Legal Rights, p. 106 and Job Safety and Health, p. 122.

Southeast Women's Employment Coalition

In mid-summer of 1979, 40 women from nine states in the Southeast gathered in Tennessee for a meeting unique in time and focus. The subject of the meeting was "Women and Work," and the participants were leaders and pioneers in struggles for economic equity for women in the South. The energy at the meeting sparked a resolution toward developing an ongoing collective effort that became the Southeast Women's Employment Coalition (SWEC).

SWEC is a network of 14 community-based organizations in six Southern states. At the local level, each of these groups provides a variety of services to women employed or seeking employment. SWEC is a commitment by these women and organizations to coordinate regional organizing and advocacy efforts in the areas of job equity and economic opportunity. "SWEC is an engine for a collective vision whose practicality is rooted in local organizing and leadership development," says SWEC coordinator Leslie Lilly.

SWEC strategies include building a regional network through a newsletter and regular meetings; education through sponsoring workshops on subjects such as federal contract compliance and fundraising; preparing women for leadership roles through the SWEC Leadership Development Program; and taking on organizing such as the federal highway construction campaign.

The SWEC Leadership Development Program provides direct training and support to women who are emerging as leaders in their communities in efforts for economic justice for women. SWEC provides a leadership development program tailored to each individual and her specific educational and skill needs.

The highway construction campaign illustrates how SWEC weaves together the experiences and needs of member groups into a fabric that maximizes the impact of a collective strategy. Many SWEC affiliates have programs that train and place women in nontraditional jobs in construction and the building trades. When these programs simply shared their experiences in training women for such jobs, they never touched the reality of discrimination and the flagrant violation by the companies of federal orders to hire more women. To attack this problem, SWEC prepared a massive assault targeting the federal construction industry. The model used was one developed by a SWEC affiliate, the Coal Employment Project, which had successfully opened the previously all-male coal mining industry to women (see page 47 for a profile of the Coal Employment Project.)

Through a coordinated research effort, information documenting widespread discrimination was collected, analyzed and released in four simultaneous news events sponsored by SWEC and its member groups around the South. Following the release of the SWEC study, two legal complaints – naming 32 of the South's largest federal-aid contractors and 52 state Transportation Departments – were filed with the Office of Federal Contract Compliance of the Department of Labor and the U.S. Department of Transportation. Seventeen independent organizations which work for economic justice joined SWEC in this action, taken in November, 1980. To ensure the necessary monitoring and documentation of the experiences of the would-be women construction workers, SWEC secured a private grant to launch the Women's Asphalt Alliance. Subcontracts were negotiated with three local organizations to carry out this special project.

In other organizing efforts, SWEC sponsored a meeting in February, 1981, to explore potential areas of cooperation between labor unions and women's employment groups. A meeting is planned for January, 1982, to broaden the SWEC network and re-evaluate organizing and advocacy struggles in light of the Reagan administration and the erosion of equal employment protections.

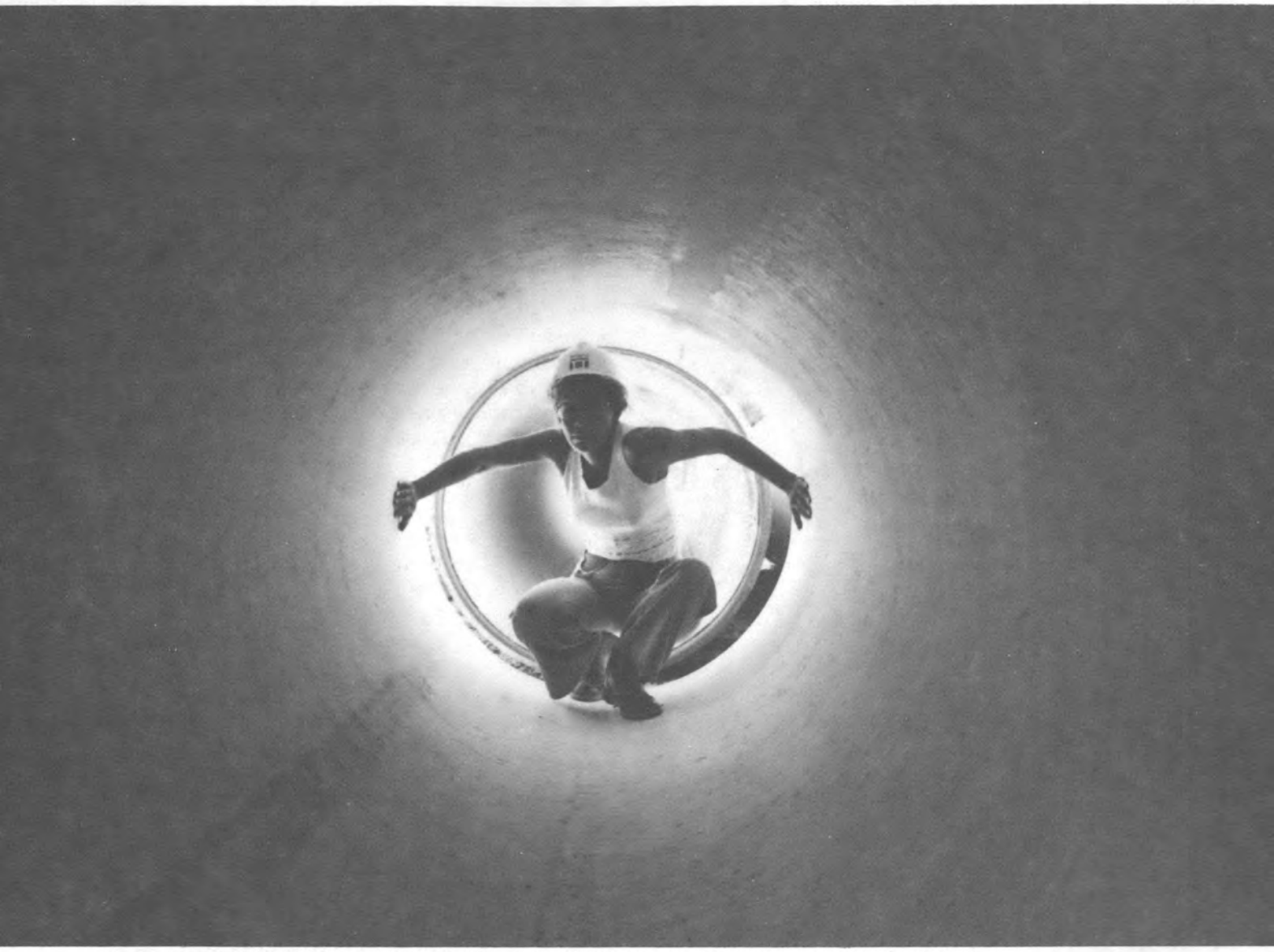
To join the SWEC network, write or call:

Rt.5 Pisgah Pike
Versailles, KY 40383
(606) 873-6440

A newsletter subscription is $3. T-shirts bearing the slogan "Ladies Asphalt Auxiliary S.E. Women Pave the Way" are available for $6. State size and color. Available in small, medium, large and extra large; red, black, light blue and green.

– Tobi Lippin

Doris Magan with her shift at Southern Appalachian Coal's Leas Creek Mine. photo by Marat Moore



Rosemary de Leon, first NWEE participant hired in a construction job by Houston Bridge and Engineering Company. photo by Becky Chavarria-Gomez

NEW FOUNDATIONS

by Janie Paleschic

Single mothers are often limited to a choice between a minimum wage job or welfare. A program for chicana women in Texas strikes at the heart of the matter: the need for income sufficient to meet the family's needs.

Rosemary de Leon boarding a backhoe tractor.

At the age of 27, Dora Guerra found herself the head of a household that includes two small daughters. One girl suffers from cerebral palsy, and about twice a year the child undergoes surgery. "I got separated all of a sudden. I never expected it. And I found myself on welfare and what they give you is very little. I couldn't survive on that money."

Mary Dominguez, also 27, divorced her husband and must care for three young children. She quit her last job because of sexual harassment. "I tried, but I couldn't get a job any other place. It's hard. I'm getting a hundred dollars a week from unemployment. But still I need insurance for my two children."

Both women applied to the Low Income Women's Employment Model Program of National Women's Education and Employment, Inc. (NWEE), which targets single parents receiving government payments, displaced homemakers and unemployed and underemployed women, particularly family heads of Hispanic background.

Upon acceptance into the program, Guerra and Dominguez began an intense three-week training to help prepare them for employment. They assessed their skills, began planning careers and developed positive attitudes toward the possibilities of employment. Instructors and counselors, many of whom are NWEE alumnae, aided them in organizing an individual employment plan which includes a commitment to lifetime employment, developing a resume and financial counseling. They received academic and career testing and assertiveness training. They practiced job interviews in classes where the students acted out the roles of prospective employer and employee. If job openings came up during training, NWEE drove the women to the interviews. The fourth week of the program concentrated on job placement. Instructors discussed child care and its problems with the class. More help with meeting the need for affordable, trustworthy child care is on the way.

This is the story of an employment project in San Antonio, Texas, that attempts to get women off welfare rolls and into jobs – and succeeds. It is the story of the battle waged against the glaring inadequacies of the welfare system. But most importantly, this is the story of the women who go through the program. The women who alone face the difficulty of feeding, clothing and sheltering their children. The women who wait in the food stamp lines and still run out of food in three weeks. The women who may not finish high school because they drop out to enter low-wage service industry jobs to help feed their younger brothers and sisters. The women, mostly chicana, who have seen lifelong discrimination as women and as members of an exploited ethnic group. They don't see the subsistence level wages offered them as an alternative to welfare, which at least pays for the children's doctor.

Welfare recipients face a third barrier to employment: the stereotype of the welfare recipient who has it made. She is unemployable because she doesn't want to work. Nothing could be further from the truth, as Lupe Anguiano, the founder of NWEE, discovered.

Anguiano – migrant worker's daughter, United Farm Workers organizer, founding member of the National Women's Political Caucus, former nun with a master's degree in administration and education, welfare reform activist – began developing the program in 1973 after she moved from California to San Antonio. She accepted a job as executive director of the Southwest Regional Office for the Spanish Speaking under the sponsorship of the National Council of Catholic Bishops. Making welfare reform a priority of the office, Anguiano moved from housing project to housing project, living for seven months with women and

children receiving public assistance.

She accompanied women to welfare offices, doctors' offices and food stamp offices, experiencing with them the frustration of trying to find a babysitter and transportation and then waiting sometimes a full day to accomplish the goal. They were met by agency employees who seemed to Anguiano indifferent, and even hostile. Not surprisingly, she found the women even more critical of welfare than its conservative opponents.

"What happens is that a woman steps into that office, and immediately that's her doom," Anguiano said. "If she dares move out of that little web, they're going to take one thing or this thing away from her.

"Women have been socialized to be dependent, and they walk into that situation, and they really get destroyed by it," she said. "But that's how welfare is. It's just an empire that destroys the lives of women – of young women and their families." Six women attempted suicide during the time Anguiano lived in public housing. Four succeeded.

In an economic system which feeds on the lives of workers, chicanas are devoured. U.S. government figures show that almost half of all Mexican-American women who are 16 years of age or older do not go beyond the eighth grade in school. The language barriers they face at school and on the job discourage some from finding work. Other factors which tend to discourage chicanas are the low occupational status offered them, the high unemployment rate for Mexican-American women and the lack of child care, especially the lack of affordable facilities. In 1970 one of every eight Mexican-American families subsisted on public assistance, more than twice the rate for all U.S. families. Chicana feminist Minta Vidal notes that "Raza women suffer a triple form of oppression: as members of an oppressed nationality, as workers *and* as women."

A Mexican-American woman who wants to work outside the home not only must overcome discrimination in the workplace but also restrictions within her own culture. Necessity, tradition and religion combine to force her into the role of wife and mother.

Gloria Reyes, 47, NWEE's employment counselor who completed the NWEE training herself in 1979, said, "A lot of the women, and I am referring to the Latin women, because I am Latin, are held back because of our culture, our tradition, our religion. When you got married, you got married forever. And we are prime victims, because we are geared to believe that the man is lord master."

Reyes tells of one young woman who was recruited through NWEE for the Houston police force. "She was embarrassed to tell me that her parents said that only bad girls left the house. And she said, 'What can I do, I have to listen to my parents.' "

Norma Gagne at the wheel of a front-end loading machine.

NWEE was in the process of developing six handbooks to aid other communities in setting up similar projects when funding from the U.S. Department of Labor was cut. The handbooks have been written, and Anguiano hopes money can still be found to publish them. For more information, write NWEE at P.O. Box 9385, San Antonio, TX 78204.

NWEE succeeds because it takes care to address the special needs of the women it serves. Again and again, NWEE women point to their new-found self-esteem, the talents and strengths they discovered with the encouragement of staff members like Reyes and with the support of their classmates. Ann Marie Ilva, a classmate of Guerra and Dominguez, explains, "Before, you just went out and made an application, and that's it, and then you realized, 'Hey, they don't give me this, and they don't give me that.' But you didn't know you were supposed to ask, that you could ask."

Often these discoveries take place in the "Magic Circle," a peer-group counseling method of self-discovery which forms a basic component of the program, helping the women develop self-reliance and assertiveness.

The Magic Circle has been a part of NWEE and its San Antonio project since its beginnings in a small group of women calling themselves Mujeres Unidas (United Women), sponsored by the Southwest Regional Office for the Spanish Speaking. Mujeres Unidas was formed in 1973 for "self-help" by women receiving public assistance payments and living in the housing projects Anguiano toured. Anguiano's stay in the projects and a survey indicated that the majority of families in the projects were headed by women and that they had skills and talents used only in volunteer work. The contacts Anguiano and the surveyors made led to house meetings. Mujeres Unidas grew out of the discussions in the women's apartments.

Lupe Anguino, the founder of NWEE, at left.

In November, 1973, the group declared a well-publicized "Let's Get Off Welfare" campaign and sent back their welfare checks in anger. The women's pleas for a better life were met in part by the San Antonio Kiwanis Club, which gave scholarships to train the women for jobs, forming the first partnership between low-income women and private business, a partnership Anguiano hopes to duplicate throughout Texas and the United States.

In addition to involving the business community by asking it to pay for training, NWEE brings area employers into its classrooms where, often for the first time, they meet women on welfare. They must confront their own biases and replace them with the realities faced by poor women at the same time as they conduct field trips and workshops for the women. Changing entrenched attitudes about the poor and welfare by involving the community, forcing the more powerful to "touch the lives of people," as Anguiano says, is one of the keys to NWEE's success in placing low-income women in jobs. Business people who participate in NWEE training and placement gain a stake in the lives of women they can no longer ignore or write off as welfare chiselers.

"I decided what I was going to do was concentrate on working with the women and with employers. What I do now is I go into communities and I meet with the chambers of commerce, I meet with employers, I meet with low-income women. I meet with people who are really concerned with improving the quality of life for both women and their children. And together we work on our model," Anguiano said.

The NWEE Alumnae Association, made up of the program's graduates, worked for months to come up with a proposal to solve the working mother's biggest dilemma, child care. NWEE instructor and graduate Pauline Pezina says, "Proper child care is the number one need women have if they are to succeed in obtaining and retaining employment. We all want to better ourselves – we want to raise our children with dignity and respect." Pezina marshaled the energies of the association to develop a plan and contact funding sources. Graciela Olivarez, former director of the U.S. Community Services Administration, secured funding to train 20 women as child development specialists before she left the Carter administration. San Antonio College will train the women on the job and in the classroom. In 1982 the alumnae association plans to form a nonprofit corporation to continue the child-care program, which will

Socorro Portillo, who completed the program in February, 1979, with her son. Portillo was selling furniture to make ends meet. Now she is vice president of Account Masters, Inc., and hopes to someday own her own company.

allow some women to care for children in their homes.

NWEE often channels its students into better-paying nontraditional jobs, including construction work. Norma Gagne, 39, the divorced mother of three, and Rosemary de Leon, 34, the divorced mother of five, tell two nontraditional success stories. On welfare, Gagne felt "as though the walls were closing in on me." She became a certified front-end loader operator with NWEE's help, and says now, "My job seemed especially rewarding when my son told me that he would like to do the same kind of work that I do." De Leon, who has a sixth-grade education, tried to support five children on $135 a month. Now she drives a backhoe tractor, makes close to $200 a week and says, "I feel as though I've really done something."

Since 1973, about 1,600 San Antonio women have completed the program. Ninety percent gained employment, and 82 percent still worked at those jobs after a year. At the same time, federal work incentive (WIN) programs in some locations placed only 0.08 to 11 percent of participating welfare recipients in permanent employment.

The San Antonio project operates with a budget of $226,000, at a current cost of about $800 per participant, 20 women are trained each month. The money comes from the city of San Antonio, approved by the city council. El Paso received funding for a project based on the San Antonio model from Governor Bill Clements's discretionary funds, and a Dallas program has opened with money from the private sector. Denver, Colorado, has started a program, and other communities have requested assistance to follow NWEE's lead.

Although NWEE's solutions reach only a few of the millions of poor, Congress failed to endorse a similar national program. Anguiano proposed that women and their families first be assured an adequate monthly income determined on a state's current cost of living, coupled with training that would assure women of wages they could live on when completed. A third component of her proposal was a provision for support services such as day care, transportation and health insurance.

"The welfare system is so messy, so complicated, so imbedded in making women stay home to take care of their kids and living in poverty," Anguiano said. "You know, I often sit down at night and I close my eyes, and I envision that welfare empire just crumbling down and turning into ashes, and my just going in and burying those ashes. I hate it. I hate that empire with a passion."

Ann Marie Ilva wants to be trained in the child-care program. She has a two-and-a-half-year-old son. "Here they taught me that you don't have to stay where you're at. If you're willing to take that step, and look for something better, you can." Ilva echoes the sentiments of other women who explain one reason why NWEE succeeds while federal and state programs with millions of dollars more don't. Dominguez said, "I see women here, and we each have these problems, and we learn from each other."□

Janie Paleschic is a single working woman raised in Dallas by a mother who usually worked outside the home and a father who tried to form a teachers' union. She is a contributing editor of the Texas Observer *and associate editor of* Austin Women's Networker.

photo courtesy AFSC

COMMON CONCERNS

by Margaret Bacon

Programs in four states are helping women get better jobs and working conditions.

Helping women to get and use information on child care, transportation, apprenticeship and job openings, and workers' rights is the focus of programs for working women sponsored by the American Friends Service Committee in North Carolina, Kentucky, Virginia and West Virginia. These programs share a community-based approach and a common dedication to help women take control over their own lives by building networks and support groups around work issues. Each has organized a local advisory committee made up of black and white local women workers.

Women in the Work Force is located in High Point, North Carolina, where most women work in low-paying jobs in textiles, hosiery and furniture. They have little knowledge about their legal rights, and in most cases lack union protection.

"The factories segregate women into traditional jobs where they are paid low wages, treated in traditional childlike ways, and afforded traditionally little respect, recognition or opportunity," explained Tobi Lippin, former director of the program. "The reality of the risks faced by women working to improve work conditions often limits their vision, making them accept the status quo."

One way to help women in their workplace struggles is to provide them with information. A series of pamphlets produced by Women in the Work Force, *What Every Woman Worker Should Know About . . .* is proving very popular. Pam-

photo courtesy AFSC

phlets cover discrimination, minimum wage and overtime laws, the National Labor Relations Act, unemployment compensation, job safety and health, and sexual harassment. A newsletter, now going to 1,500 people, and a series of workshops have made Women in the Work Force known in the community. Not only women with problems call the program; so do business and government leaders seeking to know what women workers want. In group meetings organized by Women in the Work Force, women discuss problems of sexual harassment and race and sex discrimination.

In furniture manufacturing, High Point's major industry, most women work in the finishing department. In the spring of 1981, Women in the Work Force conducted a survey in finishing to determine what specific health hazards the women face, what chemicals are used, and what health problems they are experiencing. The staff from the project visited more than 60 women at their homes to discuss furniture work and to develop a support network. Researchers on health and safety from the University of North Carolina helped to build a solid base of information.

In June, Women in the Work Force organized a "Furniture Workers Nite" at the public library, attended by workers and supervisors, as well as by people from other organizations. After viewing a slide show, "Your Job or Your Life," talk centered on problems with chemical fumes and wood dust and on how to achieve changes through collective action. The main concern for all turned out to be air quality – the chemical fumes and wood dust.

By encouraging openness and by providing information and technical assistance when needed, Women in the Work Force has been able to help women with problems of safety and health, unemployment compensation and discrimination. As a result, one woman won over $800 in back pay from an employer who had discriminated against her because of her race. Another woman was able to reverse a state Employment Security Commission decision on her unemployment compensation and is now entitled to receive her benefits. And yet another was awarded $1,700 in back pay after a local hotel discriminated against her because of her pregnancy.

In cooperation with a coalition of local groups, including the NAACP, Women in the Work Force is undertaking an effort to ensure affirmative action for women and minority men in local construction projects that are wholly or partially funded by the federal government. In the spring of 1981, the program investigated new federally funded local construction projects and found only one woman working as a laborer or cement finisher, and all the minority men in traditionally low-paid jobs. At a July meeting over 100 women and minority men wanting construction jobs shared discrimination experiences. Information on new construction projects was handed out, and the basis laid for further organizing.

Three other closely linked programs are located in Appalachia, where women live in small towns or isolated hollows and the nearest industrial jobs are several hours away. In these areas, it is impossible for a working women's program to concentrate on any one issue. Women wishing to enter the employment market come for information and have a whole host of problems. They may begin by needing their G.E.D. – General Equivalency

Diploma – to qualify as high school graduates. They may need to borrow gas money to drive the long distances necessary to apply for training or work. Others may need the support of other women in the same situation to gain the courage to stand up to a husband or to parents who are opposed to their working.

At the Logan, West Virginia, office of the New Employment for Women Program (NEW), a woman came in recently who had been deserted by her husband. The utility company had cut off her power, and her children were cold and hungry. After the staff helped her get her power back on and some groceries in the house, they encouraged her to enroll in a G.E.D. program. Next she entered a program to get training to work as a miner. Now she is the first woman miner hired by a local coal company, working in the office above-ground to keep in radio communication with all the miners.

Their efforts are not always appreciated. Recently someone shoved a note under the office door: "Nigger – Nigger Lovers – Commie – Leave." Sarah Davis, a black woman who chairs the advisory committee, is also harassed. Recently one of her children was called to the phone at school and told to hurry home because his mother was dying. He found Sarah in good health when he finally reached home, frightened. On the night of a recent meeting, Sarah returned to her house to find the word "Nigger" scrawled on her front door.

However, during the past year, NEW was successful in placing about 80 women in jobs: 50 in traditional and 30 in nontraditional employment. Of these, 10 are working as deep miners and 20 are in mine-related jobs. NEW and the two other AFSC programs in Appalachia cooperate closely with the Coal Employment Project in facilitating training programs for would-be women miners (see p. 47).

In Hazard, Kentucky, the Women's Employment Information Service (WEIS) works with women who are already employed as waitresses, secretaries, social workers and teachers but want to know how to receive training for higher-paying jobs in the mines or heavy construction. Recently almost 100 women applied for construction jobs with a federal highway project, but only five were hired.

The program also helps women to enter more traditional jobs, and works to develop networks through which local working women give financial and emotional support to each other. When one woman, who was studying heavy equipment operation, came home and found her trailer burned to the ground, another woman drove her around until she found another place to live. Later, when the woman was dropped from the training program because she was absent due to the fire, the others helped her get into a program of training in diesel mechanics.

At Big Stone Gap, Virginia, a strong and active board of black and white low-income women has for two years guided Women's Work World, the third of AFSC's programs in Appalachia. A great deal of Women's Work World's effort has gone into trying to persuade a local community college to offer training programs in nontraditional employment for women. The program has also referred local women to six-month fellowships offered by the Southern Appalachian Leadership Training Program and has been involved in setting up safe houses for abused women. A strong network of support for the victims of domestic violence has developed. Women also help each other in finding and securing nontraditonal jobs.

Custom, discrimination, corporate practice and male prejudice all block women everywhere from having their fair share of good-paying jobs. The chains that bind women are so old that they sometimes become internal as well as external. Programs of support and information-sharing are one way in which women can help each other break those inner chains, and confront the true oppression which surrounds them.□

Margaret Bacon is Assistant Secretary for Information and Interpretation of the American Friends Service Committee.

AFSC Programs for Working Women

Kentucky:
Women's Employment Information Service
200 East Main Street
Hazard, KY 41701
(606) 439-1381
Coordinators: Shirley Gibson and Jeri White

Virginia:
Women's Work World
314 Wood Ave., No. 6 & 8
Big Stone Gap, VA 24219
(703) 523-4981
Coordinator: Gloria Lawson

West Virginia:
New Employment for Women
103½ Bridge Street
Logan, WV 25601
(304) 752-3422
Coordinator: Joan Montgomery

North Carolina:
Women in the Work Force
P.O. Box 2234
High Point, NC 27261
(919) 882-0109
Coordinator: Mardie McCreary

What Every Woman Should Know About . . . discrimination, minimum wage and overtime laws, National Labor Relations Act, job safety and health, sexual harassment and unemployment compensation. . . . These pamphlets are available from Women in the Work Force for 50 cents each, 35 cents each for 50 copies or more. For bulk orders add 15 percent of total for postage and handling.

USING THE TOOLS

by Carolyn Portier

Ethel Gray, at left.

Most untrained black women in the sugar cane country of south Louisiana have three career choices. They can be housekeepers or work in day-care centers. Or they can remain on the plantations planting and scrapping sugar cane, the seasonal, back-breaking hand work considered "women's work."

Ethel Gray was given another choice – and she took it. Today, only five years away from the cane fields of the Rosebud Plantation in Baldwin, Gray is a skilled carpenter and community organizer. The change in Gray's life began in 1976 when she signed on as a VISTA volunteer to the Southern Mutual Help Association in Jeanerette.

"I needed that money," Gray recalls. "I had three children, my husband was gone and the job was regular. It was better than nothing." It was better, she adds, than returning to Rosebud, where she had spent the first 25 years of her life.

Gray became a participant in SMHA's youth training program. She learned to manage money, look for jobs, fill in applications, handle a job interview and, to her surprise, build homes. She was assigned to Wallace Poullard, a skilled carpenter with the self-help housing project, who was to teach her carpentry.

"At first it was very hard. All I kept thinking was: 'This is men's work.' But he kept pushing me. I kept saying I can't and he kept saying I can."

Poullard took the reluctant apprentice on a tour of the homes being constructed. Most of the building was behind schedule. Still considering the work "men's work," and grumbling under her breath, Gray went to work beside the other carpenters.

"Some kind of way we had to finish those houses," she says. "We went to each house to see what needed to be done. We worked on one house after another, and Mr. Poullard, a good teacher, he kept telling me one day I was going to have to take over. Well . . . I would laugh at that!

"The main thing about the job, once you learn how to frame up, is reading the ruler, using the tools. I developed blisters cause I didn't know how to use a hammer. I knew it was men's work, for sure, when I saw those blisters! Mr. Poullard, he say I was just holding that hammer wrong, holding it too tight. After that I didn't have blisters again.

"One day Mr. Poullard say, today we gonna use the gun. Well, I didn't know what he was talking about. I just looked at him like he was nuts when he told me, 'Go get the gun in the truck.' 'I don't fool with no gun,' I told him. He say, 'Girl, not that kind of gun. It's a gun to drive nails into the cement and you gonna shoot it yourself.' When I finally tried it I kinda liked it. I started laying out one room after another and Mr. Poullard he say, 'I'm gonna leave you to do this house alone.'"

In the midst of finishing the first nine houses, and with six houses yet to build, Poullard suffered a stroke and was unable to return to work. Gray became a supervisor. She was confident. She knew what she was doing and enjoyed her work. But the new position brought with it a new problem.

"I'd go to the lumber yard to order materials and the manager, he tried to confuse me. I'd say I want this and he'd try to give me something else, something I didn't need. Like one day I said I needed baseboard molding and shoe molding. He said I didn't need shoe molding, asked me what I was gonna do with it. I had to explain in detail how I was gonna use it. . . . He didn't want to fill that order. He said he wanted the approval of the male supervisor. I told him I was a supervisor and finally he took the order, but he shook his head, saying, 'I don't believe this!'

"Then he came out there on the site to really see what we were doing. He come up to me later and he say, 'You can get a job working for me anytime.' I believe him!"□

NON-TRADITIONAL WORK

ORGANIZATIONS

Wider Opportunities for Women
1511 K St. NW, Suite 345
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 638-3143

This group offers technical assistance in workshops, fundraising and administration and can help local communities and organizations to develop non-traditional job skills training program. Write for a resource list.

Women's Work Force
1649 K St. NW, Fourth Floor
Washington, DC 20006
(202) 638-3143

A special project of WOW, Women's Work Force operates a national clearinghouse of information and resources for non-traditional women's employment programs nationwide. They also advocate effective women's employment programs and favorable affirmative action regulations and legislation on a national level.

Women's Bureau
U.S. Department of Labor
Washington, DC 20213

This government agency collects information about women. They have many helpful resources. Write for a resource list.

NOTE: These organizations operate programs concerning non-traditional jobs for women and are described elsewhere in this issue: American Friends Service Committee projects (see p. 58) in North Carolina (Women in the Work Force), West Virginia (New Employment for Women), Kentucky (Women's Education and Information Service) and Virginia (Women's Work World); Coal Employment Project (p. 47); Southeast Women's Employment Coalition (p. 52); Southern Mutual Help Association (p. 77); Creative Employment Project (p. 16); and NWEE (p. 53).

PUBLICATIONS

Blue Collar Jobs for Women (1979)

Written by Muriel Leder; published by Sunrise Books, New York. This guide to choosing and obtaining blue-collar jobs skills evaluates the fields offering the best job prospects. Available in bookstores for $7.95.

Against the Grain: A Carpentry Manual for Women

A manual on carpentry written by Dale McCormick, a working journeywoman. Available for $7.00 prepaid (with a 40 percent discount for orders of five or more) from: Iowa City Women's Press, 529 S. Gilbert St., Iowa City, IA 52240.

National Directory of Women's Employment Programs: Who They Are, What They Do (1979)

A comprehensive catalogue of organizations which provide (a) job counseling, training and placement; (b) assistance to employers, unions and schools regarding women's employment; and (c) research, organizing and advocacy. Listings are by region, state and city. Available for $7.50 from Women's Work Force (address above).

Tradeswomen: A Quarterly Magazine for Women in Blue-Collar Work

A national magazine put out by and for women working in non-traditional blue-collar jobs. A subscription is $10 per year from: *Tradeswomen* Magazine, PO Box 5755, Berkeley, CA 94705.

FILMS/VIDEOTAPES

Why Not A Woman (1976)

A 26-minute documentary about how women in blue-collar jobs perform as well as men. The film discusses problems women encounter in these jobs. Available for rental for $3.00 from: Pennsylvania Commission on Women, Office of the Governor, 512 Finance Bldg., Harrisburg, PA 17128, (717) 787-3821.

Rosie the Riveter (1980)

A 60-minute documentary about the experiences of women who worked in the skilled trades during World War II. Using clips from newsreels and government films from the period, it focuses on several women's experiences and feelings about their work. Rental of 16-mm copies varies from $65 to $100 (plus $6 handling) according to your usage; purchase price is $695. Available from: Clarity Educational Productions, Inc., PO Box 315, Franklin Lakes, NJ 07417, (201) 891-8240.

See Resources on Coal Mining Women, p. 51, Legal Rights, p. 106, and Sexual Harassment, p. 117.

Joan Griffin *photo by Lloyd Dennis*

WITHOUT FEAR

interview by Clare Jupiter

Joan Griffin is a hospital worker, a single parent, a homeowner and chief shop steward for her union local. She wants to be president of the local.

I've been working for the state for 12 years [at Charity Hospital]. I went to public schools and graduated from Booker T. Washington High School. I worked a couple of days in a factory, then did some campaigning for Moon Landrieu the first time he ran for mayor. After that, I was on the WIN program, which was a program put out by the welfare. At the time I was on welfare, and my little girl was about a month old. This was '68. We got about $35 a month. They had a program they were offering you to continue your education.

I finished the course and did some volunteer work at Charity Hospital for about three days. Meanwhile I had taken the civil service exam, and I was hired after about three days of volunteer work. I worked in that position, which was a Clerk II position, for quite a few years. I was just promoted to an account clerk.

I was the youngest of two children. During my childhood days, my mother and father were separated. I remember my daddy calling us and telling my brother and me, "I got something for you and I'm going to bring it over." We were all excited, waiting to see what it was. He brought us some membership cards in the NAACP. And I remember my mother saying, "Of all the things for him to give you, he's going to give you this, for you to go get in trouble!" People were brainwashed into thinking, "Don't go and cause trouble. But we begged her to let us go, and we picketed Canal Street that year. I was about 12 or 13.

I remember one time we picketed City Hall, and there was a disturbance. This minister was dragged down the steps, and they arrested all of us. I can remember my brother saying, "Let's run." But I was too afraid to run. I was conditioned to

Several weeks after this photo was taken in a hospital basement, this entire wall of files collapsed. photo courtesy American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees.

believe that if I ran the police would shoot me. They locked us all in the paddy wagon and took us down. We didn't stay too long. The NAACP signed us out. But before they did I called my mother crying, "Mama, we're in jail." And it wasn't too long after that that we got out. I think that gave me an early start about fighting for your rights.

Then too, my stepfather worked on the riverfront, and the riverfront has been organized for as long as I can remember.

But the main thing that got me involved, which is what makes every person get involved, was when I got on the job and got into trouble. First thing, you want some help, and the union [American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees] was there.

I had some problems with a supervisor, maybe seven years ago. I was suspended a couple of days. I went to the union. I was just a dues-paying member, I didn't ever at that time go to union meetings or anything like that. But when I got into trouble, I went to the union, and they handled my grievance. After that, I started getting a little more involved.

I still wasn't very, very active. Around '76 or '77, our union got into some financial problems. This man came in, an international staff rep, and encouraged us to get more involved. I started going to some conventions and I started going to classes for grievance handling. By '77 I had been elected shop steward of our section.

I was real anxious for management to do something, and it didn't take them long to do something I thought was wrong. So I tried my hand at it, and I handled a few grievances just at the first step. I started realizing I was getting a lot more respect from management. I was getting known around the job as somebody that would fight for you.

Well, finally there was an opening for chief shop steward, and I was appointed to that position. And I started handling some second- and third-step grievances.

In our local, there's a man president and a man vice president, but these men cannot run that union without ladies. I thought about this time

running for president, or trying to encourage other women to run for president, because we have a pretty decent membership, and I'm sure two-thirds of them are women. We're doing all the work. I've seen times when I've had to handle maybe eight grievances in five days, which takes a lot of time and effort.

I think I would make a good president. I'd like to figure out some way to force management to give us even more respect. One of the things I would like to see our union do, and I would probably try to implement, is child care for working people. Even some men have to take care of their children. Our union has this nice union hall, and with a little work it could be turned into a nursery, one that would not be that expensive on working women. Women have a hard time finding somebody to keep the children. Then if you do, it's costing you maybe a fifth of your income. And if you have more than one child, it might be even more.

When Jaliece was real young, my mother would keep her while I worked. I would hate to bring her out if she had a cold or just if the weather was bad. Sometimes she would have little plays at school, and I couldn't go because I had to go to work. I could remember just wanting to be home in the evening with her when she came home from school. Sometimes, when I was off from work, I would bring her to school in the mornings, and I enjoyed that. And in the evenings I would walk up to the school, or if she came home, I would be there and I would always have some little refreshments.

But I had to work. And it's pretty hard managing off of one income, especially when it's not a very good income, and wanting some of the finer things in life. But we've managed. It's still just Jaliece and myself, and we've always been blessed.

We managed to buy a house, and I'm really proud of that. We were living in a rented half of a double and this landlord didn't fix anything. He raised his rent about every three months. So this particular Saturday morning there was a notice that the rent was going up $25 more, and I was just so disgusted. I got in my car and started riding around the neighborhood and said, I'm going to find me a house *today*. And as I was going down the street I saw a little house that had a for-sale sign in front of it. So I went and looked at it and fell in love with it. And it was in my price range. I asked the agent how much did I need. He told me $1,200. That didn't seem so bad. I had some money saved.

We went to the mortgage company, and they told me I needed $1,200 more for closing costs in the bank in two weeks. So of course I didn't have $1,200 more. But the agent was very nice, and he loaned me $1,000.

And I paid him back. I worked in the [Super] Dome, I swept that Dome – they were paying $3.50 an hour – many a night, after I finished working at the hospital. Sometimes it would be 10 o'clock at night, and we would get off at seven. I did what I had to do, and I raised the money. My daughter and I both sacrificed.

photo courtesy National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees, 1199.

I don't feel like I can get in trouble with helping employees with a grievance. That problem I had with the department head, I'm still there and he's gone. So I don't have that fear, and I enjoy doing it. Just this week I had a man come to me with tears in his eyes. It does something to you emotionally. Most employees, when they have a problem, they feel like they've been done so wrong, and they do come to you crying. And they're crying and I'm crying, and I just know I have to try to do something to help these people.

He had a problem and we cleared it up that day. It was so ironic because this man worked in the main kitchen and our president is supervisor over the main kitchen. So he bypassed the president and came way over there to me. That made me feel good, because I knew somebody had confidence in me.

My mother used to tell me, you're going to lose your job fighting for those other people, or that it's dangerous work. I don't find it that dangerous. I remember telling her people like Dr. King weren't afraid. And you can't live with fear. If you're doing the right thing, you should not live in fear. And I don't have that fear.□

Clare Jupiter is a former staff member of Southern Exposure. *She is now a lawyer in New Orleans.*

The Supervisor is a Jackass

Whenever there's a problem, say for instance a suspension or what we call a letter of warning, the first step is the employee will go and see a shop steward. The shop steward interviews the grievant and talks to the supervisor and grievant together. She can also call in the chief shop steward if she doesn't think she can handle it at the first step. If the grievant is not satisfied at the first step, then you take it to the chief shop steward, who investigates it further, and proceeds to the department head, which is the second step of the grievance procedure.

The chief shop steward takes the grievant and the department head, and you try to iron out your difference. If you still don't get any satisfaction, you go on to the third step, which is with the director of Charity Hospital, or his designee, who is usually the hospital attorney. The third-step hearing is set up with the hospital attorney being like the judge. The union is defending the grievant, and management is prosecuting the grievant. It's pretty much like a trial. You swear in witnesses and that sort of thing.

The hospital attorney then makes his report and his recommendation. He sends it to the director of the hospital, who approves it, all the time. If there's no satisfaction at that step, well, then you can file for a civil service hearing. At the civil service hearing, most of the time we hire an attorney.

I can remember this one incident that happened to me on the job. I had gone in with another employee about a grievance. He was denied a merit increase. While talking to the section head about this employee's grievance, he asked the grievant to step out of the room. Then the department head proceeded to curse me out.

Had it happened before I had gotten involved with the union I may have cursed him back. But I knew that wasn't the way to do it. I handled it. While he was screaming and hollering – the man had completely lost his cool – I just sat there and quoted the contract.

It worked. He finally calmed down and went to praising me, and what a good employee I was, it's just that I was too good an employee to get involved with that labor stuff, and that sort of thing. So I filed a grievance, and I had two witnesses, because my supervisor was in the room, and she was quite shocked when he proceeded to curse me out. When we got to the first level of the grievance, we went to the department head. He asked him to apologize to me for it. Well, he apologized. I didn't accept it because about three years before this I was suspended for calling the supervisor a jackass. And here this man has cursed me ridiculously and they're going to slap him on the hand and say, "Apologize." Well, that's a different standard, where supervisors are above the law and employees aren't. And that happens a lot, I think, especially with public employees.

Anyway, I would not accept his apology. So then he told me he would write an apology. And I told him he had cursed me out in front of two employees and I was not going to accept a written apology. So then he told me he would come over and apologize in front of everybody. And I told him, no, I didn't want that either. So he asked me what in the hell did I want. And I told him I wanted him suspended.

So of course they didn't like that. The director of Charity Hospital and his attorney drafted up a long letter, telling me I was not in a position to tell them how to discipline their employees. They told me that they were sorry that it had happened and that it shouldn't have happened but that I should drop my grievance because it wasn't going to go any further anyway. But I didn't, so we went all the way through to the third step. And at the third step, the section head was suspended. I was really proud of that. And of course he didn't like taking the suspension, so he thought he would quit. So it was even better.□

Rx for Rotten Conditions

by Cecily Deegan

450 hospital workers struggled against the medical establishment for a year and a half and won their first union contract.

The 1199 office in Sumter, South Carolina – from left: Shirley Williams, Mildred Player, Debbie Vareen and David Geiger.

"What convinced me to help organize the union," says Betty Watkins, a licensed practical nurse (LPN) at Tuomey Hospital, "is that I had worked for 10 years, been away and come back, and it seemed like things were getting worse. I thought maybe a union was the answer."

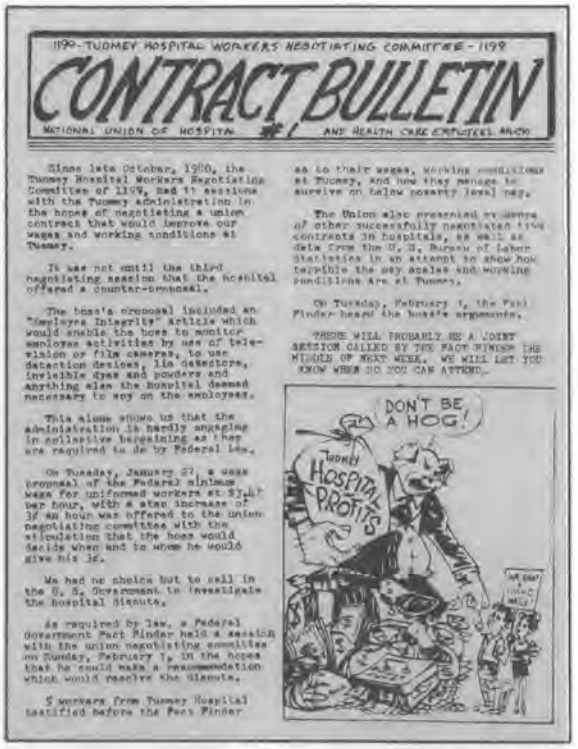
"Unions. I didn't know anything about unions except what I'd learned in high school," says Dolores Singletary, another LPN at the same South Carolina hospital. "I knew the doctors had the A.M.A. (American Medical Association) to represent them. What did we have?"

"After eight years I just got tired of nursing supervisors playing favorites," says nursing assistant Shirley Williams. "There was no place to take your grievances, and no matter how well you worked, your raise was just the increase in minimum wage."

These black women, once unfamiliar with unions and suspicious of them, became leaders in the effort to establish a unit of 1199, the National Union of Health Care and Hospital Employees, at Tuomey Hospital, a private 213-bed institution located in the farming town of Sumter on South Carolina's coastal plain. Theirs is a story of courage and persistence in fighting some pervasive cultural assumptions: that doctors are gods, that unions are bad and that blacks and whites cannot unite and risk their jobs to improve their lives.

The union struggle began at Tuomey in October, 1979. When it was all over – after bitterly contested union elections in August, 1980, and prolonged contract negotiations which nearly produced a strike instead of an agreement in March, 1981 – approximately 450 hospital employees belonged to the bargaining unit and were protected under law. Three-quarters of them were black women. Thus Tuomey was the first private hospital in North and South Carolina, Virginia and Georgia (outside Atlanta) to be unionized.

"We didn't know anything when we began," says Shirley Williams, who edits the "1199 Injection" newsletter and is a never-say-die union delegate. "We had our union reps to lead us through situations – Bill Chandler, LaBrone Epps and Arthur Laudman – but we had to organize ourselves, get committees and keep working. There were peaks, but there were a lot of valleys. In the end, it was fun. We'd have midnight strategy sessions and be up to dawn to distribute literature. We set up information tables in the cafeteria and assigned people to talk with workers at certain tables. After work we'd go visiting to employees' homes and talk with them there."



1199-TUOMEY HOSPITAL WORKERS NEGOTIATING COMMITTEE - 1199

CONTRACT BULLETIN

NATIONAL UNION OF HOSPITAL AND HEALTH CARE EMPLOYEES, AFSCME

Since late October, 1980, the Tuomey Hospital Workers Negotiating Committee of 1199, had 11 sessions with the Tuomey administration in the hopes of negotiating a union contract that would improve our wages and working conditions at Tuomey.

It was not until the third negotiating session that the hospital offered a counter-proposal.

The boss's proposal included an "Employee Integrity" article which would enable the boss to monitor employee activities by use of television or film cameras, to use detection devices, lie detectors, invisible dyes and powders and anything else the hospital deemed necessary to spy on the employees.

This alone shows us that the administration is hardly engaging in collective bargaining as they are required to do by Federal Law.

On Tuesday, January 27, a wage proposal of the Federal minimum wage for uniformed workers at $3.35 per hour, with a step increase of 3¢ an hour was offered to the union negotiating committee with the stipulation that the boss would decide when and to whom he would give his 3¢.

We had no choice but to call in the U. S. Government to investigate the hospital dispute.

As required by law, a Federal Government Fact Finder held a session with the union negotiating committee on Monday, February 9, in the hopes that he could make a recommendation which would resolve the dispute.

5 workers from Tuomey Hospital testified before the Fact Finder as to their wages, working conditions at Tuomey, and how they manage to survive on below poverty level pay.

The Union also presented evidence of other successfully negotiated 1199 contracts in hospitals, as well as data from the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in an attempt to show how terrible the pay scales and working conditions are at Tuomey.

On Tuesday, February 3, the Fact Finder heard the boss's arguments.

THERE WILL PROBABLY BE A JOINT SESSION CALLED BY THE FACT FINDER THE MIDDLE OF NEXT WEEK. WE WILL LET YOU KNOW WHEN SO YOU CAN ATTEND.

By the time the organizing campaign was in full swing in the spring of 1980, union activists made sure that Tuomey employees were constantly being offered election authorization cards and petitions to sign and buttons that read "YES" and "1199."

"Education and communication was our job," says Betty Watkins. "We learned how to do it by doing it. And we're still learning."

"The organizers from 1199 told us what was going to happen and what to expect," says Dolores Singletary. "They told us the union was worthwhile and something we *could* do. They didn't whitewash us."

Two functioning unions in Sumter, the Postal Workers and the United Furniture Workers of America, from the Georgia Pacific furniture plant, also gave the blossoming organization their advice and support. The NAACP backed them, and so did more than 60 churches.

"The hospital always tried to make the union seem like a racial issue, like it was the blacks causing the trouble," says Shirley Williams. "We knew – and the whites knew – that was the boss's tactic to split us, but we were solid. When we were talking about striking in January and February, the hospital management and doctors were taking whites aside and asking them did they know what a strike meant. They said if there was a strike it would be all black people out on that line."

Try as the hospital administration might to break the union along racial lines, it never succeeded. In fact, some of the most vocal union supporters were two older white women, Mildred Player and Dorothy Boykin.

Failing to divide the workers along racial lines, Tuomey Hospital administrator Ralph Abercrombie and the Board of Trustees resorted to a host of other union-busting tactics to put down organizing efforts.

They hired Columbia, South Carolina, attorney Julian Gignilliat, an anti-union consultant for the South Carolina Hospital Association and other clients, to advise them how to stop 1199. Gignilliat, who has since become the hospital's representative in arbitration procedures, instituted get-tough measures: extra security guards were hired to patrol every floor; doctors were asked to pressure individual employees not to join the union; head nurses and other floor managers were asked to look out for and report any "suspicious" activity; mandatory meetings were held at which hospital policy would be discussed; and the board of trustees sent every Tuomey employee a letter explaining why the hospital didn't need a union.

"At one of the mandatory meetings, Mr. Abercrombie stood up and read us a speech," says Singletary. "Gignilliat would sit right next to him, be with him whenever he appeared. Remember, these were supposed to be discussions. The message was, 'Give us time. We may have made some mistakes but we're going to change all that. We've repainted some halls already.'

"A lot of people spoke up – RNs, orderlies, assistants, black and white – and asked questions about wages, retirement benefits, leaves and other things. Right after that meeting in May, eight black workers who had been among those challenging Abercrombie were fired."

The dismissals backfired. Worker grievances were given favorable and extensive local press coverage. Organizers were besieged with volunteers both inside and outside the hospital willing to write letters, call and telegram the hospital administrator to demand an explanation for his actions. To many uncertain workers, the dismissals were a perfect example of the hospital's abuse of its power.

"I was looking to those people as our leaders, and they got wasted," says Debbie Vareen, a ward clerk. "I hadn't been an organizer up to that point, but I knew I had to help take up the slack. We had gone too far to turn around and quit."

The firing of eight workers – all black – was just one of dozens of incidents in 1980 which led 1199 to file more than 100 complaints of unfair labor practice with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). Throughout the organizing campaign, workers had been watched, verbally harassed, threatened with suspension and given written reprimands – these were often given to 60 people

at a time – for distributing union literature and talking about the union at times and in places well within their rights. Among other things, the NLRB ruled that comments regarding union organizing had to be struck from employee records. It also ordered the hospital to offer the eight fired workers their jobs back; they chose to work elsewhere.

But no matter how the NLRB finally ruled, the fact is that the union activists had to put up with harassment on the job every day – from the doctors and nurses they worked with and from their colleagues, who were often scared. They successfully met these challenges with humor, common sense and stubbornness.

"The doctors would be real polite, open doors for you, talk in the halls, ask if they could take you to lunch," recalls Debbie Vareen. "If I saw a doctor taking someone aside who I knew was unsure about the union, I'd go up and enter the conversation. My philosophy was, 'Best join in.'"

Betty Watkins explained her experience this way: "Some doctors warned the RNs that it would make a difference in the way they accepted you if you joined the union. And then they put a full-page ad in the paper saying they were against it. I let them talk. I hear and I didn't hear; I see and I didn't see. I'm like that. I knew where I stood and I said, 'In time we'll see.'"

When a crackdown came and employees were required to sign in and out of the ward, union organizers found ingenious ways to move throughout the hospital. They volunteered in large numbers to return wheelchairs to other wards. And some of them signed in and out so many times that the nursing supervisor's paper work doubled.

To meet the resistance of fellow employees to the union, organizers had to rely on their personal resources.

"I've never felt the need to advertise my feelings for the union," says Betty Watkins. "When the opportunity presented itself I would talk with people about signing a union card. After I kept bumping into the same people who didn't have anything to do with it, I had the sense not to bother them. I knew that there were people who weren't speaking to me who had spoken before, but I wanted to do what I wanted to do.

"The hardest people to convince were the elderly nurses, black and white, who had been at Tuomey for years. They have loyalty to the hospital, or to the administrator. Maybe they go to the same church as the doctors – I don't know. They've been in Sumter their whole life and they know who's doing what to who, and they know someone from when he was raised up as a child. They're ignorant toward the union. Being in the South they've been anti-union their whole life. Union is a bad word in the South."

Charlene Harvin, who works in Central Supply, found that listening was the most persuasive organizing tool: "Everybody's got their technique. Mine is not to pass judgment and to get people to take you into their confidence. Some of the biggest problems we had is that people were scared we'd tell if they signed the election authorization card. There was a lot of tension. They had a right to be scared. But people knew I wouldn't tell, so they'd talk to me. I'd tell them, 'If you don't want to be seen with union members, that's your business. But it's best to look face to face and get reputable information.' I'd say, 'Think about what you're getting and what you could get,' and I'd give them a brochure. I got some people to sign cards. It made me feel good to change minds."

The effort to change minds did not stop in the hospital hallways. The union took its story to local television and radio stations, to newspapers and to the preacher's pulpit.

"While we were organizing inside, we were organizing outside," says Singletary.

When a group of doctors bought a full-page ad in the Sumter *Daily Item* suggesting that Tuomey employees ask themselves, "Do I like unions or just dislike some aspects of the present situation," the union fought back. They took air time on radio stations and made spots which featured employees telling why they chose the union. These messages were so successful in garnering support for 1199 that the hospital made its own advertisements and had them aired right after the union's. A group of doctors also organized a radio call-in show. The union staged a debate. Pretty soon, the struggle at Tuomey was being aired all over Sumter.

The union also enlisted the help of dozens of local churches and local businesspeople. Members made trips to ministers' homes and asked them to speak personally to churchgoers who might be on the hospital staff or on the board of trustees.

Betty Watkins says: "The religious community's feeling was, 'If you need us, you've got us.' When we were preparing to strike, ministers announced it and were willing to take up a collection or do most anything. They made people aware of what was going on in their own town. Ministers would come – even if they sat for 20 minutes – to show whose side they were on during contract negotiations. Sometimes, if a business leader or minister couldn't come, he'd send some member of his family to represent him. For six months of talks, they supported us. Sumter's a small town. People were influenced by what they saw and heard."□

Cecily Deegan is a free-lance writer living in Frogmore, South Carolina.

I Like What I Do and I'm Good at It

by Bonnie Dill

Born and raised in Memphis, Tennessee, Opal Broadway is married and the mother of two children. After learning about the National Committee on Household Employment, she has begun organizing a Memphis chapter.

I've catered for the airlines. I've been a production worker in a factory. I've worked in hospitals, worked in hotels. I've been doing housework for about 16 to 18 years. Out of everything else I've done, I got the most satisfaction out of it. So many of the times, especially in the ones where there were children, I know I was needed. So many of the times the parents were away. I still have the respect and the love of those children today. They loved me and respected me and I could see where I was accomplishing something.

Those other jobs that I had, the majority of them, it was just eight hours work for eight hours pay and that was it.

Believe it or not, housework is one of the most difficult jobs anyone could undertake. It really is because it demands everything, physically and mentally. You have to be bright, you have to be alert. I've worked for single people. I've worked for couples. I've worked for the elderly. When it's a single person or a couple, it's not as demanding. But, when children are involved, then it's something altogether different. It's a whole new ballgame.

The children tend to lean on you more. The parents tend to lean on you more, they tend to expect more of you. When you first undertake a job like that you say, "Well, this is just a job. I'm not going to get emotionally involved." This is the way it starts out. But, when you walk into a home and you see a child, you look in a child's eyes, and then you start to be with this child on a daily basis or a live-in basis, you cannot help but become attached. Once you become attached to this child, then it stops being just a job.

It makes it easier for people to take advantage of you. See, if it was just the housework you had to do, you could do it on a daily basis and just forget it. It's just a job. But when you got children involved, you gonna fall. If you got any kinda heart, you gonna get hooked. This is why you find so many of us work in one place for years and years and years: because of the children.

There are some of us that are able to make a living out of being a maid. There are some of us that are blessed enough to get employers that respect us, pay us well and treat us like we are human beings. They really care what happens to us. By the same token, there are a lot of us that really need to work, have to work, but are unlucky enough or unfortunate enough to get employers that don't care and that will drive you into the ground if you let them.

You make a terrible, terrible mistake in this kind of work when you let these people know that you really, really got to have this job. Even today, you have people that want to pay you $2.50 an hour. You have people that don't want to take out any social security on you. You have people that want you to be a mother, philosopher, father, nanny, governess and everything else to their children. They want their house kept. They want their dogs walked. They want their dogs cleaned up after.

I had worked in maid work about six or seven years, and I moved to Atlanta, Georgia, from Memphis. I was a live-in there. I made the mistake of letting them know that I was not from there,

Above: Opal Broadway and one of her children; photo courtesy Opal Broadway; at right: a domestic worker in North Carolina; photo by Alma Blount

I had nobody there, and I had no place to go if I were fired. Once they found this out, that was it. I worked 16 hours a day. I had not one, not two, but seven girls to attend. Each girl had her own dog. The dogs lived in the house. One side of the house was done in all glass and it had to be immaculate at all times. If you mess around and stay around your home on your day off, you still would be working. They give you Sunday off because they felt like you wanted to go to church. But that's it. You didn't have a day through the week to go get your hair done or something like that because those were their days. You worked day and night, not just through the day hours. My name is Opal. Very simple, very Southern: Opal. When she would talk to me, I was called everything but that.

At that time, I had to have this job in order to send money back here [to Memphis] because I had a sick mother and two brothers in school. Finally the day came when I scrimped and saved enough to come back home. I promised myself then that I would never do that again, work at a job or work with somebody that I didn't like. There are not many of them still around, but there are some. I require references on the people that I work for now. I don't work for just anybody.

For centuries, many, many years, we've been made to feel that housework is the lowest thing you could do. This is what uneducated people do. This is what drop-outs do. So many mothers use this as a weapon to frighten their children: "You're going to end up washing somebody else's dishes. You're going to end up slavin in somebody else's kitchen."

Now, me myself, I'm a proud person and I'm proud of what I do. I'm not ashamed of being a maid. I like what I do. And, because I like what I do, I believe I'm good at what I do. Believe it or not, domestic work is a profession. It's not just a job. It's an art to being good at it. You gotta really know what you're doing to manage a family.

You know, people go to school for years and years to be doctors, lawyers, surgeons, what have you: professional people. Even after they go to school all these years, get their degrees and land their position, if they don't like what they're doing, they're not going to be satisfied. To do a job well, no matter what it is, it has to start in your mind. You have to have a satisfied mind.

That's the same way I am about domestic work. It pleases me when I please my employers. If I clean your house and I can walk through here and I say, "This looks good to me!" then that pleases me. It's self-satisfaction that I get.

I don't know how soon but one of these days we're gonna be unionized. The only way you're gonna be able to get a domestic worker any kind of way is through the union. I would like to see us form a domestic union all over this country, not just locally.

This needs to be done and it needs to be done right away. There are an awful lot of us that are not even scratching out an existence, let alone talking about a living. Like I say, I'm one of the blessed ones. I've been blessed to work for people that paid me well. But there are some of us that are working, and we're not able to make ends meet.

I would like to see all of us get decent salaries. We have families too, and they have to be fed and clothed. It gets just as cold on my children in the wintertime as it does on anybody else's.

We can't live off $2.50 an hour. We can't live off $1.50 an hour. You take domestics in the Midwest, on the East coast, West Coast, they make more money than we make in the South. The most that they want to pay here for a day's work is $21. With the prices and things the way they are now, it's just hard.

I don't say that I should be making $35,000 or $40,000 a year, but let me at least keep my head above water. Don't try to keep me down. Some

man – a senator – was making $150,000 a year and he couldn't survive. Well, if he can't survive on $150,000 a year, I can't even crawl on what I make, can I? Ain't no need in me even gettin out the bed then, is it? That's something to think about.

I'm working but I still got to stand in the food stamp line. I still got to stand in the welfare line. If I'm going to work, let me work and maintain my pride. We can't survive on what we make. Seventy percent of us are without mates. Seventy percent of us are without any other help other than the welfare rolls, and the food stamp lines. I've been there and I know what it's like. It's not easy.

I would like to see the people that employ us take us more seriously. Recognize that we are human beings and not just *something* there in the house; something to fetch your slippers when you don't feel like getting them yourself. We're more than that.

By the same token, I would like to see our people concern themselves with the job, not just the eight hours pay. We've got to get some pride about ourselves and what we do. Hold our heads up and say: "I'm a maid and I'm proud."

We're not taking anything, we're working for it. That makes it just as good as any other job. We're doing an honest day's work for an honest day's pay. Don't be ashamed to say, "I like what I do." That's my motto. "I like what I do and I'm good at what I do." Anybody I've ever gone to work for, I tell them that. "I like what I do and I'm good at it."□

Bonnie Thornton Dill is a member of the Sociology Department faculty at Memphis State University. After January 1, 1982, she will direct the Center for Research on Women at Memphis State, which will focus on the lives and work of women of color in the United States and working-class women in the South.

illustration by Grace Iglehart

DOMESTIC WORKERS

ORGANIZATIONS

National Domestic Workers of America
52 Fairlee St. NW
Atlanta, GA 30303

Household Technicians of America
National Committee on Household Employment
1725 K St. NW
Washington, DC 20006

A division of the Urban League, the National Committee on Household Employment works to win basic benefits and rights for household workers.

PUBLICATIONS

Household Employment Laws and Standards

This pamphlet, in both English and Spanish, explains what benefits, wages, hours and working conditions are required under state and federal laws for domestic workers. Although it is written to cover California, it is a useful model for other states. Available from: Union WAGE, 37-A 29th St., San Francisco, CA 94110.

FILMS/VIDEOTAPES

Are You Listening? Household Technicians

In an informal discussion, household technicians talk about their jobs and struggles for basic rights and benefits. This film was awarded first prize in the Women at Work Broadcast Awards in 1980. Available from: Martha Stuart Communications, PO Box 127, Hillsdale, NY 12529, (518) 325-3900. Purchase of a 16-mm copy is $325; the rental price is $50 per day. A three-quarter-inch videotape copy is available in English and Spanish for $250 purchase and $35 per day rental.

LAWS AND REGULATIONS

Federal wage and hour laws protect domestic workers, and at least 18 states have additional laws governing wage and overtime rates for domestic workers. The coverage and provisions vary considerably from state to state. Check your state's Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division.

See Resources on Legal Rights, p. 106

photos by Alma Blount

"If you got time to lean, you got time to clean."

by Alma Blount

Three million women work in 16,000 restaurants of all types across the U.S.

The ads feature a young, conventionally good looking race car driver called "Runner." He catches a date by phoning a young lady to ask if she'd like to join him for "some homemade biscuits" at Hardee's – after they've danced the night away. In another episode, Runner and a friend charm their dates into believing they have grilled their own fabulous burgers when in fact their "secret recipe is four blocks down the road" and they're really serving Hardee's Big Deluxe charbroiled hamburgers with "that special Hardee's sauce."

Biscuits made "from scratch" and chicken fillet sandwiches "good as Sunday morning at Grandma's" – the accent and appeal of the ads aim to be distinctively Southern. "And we consider ourselves a Southern operation although you'll find us in 34 states," a spokesperson from Hardee's headquarters said. "Because North Carolina is our heartland. That's where we began."

It started over 20 years ago when Wilbur Hardee ran a restaurant in Greenville, North Carolina, that was known for its hamburgers.

Jim Gardner and Leonard Rawls, two business entrepreneurs, purchased the first franchise from Hardee in the late 1950s and built a Hardee's Restaurant in Rocky Mount, North Carolina.

There were five restaurants in Hardee's Food

Systems (HFS) by 1961. Today there are about 1,300 Hardee's Restaurants throughout the Southeast and Midwest, and several in Japan, the Philippines and Europe.

Hardee's is the fourth largest food chain in the U.S. after McDonald's, Burger King and Wendy's (in number of units and volume of annual sales). In January, 1981, Hardee's Food Systems became a subsidiary of Imasco, Ltd., a Canadian investment organization. Among the ranks of the employees, no one seems to be particularly concerned about any changes in business practice or image the new ownership might bring in the future. One regional supervisor thought the new owner's name was Tabasco.

Hardee's Food Systems still maintains its corporate headquarters in Rocky Mount. There it coordinates the management of 500 company units and keeps tabs on 800 units owned by several franchises. (Company units are owned and operated by HFS, whereas franchises are managed by individuals or private companies who pay royalties to HFS for the Hardee's name and logo, sell Hardee's products and agree to adhere to Hardee's food preparation and business procedure guidelines.)

The restaurant where these interviews were conducted is owned by Boddie-Noell Enterprises, the largest privately owned company in the HFS chain, with 160 franchises in North and South Carolina and Virginia. The manager stated openly that he didn't have women working the grill because he likes to have them up front. There are at least twice as many female as male employees, and most are 17 to 22 years old. All benefits such as health insurance, sick leave, life insurance and paid vacation become effective only after one year of full-time employment, but most employees work part-time and usually don't stay for longer than six to eight months.

A number of middle-aged homemakers work for Hardee's, a spokesperson from the company's public relations department claimed. "Many housewives find the part-time hours, especially the 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon peak business hours, to be ideal for their schedules, and the split is really about 50-50 between the number of middle-aged and the number of teenaged workers among the approximately 20,000 Hardee's [Food Systems] employees nationwide," he added.

Wouldn't these thousands of adult, mostly female fast-food workers be the first ones displaced if a subminimum wage measure for youth 16 to 21 years old, sponsored by Senator Orrin Hatch (Republican – Utah) were approved by Congress?

According to Hardee's public relations person – no. The homemakers' hours and the teenagers' hours vary anyway, he asserted, and the older people usually opt for working during the business day while the teenagers are more interested in the after-school hours.

But according to AFL-CIO economist Clara Schloss: "I have yet to meet anyone who can prove that lower wages will generate additional jobs and won't result in the substitution of younger for older workers. Women moving into the work force – single heads of families – would be especially vulnerable."

If Clara Schloss is proven right and the assurances of Hardee's proven wrong, what recourse will Hardee's employees have? Very little at this point: the Hardee's chain, like other fast-food chains across the country, has no unions.

(Editor's note: The names of the two women interviewed here have been changed at their request. They feared they might lose their jobs. The public relations person who spoke with us also requested anonymity.)

"Mary Smith"

I'm 17. I go to high school. I've worked here a year. This was my first job. I wanted to work so I just came up here and started working.

I usually work about 30 hours a week, in the summer and the school year too.

What I do here is take the customer's order, bag it, take their money, make sure things are stocked up for the next order and keep the store kind of looking nice from the customer's viewpoint, right?

The girls usually cashier, but the guys don't. We have one guy here who cashiers some, but they don't have girls work the back line. You know like we might go back there if it's slow or if they need help, but they don't put us on the schedule for work like that.

Most of the time the girls batter the chicken and stuff like that and the guys clean the grill – we don't do stuff like that.*

They don't know, much, how it is being a cashier, and we don't know, much, how it is working that back line. Like they don't know some of the stuff we get from the customers, the pressure and all. I think we should switch off sometimes so they'd know how hard it is.

Everybody gets paid the same at first and then we get raises by how long we've worked here.

I still get minimum wage but they say I'll get a raise in September.

There's more women here than there is men. There's seven guys in all and there's about 20-something women. The two assistant managers are women, one day and night shift, and the manager is a man.

There's more black women than white. Three white women and the rest black. The white women just don't apply here. We've talked about it and there've been several to come here, but they end up getting fired or they quit or they think the work is too hard – most of the time that's what it is. They get fed up with it or something and say it's not worth the money.

I'd say most of the white women who worked here are high school dropouts, but like I'm still in school and some of the black women are in college. Most of the rest of the black women are in their 20s and they got another job plus this one.

You meet a lot of people here. That's one thing I like about the job.

It might be slow here sometimes, but we always have to keep doing something.

Drive-thru is hard. Cause you know you got to get all the people their orders, right, and you run over there for something and you got to get back cause your beeper is going and then somebody else is at the window. You got to really keep your pace up.

Like between 12:00 and 1:00 – lunchtime – it's packed. Daytime probably thinks that nighttime doesn't work as hard but at nighttime you have to really clean. And I think we should get more money for as hard as we work, not less!

I know about the subminimum wage thing and I mean it doesn't even make any sense, as much as we clean. There's too much work in here to be getting paid a *minimum* wage.

If I could do whatever I wanted, probably I'd do my own business somewhere. No food involved! If I can help it, I'm never working in another fast-food. When I first got the job doing this, people that have worked in it before told me I wasn't going to like it. And they were right. It is hard. You know, you get fussed at and chewed out by the customers and you can't say nothing to em.

*Although the women were not aware of any salary difference between counter workers (mostly women) and grill workers (mostly male), the pattern in fast-food chains is that grill workers are more frequently granted full-time status, making them eligible for benefits and overtime. The Hardee's manager refused to discuss salaries, referring us to the corporate public relations office.

"Jane Brown"

I started working here because I got fired from McDonald's. I talked to the manager here. I told him I wanted to be a crew chief or a manager. He said, "Would you mind working your way up?" I said no, and I started.

The women are cashiers because when people come into a fast-food place they want to see feminine qualities. They don't want some husky man with big voices waiting on them. They want something pleasing. And most people think the feminine is the most pleasing.

What's it like here? Let's say you come in early in the morning. You get people who want to order this. So you order it and all of a sudden, often you've totaled the machine and you can't change it and they say, "Wait a minute! I want to change my order!" And the people expect you to be smiling all the time they're doing this. But I don't smile all the time. I have this very bad habit of cutting people short. I show my anger sometimes by the way I speak. I get in trouble for it. I've been writ up once or twice for it.

But I'm very open about my feelings. Except when it comes to the managers, and then I shut up real quick. Cause I don't want to lose this job. Not yet.

The black girls have mostly lived in one area all their life, and I've been a few places – like I've lived in Europe. I freak em out sometimes because of my straightforwardness. But, in fact, I get along with the black girls better than the white girls.

It does pose a problem that I'm one of only three white girls here. There aren't many white women who live in this area. But I think there's more black women working in fast foods anyway. I really don't know why.

I think people who work in fast foods ought to get at least $4 an hour because we're the ones who keep everyone else going. I mean, if people had to take an hour off for lunch and go to some restaurant, then they wouldn't get the work done at their job. But here they can come in and get waited on, and get back to their job. We're practically the backbone.

If I had my choice to work at any fast-food, I'd work at Hardee's. Even though they have a lot of pressure here because there's so much food preparation like with the biscuits and the chicken sandwich and the roast beef, people seem like they're more down to earth here than anywhere else. You know, like at McDonald's they have the rank structure. And if I'd a wanted to go into the military, I would have gone.

And at McDonald's, you've got all this machinery around you. Here, you've got a little bit of humanism. You don't see a lot of people talking good about Hardee's sometimes, but that's because you've got to wait for good material and people don't like to wait.

I plan to work here until I either get higher status or a better job. But I plan to keep this job because it will be hard to find a job.□

Alma Blount is a free-lance writer and photographer living in North Carolina.

Raising Cane

by Carolyn Portier

Louisiana farmworkers are working together to break the shackles of a modern plantation system.

"If you didn't know where you were going you would never find these people."

– Bessie Bourgeois,
Southern Mutual Help Association

In south Louisiana hundreds of small communities of black farm workers are located far back in the sugar cane fields. These communities remain invisible to most people, even to those who live in nearby communities. Often located on the same land where once stood the slave quarters of ante-bellum sugar cane plantations, the houses the workers live in are still owned by the "bossman," whose paternalistic attitude toward his employees blurs the fact that he does not own the workers as well. The plantation system as it existed in the mid-1800s has not gone completely out of style in Louisiana. With poor housing, health problems and income at about $5,000 per year for a family of six, it is thinly veiled behind what writer Patsy Sims aptly described as a "cane curtain." When asked, "Isn't this just like slavery?" one plantation owner responded, "Yes, but it works!"

The Southern Mutual Help Association (SMHA) is a small but vigorous group of ex-farmworkers and others working out of Jeanerette, Louisiana. Created by community organizers and farm workers, SMHA works on local, regional, state and national levels to fight the huge and powerful plantation system which is entrenched in Louisiana's economy.

SMHA strives to help the workers become "empowered persons." An "empowered person," explained assistant director Lorna Bourg, is one who knows the plantation system – and knows how to change it. Since SMHA was first organized in 1969, the emphasis has been on getting the workers involved in helping themselves.

The Patout sugar cane refinery, just a few hundred feet from the plantation home of a farmworker. *photo by Carolyn Portier*

"We wanted [SMHA] to serve as a catalyst so that the farmworkers would begin to learn how to work together, and not just side-by-side under the direction of a bossman," explained Sister Anne Catherine Bizalion, SMHA director. Since its inception, SMHA has helped 700 to 800 farmworkers find jobs outside the plantation system.

A majority of the SMHA staff and volunteers are those farmworkers considered most expendable in the sugar cane plantation system: women workers. There are three main reasons why women are more involved in SMHA than men. Two-thirds of all sugar cane workers are women, but because there is less year-round work for women, they are more likely to seek work off the plantations. Few women can find work more than 14 weeks out of the year, hand-planting cane in the spring and hand-cutting it at harvest time. This work is the most physically taxing, brings the least pay and provides absolutely no job security. As mechanization brings cutbacks in work to the cane fields, women workers are the first to be replaced. As one ex-farmworker commented, "There isn't much you can do because even if a woman works as hard as a man at planting and harvesting times, the bossman is still not likely to let the woman drive a tractor or other machinery."

A second reason why women workers are more likely to become involved in working to change the plantation system also has to do with the "rules" of the system. A woman worker is never considered head of the household. The house she lives in on the plantation must be held by her husband, her son or her father – even though she works on the plantation. Women workers, therefore, can leave the plantation to work while still being able to live in plantation housing; if a man leaves to find work off of the plantation, the family must move. On the other hand, when a woman farmworker finds a job in one of the nearby towns, this is the first step toward financial independence for the family. SMHA realizes this and offers several programs designed to attract women workers to the association and to encourage them to move into the world beyond the cane brakes.

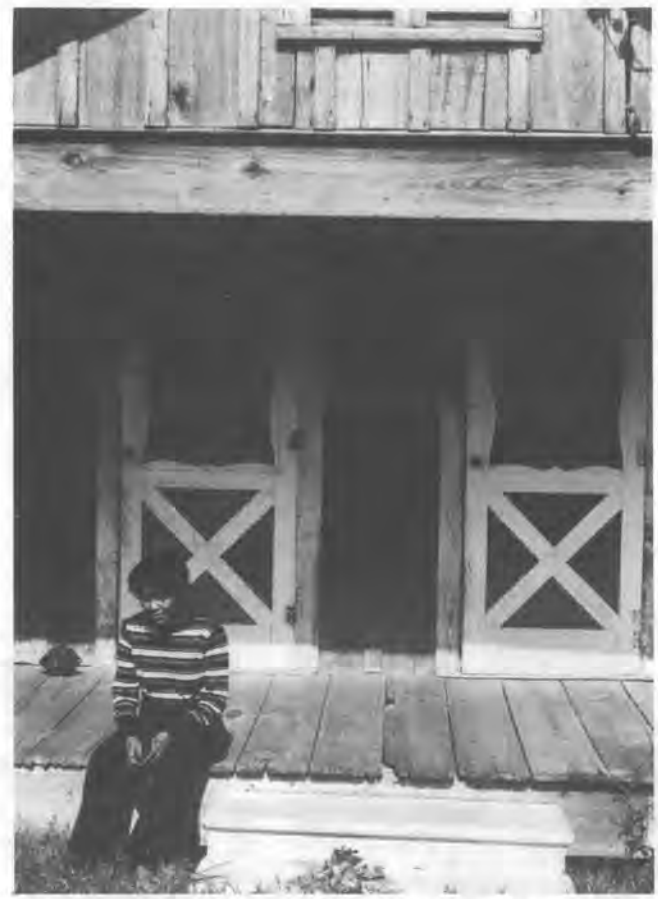
A third reason was given by Sister Anne: "Women seem to have the need to make changes more often than men," she said. "Maybe it's because they are closer to the changes of the earth. Probably it's because they are *not* as close to the bossman. They are not as fearful of him. They have nothing to lose anyway. The women are at the bottom of the plantation system which is at the bottom of the [overall economic] system."

The Southern Mutual Help Association began when most poverty programs in Louisiana were ending: the late 1960s. Sister Anne and Lorna Bourg had both worked in War on Poverty programs. Sister Anne, a Dominican Rural Missionary from France, directed a Headstart Program and had worked for years with Father A.J. McKnight to establish educational and cooperative programs. It was Father McKnight, a black Catholic priest very active in the Civil Rights Movement, who brought Sister Anne and Bourg together. Bourg met Father McKnight while teaching at a Catholic junior high school. She took her civics class to one of his speeches and the class invited him to speak to them at the school.

"The students were interested in knowing why a Catholic priest was involved in community problems, like civil rights, and not saying mass," Bourg recalled. When the school principal and pastor learned of the invitation they informed Bourg that he could not speak at the school. He was too controversial, Bourg explained, and he was black. Two days later Bourg resigned a teaching position that she had come to enjoy very much.

"That was my introduction to the War on Poverty," she said.

The local Catholic Church and SMHA have had



Bessie Bourgeois on the porch of the home she grew up in on Fortier Plantation. *photo by Carolyn Portier*

other clashes through the years. Many of the plantation owners are Catholic and are among the influential members of the Church. Besides being critical of SMHA, the Catholic Church in general has shown very little interest or concern in the problems of black farmworkers. Although the sugar cane plantations are located in the heart of one of the most Catholic areas of the country, very few Catholic parish priests have become involved in SMHA. One who did was transferred to another community in another state. In the early days of the association, one Catholic bishop did request that Sister Anne be asked to return to France or be relocated elsewhere. The Mother Superior of the Dominican Rural Missionaries instead praised her work and refused to recall her. Another bishop, who came from a family of sugar cane growers, was quoted in the *Saturday Review* as saying: "There is no suffering among sugar cane workers. . . . The USDA sees to that."

The only other church of prominence in the area is Baptist. Each plantation community has its own Baptist church. But as Bessie Bourgeois pointed out during a tour of the plantations, these churches are built on land given to the church by the growers; the growers contribute and support the churches, and, in some instances, the minister is paid by the grower and works as an overseer in the cane fields. These churches have not made any efforts to work with SMHA or with the farm workers to bring change to the plantations.

When Lorna Bourg resigned her teaching position, she went to work under Sister Anne at the Vermillion Parish Headstart Program. The State Legislature then passed an amendment giving local police juries direct charge over all community action programs: charters were revoked and Sister Anne and Bourg were among the first to be fired. Responding to a request from veteran union and community organizer H.L. Mitchell to survey the health needs of the cane workers, Bourg and Sister Anne began the work that has filled the last 12 years of their lives. By 1969 SMHA was organized; its members were farmworkers, community organizers and other people from the black and white communities in the 19-parish area of the Louisiana sugar cane belt.

Members of SMHA work with other farmworkers to change the plantation system. They give testimony before state, local and national governing bodies about unfair wages, company stores, unhealthy living and working conditions, pesticide poisoning and discrimination. Some of SMHA's efforts and victories have included:

• Conducting the first professional and comprehensive health survey of farm workers living on two plantations in Terrebonne Parish. Of 107 people examined, 89 had medical problems but only 12 were seeing a doctor. The survey, conducted by workers with assistance from doctors and medical students, was used to secure grants to create the first farmworkers' health clinic in the state. "It was a survey plus a whole education, a whole basic organizing effort," Sister Anne said of the 1970 survey.

Top: Donna Baker of New Orleans with members of the offshore oil rig crew she works with; bottom: Debbie Azoursky (left) and Helen Coates, who work on a Texaco oil rig. *photos by Carolyn Portier*

• In 1971 Huet Freeman, a sugar cane farmworker, won a class action suit against then-Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz, who had illegally frozen farm workers' wages. SMHA was appointed inspector of all growers' books in 19 parishes to confirm payment of three-quarters-of-a-million dollars in back wages. "That's how we got the first statistics on how many workers there were in the state at that harvest." There were 16,000 workers.

• One of SMHA's earliest and most important victories clarified the right of free association for the workers. Officials of the Southdown Plantation in Terrebonne Parish, the district attorney and the parish sheriff had arrested volunteers gathering information about plantation life. "It took a three-judge federal panel to finally guarantee the right of egress and ingress to the workers' homes under the constitutional right of free association," Bourg explained. That victory gave the volunteers the freedom to make contact with the workers. It also, legally, gave the workers the freedom to meet, talk and organize. (But today, 10 years after that victory, SMHA workers are constantly harassed when they venture onto the plantations.)

• SMHA staff and volunteers have been successful in closing company stores on the plantations

and in assuring minimum wage for the workers. They have not yet been able to stop growers from deducting health-care expenses, loan payments and housing expenses from workers' checks.

• Between 85,000 and 200,000 acres of sugar cane are treated with Silvex every year. Silvex contains dioxin or TCDD, known as Agent Orange. Silvex and the pesticide 2,4-D are suspected of causing illness, miscarriages and birth defects. SMHA staff and other farmworkers are gathering data and testifying against the indiscriminate spraying of these and other pesticides on the fields and on the farmworkers, their homes and children.

In organizing SMHA, Sister Anne said, "We knew we did not want the band-aid approach. We wanted to get at the roots of the problem to really change it because it involved the total lives of people, not only their individual lives. Because it was a problem affecting the whole community, of people, not only their individual lives. Because it was a problem affecting the whole community, we decided the approach to a solution was to take in the whole community and to be a bi-racial group. We're not a black civil-rights organization. We were always meant to be a mixed group."

Encouraging women farmworkers to find nontraditional types of work is a main focus of SMHA's programs for women. The goal here, said Bessie Bourgeois, is to get women farmworkers into the high-paying jobs of the booming oil industry of south Louisiana. On the periphery of the dense fields of cane, the oil companies have located their headquarters, shipyards and boarding docks for offshore work. And the support industries to these companies – the fabricating plants, the tool companies, the catering services and the tugboat companies – have clustered in nearby towns like Houma and Morgan City.

But SMHA has encountered some problems in getting both women and men to take jobs in the oil industry. The work environment is the main problem, according to Bourgeois. "Most people who have worked on the plantation are happiest when working with the earth," she commented. "The main things that I have found [that keeps workers away from the] oil industry are that they are afraid of heights and of working over water."

A self-help housing project coordinated by the association trains women farm workers to be carpenters. Ethel Gray came to SMHA expecting to complete her high school degree – which she did – and to learn a job skill like typing – which she did not. Instead, somewhat to Gray's surprise, she learned carpentry. She apprenticed with a local carpenter involved in the project and in four years rose to construction supervisor. Gray had not only learned the trade, but she gained confidence in her ability to handle a nontraditional job *and* she now trains other women to build their own homes.

To date the self-help housing program has facilitated the building of 49 homes and 108 apartments.

"The self-help housing project, where people are learning to work together to build their own homes, is a good example of how a program can be a tool for organizing," said Lorna Bourg. "It is an excellent tool for organizing as well as a way for the farm workers to obtain for themselves that very essential freedom of being able to choose where to live."

The hallmark of SMHA has been to provide training and organizing around issues. During 1980 a paid staff of 38 operated the organization's offices and directed several programs designed to encourage farmworkers to complete their high school degrees and participate in job training programs. These programs were funded through U.S. Department of Labor grants, CETA positions and, in the self-help housing program, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA).

When the Reagan administration came into power in 1981, however, SMHA realized a cut in funding was inevitable. Two Labor Department grants that had been approved and signed in the closing days of the Carter administration never reached SMHA. These loans were to continue Southern Mutual's work in basic education skills, job hunting, money management and an intensive women's training program called Plantation Women in Development.

Farmworkers have also had difficulty receiving assistance from HUD and FmHA since the Reagan takeover. According to Sister Anne, the FmHA continues to find reasons not to provide loans to farmworkers who want to build their own homes through the SMHA self-help housing program.

"The FmHA is bending toward giving loans to middle-income people who use contractors," she said, "even though the cost of building a home with a contractor can be over one-third more expensive than building it yourself."

No new homes have been built through the self-help housing program since October, 1980, because FmHA loans have not been approved.

Because of the loss of all government funding, SMHA is now operating on contributions and loans from private individuals. The Marist Fathers Missioners of Washington, D.C., recently gave SMHA $10,000 to continue its work. During September, 1981, a staff of 10 unpaid workers kept the association going. A fundraising bingo game held at the

end of the month brought in money to pay some salaries.

"But we remain very encouraged in spite of all of this," Sister Anne said. "When you are clear in your objectives you find you just keep going. Actually we have come quite a ways in the past eight months. In this kind of work you learn fast that when one tool is out you quickly find another one."

SMHA is now devoting much of its efforts to assisting farmworkers in developing their own small businesses. These include small-scale farming, greenhouse operations, industrial janitorial and industrial catering services.

Using funds awarded to SMHA in a suit against HEW (for not honoring a training contract), the association purchased one acre of land a year ago. It recently sold that acre as commercial property and with that money bought three acres in the countryside near Olivier, two miles from their present offices in New Iberia. With some of the money given and lent to SMHA by the Marist Fathers, the group purchased an old plantation home and moved it to the three-acre site. By spring this site will be the headquarters of a still vital, more independent Southern Mutual Help Association, and it will be the location of the first farmworker center in Louisiana.

Staff members plan to operate a greenhouse at the farmworker center as well as offer ongoing workshops in farm-oriented and other types of small businesses. SMHA has already sponsored two workshops on setting up mini-farms and greenhouses for farmworkers in the area. This spring staff members of the Graham Center in North Carolina will be training SMHA staff and other farm workers in greenhouse and small farm operations.

SMHA's goal here is to develop cooperative communities of mini-farms owned by former cane workers. SMHA would purchase or hold the option on 21-acre tracts of undeveloped land and then divide each tract into seven three-acre farms, which would then be sold to cane workers. A very minimal fee would be tacked onto each sale. The fee would go into a special fund used by SMHA to purchase more land.

Eventually the mini-farms owned by ex-farmworkers would be self-sufficient, growing intensive-care crops like produce or fruit. The overall plan involves securing additional income through jobs for women farmworkers, assisting families with that income to move off the plantation, helping them finance their own land and build their own homes, training them in farming and marketing techniques, and organizing to form cooperative communities interested in helping themselves and other farm workers.

Top: Lorna Bourg; bottom: Sister Anne Catherine Bizalion

"Our staff members are now learning about greenhouse operations, land-trust funds and the technical skills it will take to carry this off," Bourg commented. "We're working toward this direction because many of the cane workers do naturally prefer being in the country. They like farming. It should be one of their alternatives."

The farmworker center will also be used to demonstrate ways to make old houses more efficient and it will house a farmworker museum.

"We want the museum to record the contributions farmworkers have made to the state and we want it to be a place where farm workers can come together to celebrate their culture," Sister Anne said.

SMHA staff members are now working on the old plantation home, which, ironically, is a pre-Civil War mansion (circa 1820) that housed several generations of sugar cane growers. Southern Mutual is receiving assistance in renovating the home from individuals and groups in the area. The Electrical Workers of America's New Orleans local, for example, has volunteered to do all the electrical wiring at the farmworker center on weekends.

In discussing the future efforts of SMHA, Sister Anne pointed out that although the association favors workers' rights, it does not do union organizing and does not consider itself a union.

She said SMHA is working so that "the skills of leadership will emerge from within, so that decisions like forming a labor union or a cooperative will come from the inside and not from the outside." She added that because of SMHA, if the workers ever do form or join a union, women will be among its leaders.

"In other unions, the leadership of women is often bypassed," Bourg commented. "At SMHA, if it happens, women won't be left behind."□

Carolyn Portier is a free-lance writer from south Louisiana. For the past three years she has lived in the North Carolina mountains, where she managed and edited her own farm paper.

The Southern Mutual Help Association can be reached by writing P.O. Box 850, Jeanerette, LA 70544 or calling (318) 276-6021.

MIGRANT FARMWORKER RESOURCES

The following is a list of resources available for migrant workers and their families as of Summer, 1981. Many of these programs have had their funding severely cut, and the future extent of their services is in doubt. However, most will continue in some form.

ORGANIZATIONS

Farmworker Information and Referral Hotline
TOLL FREE: (800) 424-2897

The hotline takes calls, complaints, requests for information and referrals to organizations and agencies.

Migrant Legal Action Program, Inc.
806 15th St. NW
Washington, DC 20005

This national organization assists and supports farmworker organizations and programs across the country.

Farmworkers Legal Services

Legal Services provides free legal assistance to those unable to pay for such help. Legal Services in most of the states where there are farmworkers have supported special farmworkers' legal services offices and programs. For up-to-date information on the availability of these programs, contact your nearest Legal Services or Legal Aid office, or contact the Migrant Legal Action Program in Washington, DC.

Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers Association
PO Box 19500
Raleigh, NC 27609
(919) 851-7611
(North Carolina office)

This association is a private, nonprofit organization providing job training and emergency assistance (food, transportation) to migrant and seasonal farmworker families. As of Summer, 1981, there were offices of the association in North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, Georgia and West Virginia. The association has fairly strict limits on who is eligible for its services.

National Farmworker Ministry
1430 West Olympic Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90015
(213) 386-8131

A church ministry whose purpose is to support farmworkers as they organize a national union under the leadership of the United Farm Workers of America.

National Farmworkers Service Center (UFW/AFL-CIO)
PO Box 1493
San Juan, TX 78589
(512) 787-2233

This is the national service center of the United Farm Workers Union.

PUBLICATIONS

Handbook

A handbook from the Migrant Legal Action Program, Inc. (address above), which contains general information about farmworkers' legal rights nationally. It includes information on wages, social security and living and working conditions.

Know Your Rights

This bilingual pamphlet was written in Spanish and English specifically for North Carolina migrant and seasonal workers, with simple explanations of farmworkers' legal rights and benefits in that state. It includes information about health care and pesticides as well. Available from: Farmworkers Legal Services, PO Box 398, Newton Grove, NC 28366, (919) 594-0437.

See Resources on Legal Rights, p. 106, Sexual Harassment, p. 117, and Job Safety and Health, p. 122.

Top left: cabbage cutter near Mission, Texas: top right: bell pepper picker near McAllen, Texas; bottom: Senora Castillo de-tassles corn in a field near Hereford, Texas.

photos by Alan Pogue

THE BOTTOM LINE

by Debby Warren

Union women get paid from 19 percent to 34 percent more than their sisters who are not in unions.

As the interviews throughout this book reveal, women organize and join unions for many reasons. A union contract forces the employer to write down the rules both sides agree will be used to discipline, or transfer, or fire a worker. A contract protects you against favoritism or arbitrary treatment, it establishes a procedure for handling grievances you may have against your supervisor. It makes the boss respect you and your work more, it gives you somebody (a shop steward or union representative) who will stand by you if you need help; it sets down guidelines for improving working conditions, for protecting your health and safety, for filling new job openings, and in some cases, for handling sexual harassment on the job and enforcing affirmative action in promoting women. It also gives you more money.

Money is the reason most nonunion people think workers get involved with unions; however, union workers say it's one of the least important gains, ranking better pay and benefits below job security, a grievance procedure, seniority rights, improved respect, personal dignity and other intangibles like "it makes me feel like I can stand up to my boss as an equal." But the better pay is certainly welcome, and unions work hard to make sure their members earn more than workers not protected by a union contract. From the numbers the government collects, it looks as though they are succeeding.

In 1977, the last year for which such information is available, women represented by labor organizations in the South earned from 19 to 34 percent more than their unrepresented sisters. In terms of hard cash, this means that union women in the East South Central states (see map) earned $1,456 more than women doing the same work, perhaps even in the same city, in nonunionized plants. The salary difference in the West South Central region leaped to $2,600, and was slightly higher again for union women in the South Atlantic states: $2,652.

There are no recent studies comparing the financial rewards of union membership for black and white women workers in the South, but a 1974 study published in the Bureau of Labor Statistics' *Monthly Labor Review* (Table 1) shows that all classes of workers – black, white, male and female – gained from union representation. Black men in the South benefited the most, earning 30 to 50 percent more, while black women earned 17 to 24 percent more than nonunion workers of the

Annual Wage Difference for Southern Women Represented by Labor Unions, 1977

West South Central: Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas

East South Central: Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee

South Atlantic: Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia

Table 1: Average Hourly Earnings For Southern Union and Nonunion Workers (1974)

	Black Women	White Women	Black Men	White Men
SOUTH ATLANTIC: DE, DC, FL, GA, MD, NC, SC, VA, WV				
Union	$3.19	$3.34	$3.76	$4.56
Nonunion	$2.57	$2.87	$2.90	$3.92
EAST SOUTH CENTRAL: AL, KY, MS, TN				
Union	$2.73	$3.13	$3.86	$4.31
Nonunion	$2.33	$2.60	$2.58	$3.63
WEST SOUTH CENTRAL: AR, LA, OK, TX				
Union	$2.76	$3.12	$3.94	$4.32
Nonunion	$2.25	$2.65	$2.85	$3.76

Source: Monthly Labor Review, "Measuring, Union – Nonunion Earnings Differences," December, 1974

Table 2 Comparison of Weekly Wages for Union and Nonunion Southern Working Women, 1977

	South Atlantic			East South Central			West South Central		
	Represented	Not Represented	% Weekly Earnings of Represented to Not Represented Workers	Represented	Not Represented	% Weekly Earnings of Represented to Not Represented Workers	Represented	Not Represented	% Weekly Earnings of Represented to Not Represented Workers
All occupations	$207	$156	133%	$174	$146	119%	$198	$148	134%
White collar	233	175	133	201	168	120	213	167	128
Professional and technical	262	221	119	*	212	–	225	202	111
Managers and administrators	*	218	–	*	*	–	*	182	–
Clerical	189	154	123	*	147	–	*	155	–
Salesworkers	*	129	–	*	*	–		144	–
Blue collar	164	130	126	154	123	125	*	117	–
Operatives	157	129	122	154	120	128	*	114	–
Service workers	*	110	–	*	104	–	*	105	–
All Industries	207	156	133	174	146	119	198	148	134
Manufacturing	165	138	120	151	131	115	*	138	–
Durables	*	143	–	*	147	–	*	150	–
Nondurables	*	136	–	*	123	–	*	131	–
Trade	*	126	–	*	124	–	*	126	–
Finance and Services	228	163	140	187	153	122	212	153	139
Finance, Insurance and Real Estate	*	159	–	*	151	–	*	165	–
Other services	229	168	136	188	158	119	212	154	138
Public Administration	*	221	–	*	*	–	*	180	–

*Data not available or sample size too small.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Report 556 (1979), *Earnings and Other Characteristics of Organized Workers*, Tables 13 and 14, pp. 40-47.

same race and sex; white men gained 15 to 19 percent, with white women slightly higher at 16 to 20 percent.

One of the most dramatic examples of the benefits of union representation is found among clerical workers in Atlanta. Southern Bell Telephone's clerical workers are represented by the Communications Workers of America (CWA), and they earn from $7.57 to $9.39 an hour after 48 months on the job. Their counterparts in Atlanta's nonunionized firms bring home $4.18 to $6.67 per hour – 81 percent less than CWA members. Ma Bell's operators earn a tidy $8.92 after 48 months while switchboard operators – without a union – in Atlanta earn between $4.47 and $4.77, or barely half as much.

The paycheck benefits of a union contract appear in every industry. More than 100,000 Southern women work in plants that produce men's and boys' shirts, trousers, suits and coats, an industry in which four out of five of the workers are women. Union workers in suit and coat plants get an average of $1.17 for every dollar earned by their nonunion counterparts in the same jobs. Those engaged in the production of trousers make about 10 percent more. And union employees in Southern shirt factories bring home checks that are 13 to 16 percent fatter than those of nonunion shirt makers.

The financial benefits a union provides its members go beyond take-home pay. For example, parking lot attendants at the Atlanta airport – almost all women – are represented by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). They make 12 percent more than unorganized attendants, plus they have health insurance, eight paid holidays a year and paid sick leave. Women workers at a SEIU-covered nursing home in the mountains of North Carolina also have higher wages than their nonunionized sisters, as well as a system of automatic raises that keeps even the lowest paid worker above the federal minimum wage, a retirement plan, and a health insurance program fully paid for by the employer. With each additional year of employment, an employee can also get the nursing home to pay an increased portion of health insurance coverage for other family members. After 10 years, the company pays the full amount – over $50 a month – a hefty sum for the woman who heads a household or who is married to a man without health insurance.

Money isn't everything, but a little extra sure helps. □

Debby Warren is a former editor of a rural weekly newspaper in North Carolina and a former staff member of Women in the Work Force. She now works as a labor planner and researcher.

WOMEN AND UNIONS

It is not possible for us to list all existing labor unions here. However, the following organizations and resources can be helpful with general information on unions and unionizing drives, unions and women and union democracy.

ORGANIZATIONS

Industrial Union Department, AFL-CIO
815 16th St. NW
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 637-5000

The Industrial Union Department is in charge of new union drives and coordinates the organizing among the unions which are part of the AFL-CIO.

Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW)
15 Union Square
New York, NY 10003
(212) 242-0700
(800) 221-1930 TOLL-FREE

CLUW aims to unify and support working women. The group has a Center for Education and Research which can help you or your union identify grants, resources or projects that have bearing on your work or your problem. As of November, 1981, there were Southern CLUW chapters in: Birmingham, Alabama; Dade County, Florida; Elizabethtown and Louisville, Kentucky; Baton Rouge and New Orleans, Louisiana; Memphis, Tennessee; Austin and Houston, Texas; and Richmond, Virginia. CLUW membership dues are $10 for active union members and nonunion associates and $5 for retired union members. To start a CLUW chapter you need 25 CLUW members and no less than five national or international unions. CLUW News is available for $10 subscription or free for dues-paying members.

Working Women Project
Labor Education and Research Project (LERP)
PO Box 20001
Detroit, MI 48220
(313) 883-5580

LERP educates workers in the union movement by offering resources, workshops and research on certain issues including sexual harassment, safety and health, and equal pay.

Union WAGE
PO Box 40904
San Francisco, CA 94140
(415) 282-6777

Union WAGE is an organization of working women, both unionized and nonunionized. Union WAGE works to give women the skills to organize within the union structure and to organize non-affiliated working women. The group is concerned with issues including sex discrimination, safety and health, and sexual harassment. Write for a list of available resources.

Southerners for Economic Justice (SEJ)
6 North 5th St.
Richmond, VA 23219
(804)649-1949

SEJ works throughout the South to protect workers and union rights by encouraging community and church support for labor.

PUBLICATIONS

Bargaining for Equality: A Guide to Legal and Collective Bargaining Solutions for Workplace Problems That Particularly Affect Women (1980)

This book covers several workplace problems and their legal and organizational remedies. Topics include maternity benefits, child care, flex-time and pensions. It includes model contract language and practical suggestions on helping unions fight for women's rights. Available for $4.50 plus 50 cents postage (10 percent discount on orders of 10 or more) from: Women's Labor Project, PO Box 6250, San Francisco, CA 94101.

Democratic Rights for Union Members, A Guide to Internal Union Democracy

This book, by H. W. Benson, explains how federal law on union democracy works in practice and has suggestions on how unionists can best defend their rights in their unions. Available for $4.75 plus $1.00 shipping from: Association for Union Democracy, 215 Park Ave. South, Suite 1711, New York, NY 10003.

Effective Contract Language for Union Women

CLUW's ueful teaching and small-group discussion guide explains union contracts, non-discrmination clauses, maternity leave, pregnancy clauses, child care, fringe benefits and non-sexist language. Available for $1.00 from CLUW (address above).

Talking Union: A Guide for Working Women

A guide to the terms used in union organizing and contracts. It explains the role of federal agencies in workplace regulation as well. Also available from Union WAGE for $1.25 plus $.60 handling.

Labor Notes

The monthly newsletter of LERP (address above) provides specific news on unions and union locals and information on trends in labor relations, politics and the economy. Also contains special sections on women. Subscriptions cost $7.50 per year; sample copies are available upon request.

illustration by Grace Iglehart

Union WAGE

Union WAGE's bimonthly newsletter covers the group's activities and also looks at other union and labor organizations. It highlights resources and activities of particular interest to women. A subscription is $4 per year; also comes free with a $15 membership in Union WAGE (the fee for low-income persons is $7.50).

FILMS/VIDEOTAPES

I Am Somebody (1970)

Produced by the American Foundation on Nonviolence, this film looks at the efforts of a coalition of labor and civil-rights groups to organize a hospital in Charleston, South Carolina. Available for $5 rental from: AFL-CIO Department of Education, 815 16th St. NW, Washington, DC 20006, (202) 637-5153.

Union Maids (1976)

A 45-minute documentary details the role women played in building the labor movement in the 1930s. The rental fee is $70 ($45 for unions); copies can be bought for $475. Add $5 to receive promotional posters. A 10-percent discount is available upon request. Order from: New Day Films, PO Box 315, Franklin Lakes, NJ 07417, (201) 891-8240.

With Babies and Banners (1979)

This 45-minute film tells the story of the Women's Emergency Brigade, which played a key role in the General Motors sitdown strike in 1937. Available for $10 rental from the AFL-CIO Department of Education (address above).

EXTRAS

"A Woman's Place Is In Her Union"

Buttons available for 50 cents each – $30 for orders of 100 – from CLUW (address above). Also available from the national office are tote bags, paper weights and mugs with CLUW logo. Write for information.

See Resources on Legal Rights, p. 106, and Job Safety and Health, p. 122.

Shoulder to Shoulder

by Anne Braden

The struggle for a union at Virginia's Newport News shipyard united women and men, black and white.

In 1978, workers in the gigantic Newport News shipbuilding yard owned by Tenneco Corporation voted to be represented by the United Steelworkers of America. After the company stalled negotiations, the workers struck in 1979 for 83 days. In a major breakthrough for organized labor in the South, Local 8888 won a contract covering the yard's 16,000 workers.

Because of laws won by the Civil Rights Movement, the shipyard began hiring women in traditionally male jobs in 1973. By the late '70s, one-third of the production and maintenance workers were women, and they have played an important role in the union. In the process, they have watched their lives and personalities change. Of the women quoted here, six are white – Paula Axsom, Nancy Crosby, Jan Hooks, Judy Mullins, Sandra Tanner, Ann Warren. Three are black – Cynthia (Cindy) Boyd, Peggy Carpenter, Gloria Council. "We got to know each other on the picket line," said Peggy Carpenter. "Oh, we may get mad now and then, but we say what we have to say, and we work together. We know who the enemy is. We stuck together, and it paid off."

Ann Warren, *mother of two sons, now grown, Steelworker delegate to Newport News Central Labor Council:* I was one of the first women ever to work on a ship. I hired in on October 4, 1973. I was separated from my husband, my sons were still little boys, I knew I could not support them on a minimum-wage job. Then I saw a newspaper ad that the shipyard was going to hire 1,000 women, so the next morning I was there. The government had told them they had to hire a certain number of women, to comply with EEOC [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission].

I hired in as a tack welder; now I'm classified as a mechanic in the shipfitters. We do very heavy work. I've worked with steel foundations that are bigger than a couch. I'll never forget that first day in the shipyard. They put me underneath a ship, held up by the big pillars. A young man was going to teach me; 10 minutes later he leaves and for a half hour I sit there looking at that huge ship over my head, thinking, "God, don't let it fall."

At first, I got a lot of static from the men. "This is no place for a woman, you ought to be outside taking care of your kids." I got angry one day, and I told one of the guys that I had to feed my damn kids just like he did, that's why I was there, and I never had too much trouble after that.

Sandra Tanner, *a painter and member of Local 8888's safety and health committee:* I went to work in 1976, and there still weren't many women in the paint department where they put me. I'd never done anything like this before. I grew up in North Carolina; my father worked in a textile mill, my mother never worked outside the home. I did clerical work for W.T. Grant, worked up to management. They went out of business, and I came to the shipyard. I've always been the prissy type, and my brother said, "You'll never make it through the winter." It was cold, no heat anywhere on the ship; you had to eat outside, or in the bottom of the ship because you had only 20 minutes, and you never knew whether your lunch would be there, because a big rat might come and take it right out of your tool box. But I made it through the winter. Then my brother said, "You'll never make it

Local 8888 women with their union banner at the giant Solidarity Day march in Washington, September 19, 1981. From the left behind the banner are: Ann Warren, Jan Hooks, Sandra Tanner, unidentified woman, Gloria Council, Nancy Crosby, Cynthia Boyd and Paula Axsom. *photo by Anthony Vincent*

through the summer, it's worse, it's so hot." But I made it through the summer, and I'm still there.

Jan Hooks, *twin sister of Ann Warren, mother of two daughters, editor of Local 8888's newspaper,* The Voyager: I'm a crane operator. The cranes fascinated me from the day I went in the shipyard. That was after Ann was already working there. My second husband was a serviceman and we lived all over, but when I moved back here my second husband and I had separated. I had two daughters, and no job. I'm trained as a secretary, but I enjoy being outside. Ann said come to the shipyard. My department is grunt-and-groan work; it's classified as an unskilled department – primarily black uneducated men. And I'll tell you those uneducated black men accepted me a whole lot quicker than anybody and went out of their way to help me. The white men in the age bracket from 30 to 45 were the ones I had the biggest problem with. They seemed to feel the most threatened.

My first day in the yard, I was sent to the bottom of a ship. They put me in a little hole, with no lights, and gave me a two-inch paint brush and a metal shovel and told me to clean this hole out. I was scared to death; it was hot as all get-out. But one woman working with me pulled me out, and she jumped all over the supervisor, told him no woman, no *worker*, was going in a tank by themselves without a light, or ventilation.

Warren: When I first went there, they had only one bathroom for women in a six-block area. We raised cain, six women fighting the whole shipyard So they brought us two portable johns, and the men used them at night, and they stayed filthy. We got a padlock and locked them. One day, it was real hot, and one of the girls was angry because the stench in the john made her gag. A construction supervisor – one of the biggest men in the shipyard – was down on the shipways; she grabbed him by the hand, put him inside the toilet and locked the door. She made him stay in there about 10 minutes, and it was hot and it stunk. When he came out, he was heaving, he was so sick. He said, "Is this the only thing you all've got?" And two days later we had the prettiest and brightest brand new toilet you've ever seen.

In 1976, five men formed a committee and asked the steelworkers to help them organize. Women soon joined.

Peggy Carpenter, *mother of a nine-year-old daughter, a welding inspector and financial secretary of Local 8888:* Before we had the union, the supervisors felt they could talk to you any kind of way. And they would promote their girl friends, or women they liked; there was no seniority.

Warren: Jan's and my father worked in the shipyard before he retired, and he was so proud of us both. He took us both out and bought us our work clothes when we first went in. He's always been ahead of his time – brought us up to show no partiality to anybody, black, white, man, woman. And he knew about unions, because I remember walking a picket line with him when we were four

Ann Warren explains strike benefits to shipyard workers during the strike at Newport News. photo courtesy of Jan Hooks

years old. That was in the North Carolina mountains in the '40s, at a big laundry. Jan and I went and asked our father what he thought about the union. He said yes, a union was probably the best thing that could happen at the shipyard, and if we wanted it to go after it. So we both did.

Judy Mullins, *a machinist and a leader in Local 8888's work for passage of the Equal Rights Amendment:* It was different with me. Union is something I did not grow up with at all. My dad worked in the shipyard, but he said don't join the PSA [Peninsula Shipbuilders Association, the company-controlled union that then represented the workers]. He still considers the Steelworkers crime and corruption. But in the yard, I listened to the men complain – I mean from day one, I heard them – about working conditions, low pay, lack of benefits, management pushing people around, unsafe conditions. And I knew a union was needed, here was a chance to change things 100 percent.

Gloria Council, *a welder and recording secretary of Local 8888:* My sister was in the union before I was. The company made up things to fire her. But the union fought and got her job back. So I saw what a union could do.

Local 8888 includes about as many office workers as production workers. Women who were pioneering in the heavy work on the shipways soon found allies among the women who worked in the offices, many of them on the highly technical computer jobs.

Paula Axsom, *mother of two grown children, now Tidewater coordinator for ratification of ERA:* I'm a materials supply clerk, I monitor books for spare parts, it's a bookkeeping job. Those of us in the office were lowest on the totem pole in salary. Before we got our contract, they were hiring clerical employees at minimum wage. I had been at the shipyard 15 years, but production workers who had been there just a few years made more than I did, and I was topped out as to where I could go. All that has changed with the union.

Cindy Boyd, *mother of two young children, now co-chair of Local 8888's compensation committee:* I work in the office, and actually I was doing pretty well before the strike. I'd been there seven years, my father was in service, and I worked summers during high school for the government, hoping I could someday be a clerk-typist. When I got the job at the shipyard, they trained us on computers, and I thought it was marvelous. The reason I went out on strike is that my husband works in the yard, and I knew what he was going through, being a black male in that shipyard. Not just him, but the women, too, with bad work-

ing conditions, unsafe, no benefits. So we both came out on strike, and I was scared, we have two kids, and we didn't know if we would have a job again, but we decided to make that stand.

The computer operators put the company through a trick when we went out. We knew our jobs, we trained other workers, but we never wrote down procedures. We took that information out with us in our brains, and the supervisors didn't know how to get the work out, they really messed up the computer system.

When we got back, it was terrible. Harassment like I'd never heard of before. I had to go to a doctor and get medication. And they took away all the interesting duties we had, gave us menial tasks, and I finally asked for a transfer, and now I'm a materials supply clerk. That's when I learned I had to fight – because they weren't giving me anything. I used to cry when supervisors would harass me, but no more, I fight now just as hard as they fight me.

Nancy Crosby, *who, before the union, worked on a highly skilled job in the yard's computer center:* We all learned to be fighters. I worked in a highly secured area, very interesting work. Then my husband (Wayne) got active in the union and became president, and they took many of my duties away from me and finally transferred me, supposedly temporarily, to another job. They didn't trust me. I was in a salaried position and was not eligible for the union, but when the strike came, I went out too – stayed out with the others, walked the picket line. After the strike, I asked if I'd be put back in the computer center, but they said the job was no longer available. So now I have a clerical type job in the design unit, where I belong to a different Steelworkers local, 8417. We've all given up some things for the union – but we've gained more. I learned about unions in Georgia, where I grew up. I was one of eight children, my dad died when I was 11, and we were very poor. I got a job as a store clerk to put myself through high school.

Elizabeth "Jackie" Breeden being arrested on "Bloody Monday" – the day during the strike when Newport News police beat strikers and arrested them en masse. Breeden was third-shift strike coordinator and is still a union leader.
photo courtesy of Jan Hooks

After the strike, the union women became leaders in the Virginia movement for the ERA. Local 8888 led a march of 8,000 people at the state capitol in 1980. Says Paula Axsom, "We had more men go with us to that march than women." Jan Hooks adds, "The guys in the union are really with us; they are no longer antagonistic. It's the ones that are not involved that we really catch flack from," photo by Suzanne Crowell

But after I was married, Wayne and I worked together in a small Georgia can plant, and we helped organize a Steelworkers local there. Whether you are in an office job or on the shipways – I know that shipyard management has a lot more respect for those people they know will stand up to them.

Warren: So we were all together. I'm an old shipyard worker, I stay dirty, and Cindy and Nancy and Paula, they're nice, working up there in the office. But there we were, working side by side, in the union hall, on the picket line, during the strike.

Local 8888's strike in 1979 was rough. Many strikers were arrested. State and local police attacked the strikers brutally on several occasions.

Axsom: When the strike began, the union organizer said he didn't want women on the picket line, he was afraid we'd get hurt. But the women went anyway.

Warren: One of the first ones who got arrested was a woman. Police arrested her husband, and she made a flying leap and tackled the lieutenant, bodily to the ground. It took four of them to put her in the cop car. And we had a policeman with a camera, he'd harass the devil out of people, so we ganged up and covered one gate with 50 women, and every time that cop brought the camera up, we posed for him; we harassed him until they finally took him off the gates. Even the wives came out, mothers pushed babies in carriages on the line.

Tanner: Since the strike, we've learned so much, about our rights, about safety. That yard is a dangerous place. When I first went there, working in the paint department, they put me to busting rust. That's grinding rust off the ship hulls so they can be painted. My supervisor never even showed me how to hook up my grinder. It has no guard, so not knowing how to use one, you could cut your hand off. I busted rust for three days before I even knew what a respirator was. They had respirators, but they didn't educate the people. When we came off the ships, you couldn't tell who was white or black, we were covered with rust.

But with the union, we started having safety meetings once a week, and they educated us so much. I got to arguing with my supervisor all the time about how we needed ventilation and more safety equipment. I stayed in a lot of trouble, but I figured my lungs were worth it. I got so interested in safety that I've gone back to school part-time. I only finished high school before, but now I'm at the community college, studying occupational safety and health.

Warren: None of us knew the rights we had under federal law. The state is not that much, but federal laws like EEOC, the Civil Rights Act, labor laws, our rights under OSHA, we learned all that.

Council: You always had the right to refuse to do dangerous work, but before the union there was no one to guarantee that right. Now there is. The main thing is that the company knows now that we are not afraid of them.

Carpenter: I come from a struggling family of women. My mother and father separated, my mother worked in a chicken plant, plucking chickens, and went to school at night. She was a strong woman. I think I'm naturally like her, and the union brought out the real me. And it gave me a chance to use my ability. I didn't go to college, but math was my favorite subject, so when I first went to the yard, I tried to get into clerical work. I'm glad now I didn't, because I'm using my math as financial secretary for the union.

Warren: That shipyard has always made the women, and the men too, feel like they were stupid, ignorant. But they found out through the Steelworkers and our learning process that we are not ignorant people. For example, Jan had never worked with social services in her life, but she handled food stamps for the whole strike. She got to know everybody within a 200-mile radius who dealt with social services. Cindy is now one of our leaders, co-chair of workers' compensation. One of them, head of the compensation committee, went to Washington recently to testify on that. The shipyard has found out that we are not as stupid as they thought we were.

Women are fighting back against sexual harassment on the job now. One woman took a supervisor to court, and he was fired. She had asked for a raise and he said, all right, if you'll sleep with me, only he used cruder words. Now this was a white supervisor and a black woman – and she went back and asked him again, and he did the same thing. And she taped him.

Crosby: So now they bar all tape recorders from the yard area.

Tanner: But the company is also turning it around and trying to use the sexual harassment thing to turn worker against worker. They're now telling our co-workers they'll get fired for sexual harassment.

Hooks: The discrimination is still so rampant. In my department, you see so many white guys that are supervisors, or specialists, and there's not a single woman above third-class mechanic. The work force in my department is 80 percent black, and I bet not two percent are above mechanic.

Warren: As far as this company is concerned, the people in that shipyard are either white men, or they are Southern white gentlewomen that don't have any business working, or they are niggers. And I mean they actually call them that, sometimes to their face. Some women, white and black, have been made supervisors, but they are tokens. The government told the company to comply with EEOC, so they find women who scabbed. A decent supervisor who treats people right, man or woman, gets shafted. They want supervisors who will stay on people's backs all the time.

The women – along with union men – have gone into politics. In 1981, Local 8888 representatives, in coalition with several other unions, took over local Democratic conventions in Hampton and Newport News and elected most of the delegates to the state convention.

Warren: We don't have anybody in office around here who will stand up for working people. Whether it be on city council, in the House of Representatives, senators. And we figure we have to start here and put the people in that we need. The only way you can do that is register to vote, and you'd be surprised how many people on the Steelworker rolls were not registered to vote.

Axsom: So we ran a telephone bank. It's estimated that at least 2,500 people registered through those phone banks. Soon we'll be gearing them up again.

Warren: Tenneco put on a campaign in the community for four years saying the Steelworkers were trouble with a capital T. So the whole area got against us, first because we were women in the shipyard, then because we were Steelworkers.

Axsom: But I think we are turning that around now. Not totally, but people are coming around, people who were scared of us, they are knocking on the door, they are calling.

Carpenter: This is something new for the South. And I think more unions, more working people, are going to get together, statewide, nationwide. We know what we want; we want a fair shake. We don't need to be rich or have a big Cadillac. We just want to be able to live and raise our children and not have to struggle every minute. I saw my mother struggle so, working in the poultry plant, and never have anything for it. Oh, we never went to bed hungry, she saw to that, but it was such a struggle for her.

Warren: We've got to fight together, or we'll have nothing. One person can't do anything, but when you've got people behind you, you can accomplish things.

Mullins: And for the betterment of everyone. Not just for us, but for everybody, try to make things better in our work place and in our community. Because we are not going to make any changes in what's going on in this country until we can make changes in our own community. And that's what we're trying to do, make things better for everybody.□

Anne Braden is a journalist who has been active for more than three decades in Southern movements for social justice. She is currently co-chairperson of the Southern Organizing Committee for Economic and Social Justice.

Jan Hooks and Ann Warren, twin sisters who are leaders of Local 8888, at Solidarity Day in Washington, September, 19, 1981, photo by Anthony Vincent

Leading the Way

by Ralph Johnson and Higdon Roberts

Women have been underrepresented among the official leadership of unions. But that is changing, and these women lead the way.

A recent booklet by the Coalition of Labor Union Women, "Absent from the Agenda: A Report on the Role of Women in American Unions," provides stark evidence of the lack of female leadership in the upper levels of the American labor movement. Recognizing and acknowledging this state of affairs is important. However slowly and carefully, individual unions and the AFL-CIO are attempting corrective measures.

This slow, steady movement is partly a result of enlightened union ideology, but it's also a reflection of the pragmatic attitudes of the current labor leadership. With an increasing number of women entering the work force, it is apparent that one of the major areas for future growth – perhaps survival – for the labor movement is the female segment of the work force. If women are to be organized, it will take concern for and an understanding of women workers. This demands a strong female presence and influence at all levels within the labor movement – a presence currently low, but improving.

The route to the top requires entrance somewhere along the line as a full-time professional staff person. We, therefore, spoke with a few women in such positions in the South. How and why did they get where they are today? What were some of their formative experiences along the way? What are the joys and problems of their current jobs? What do they see as the future for women wanting to travel the same road?

Fannie Neal from Montgomery, Alabama, is Southeastern Director of Volunteers in Politics, Committee on Political Education (COPE), AFL-CIO. Volunteers in Politics, formerly known as the Women's Auxiliary Department, is primarily responsible for implementing AFL-CIO political policies. It plays an important role in voter registration and get-out-the-vote campaigns.

Shirlee MacCourt from Orlando, Florida, is

Buddie King

president and business agent for the Hotel and Restaurant Employees and Bartenders' Union, Local 737. Her duties include administration of the local, collective bargaining, handling grievances and arbitration.

Jeane Lambie is president/director of Arkansas Council 38 of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees. She oversees the total program of the union.

Judy Clark from Owensboro, Kentucky, is business agent for the Southeastern Joint Board of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union of America. She is responsible for administration, collective bargaining, grievance handling and arbitration.

Buddie King, representative of the United Steelworkers of America, District 36 in Birmingham, Alabama, is primarily an organizer.

Eula McGill is manager of the North Alabama Joint Board of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers. As joint board manager, her duties are similar to those of a president or business agent, but are based on a geographical area.

Barbara Kelly from Greenville, South Carolina, is field staff representative for Region 5 of the AFL-CIO. She is primarily involved in organizing and implementing national AFL-CIO policy.

All the jobs are complex and require a range of skills and knowledge difficult to find in a single individual. All require extensive travel and long irregular work hours. All are either elected or appointed by others who are elected, which makes politics a constant in everything they do.

The women were asked how they became involved in unions.

Fannie Neal: Seeing workers persecuted and mistreated in 1945 in the late spring, a group of us was talking about how workers were treated. The papers were telling us what workers were getting out of contracts and how the struggles of the working people were spreading. With us working in the factory, we came under the CIO and we became interested in trying to help do something about our shop.

I think one of the things that motivated me more than anything was I read in the papers where, I think it was UMW, who got that contract. They had something about reporting time and this was when you came to work at 7:00 a.m. and there was no work available for you, then the company had to pay you for that time that you waited until work was available.

Shirlee MacCourt: Well, I guess, just talking to different waitresses, people in my field in food and beverage, and seeing how bad people were treated. Having no recourse, who are they going to? They had nobody to go to, and if the boss told them, "Punch out," they were gone. I could see all

Fannie Neal *photo by Horace Sheffield*

Eula McGill

the different situations were terrible. They needed help, that is all there is to it and here I am.

Jeane Lambie: I started working at the state hospital. My mother was a charter member of the local out there and I joined it. At that time, there was a great struggle between the union and the Licensed Psychiatric Technicians Association. I was in both; I always felt very good that I was able to bring those two groups together and became president of both of them at the same time. I served as president of that local, and I was elected secretary-treasurer of Council 38 for five years and then ran for president.

Judy Clark: I was divorced and had two children back in 1963. I went to work in a Palm Beach shop near my home in Kentucky. I was not really active in the union the first couple of years that I was in the shop. Then, after I was there about three years, they needed somebody in the job of recording secretary. I was, more or less, drafted for the job.

I was cause-oriented; the candlelight marches, anti-war demonstrations. I felt the union was a way to continue my disagreement with the way many things were. A lot of things were wrong and I wanted to do something about it.

Buddie King: The first memory I have, in my lifetime, is my mother begging my daddy not to go to a union meeting because she was afraid he would be killed. I couldn't have been over three, but I remember that so vividly because it scared me. I was afraid my daddy wouldn't be coming home. He did go, of course, and they did organize.

Eula McGill: When I was a kid, seven years old, I went to my first union meeting. My father was a union man. And later, I first went to work up there in the old White Mill when I was 14 years old, in the summer.

In 1933 we first started organizing in textile and clothing in the South. When Roosevelt was elected, the National Labor Relations Act was passed. This bill provided minimum wage, 25 cents an hour and an eight-hour day, and had a clause in there that people had a right to join a union.

Barbara Kelly: I had been moonlighting as a cocktail waitress in a hotel in Virginia. I saw the inequities that were there. There were girls over there trying to support children. They had families and were working double shifts just to make ends meet – a lot of things were wrong.

What is your advice for any woman aspiring to union leadership?

Shirlee MacCourt: I would tell her to start out as a shop steward. You have to know the union from the ground up – the real everyday problems.

Fannie Neal: I tell them to get involved. Instead of going to play basketball, go to your voters' meeting, or go to your council meeting. If you go to work, you think about it, look around and look at the conditions you work under. If you are not satisfied with them, talk to your co-workers about it, see how much you can influence that co-worker, see how many people feel the same way you feel.

Buddie King: The first and most important thing is to be committed to that kind of life. I would also say that you have got to get active in your local union. You've got to see where the need is and understand why there is a need; be committed to trying to fulfill that need.

Not one of the women could give us an example of a typical day.

Eula McGill: As manager of the North Alabama Joint Board, I meet with regional managers from the plants we represent. I might have problems I need to discuss. I try to set it up a week in advance, but I have problems sometimes with my days coinciding with regional managers' days. So you can't always plan it like you would hope to. I get into the office around 7:00 a.m. or 7:30 a.m., because the shop starts working around 7:30

Jeane Lambie

Judy Clark

a.m., and we're here in case something happens. If I am going out to one of the local unions, or one of the shops, I usually leave here around 8:00 or 8:30 a.m., if I am going to come back that night. Fifteen locals and their problems keep me away. The only time I can get to spend as much time as I want to in the office is when one of my meetings goes astray, and I have my whole week messed up, and then I stay in the office and try to catch up. Most of my time is spent in the area, assisting business agents in things they can't handle.

Barbara Kelly: I am working in Georgetown, South Carolina, organizing a hospital. We left for the hospital early, so we were up at 5:00 a.m. in the morning, and out to the hospital by 6:00 a.m. until a quarter after seven. I came back, had breakfast and met with other reps, and started on another leaflet to be put out the following week. Also, I mailed the leaflet that we had just distributed in front of the hospital. We then opened an office that we are just getting for the daily organizing campaign. We drove 25 miles down to another town and back. I had to make a sign for the office; back out on the street again at 2:30 until approximately 4:15 at the hospital again. Meetings with the same reps; had an early dinner and a meeting at 7:00 p.m. with the committee, and we left around 9:30 p.m. Now, that is not every day, but that is one of the many days you have in organizing.

Jeane Lambie: I like the meet-and-confer sessions. Meeting and appearing before committees, particularly the legislative council committee, is an ongoing thing throughout the year. You know, I like representing public employees.

Shirlee MacCourt: We have to represent non-members, those who don't pay dues. But I treat those freeloaders the same as I treat the members. I found, over the years, this is how you gained their respect, because I have answered their questions, handled their problems the same as I would handle you, as a member. Today, those same people are coming back and signing up. Some of those people are coming back and saying, "Shirlee, I found out what your reputation was, and how you handle problems, and I want to be part of your organization." When somebody tells me that, it makes my whole day. It also builds our strength.

Judy Clark: The job gives me a sense of identity. I am a representative of the Amalgamated. This gives me a sense of place, of being, of doing something worthwhile, belonging to something that is larger than myself. I have to admit that I like confrontations. I like to confront management on problems. A strong, consistent manager – that's a worthy opponent.

Life as a union representative is not free of frustrations and problems:

Barbara Kelly: I don't like losing track of people. When a campaign is over, that union is going to send somebody in there to help them negotiate the contract. I might not see them again, unless I have another campaign in that part of the state. You see, my ties are broken there, and that kind of bothers me, occasionally.

Jeane Lambie: The thing that is most unpleasant is when there are internal problems within the local union, and I am called in to mediate and settle this.

Judy Clark: What I don't like is the thankless aspect of the job. We get, in some instances, a considerable number of people who are unhappy, dissatisfied. You can understand some of this, but it can get to the point where it becomes overwhelming at times. I guess what I like the least is the fact that you have to constantly sell the union, even though all the advantages of the union are apparent. The wages, insurance and grievance procedure – this gets to me after awhile.

The women commented on the role of women as full-time officers.

Judy Clark: I feel that I can represent these women better since I am a woman and have gone

Marty Schuller

through all these things myself, but I know that some of them would probably prefer a male.

Jeane Lambie: When I was first elected, I had problems going to some of the all-male locals. Yeah, I really had to prove myself, I think, much more than a man would have. I remember one meeting, they were just very vocal about it, and I just stood up to them, and I had on a skirt, and I said, "Look, what the hell difference does it make whether you are a representative wearing a skirt or pants, as long as you get the job done? Give me a chance." They did, and I was successful in getting the first contract they ever had. From that time on, I never had trouble.

Well, a lot of male leaders see women as a threat, and just really won't give them a chance. We have a lot more women at the local union level, a lot more women in leadership positions at that level. But I find there is still resistance from many male leaders at the state, and certainly at the national, level.

I think there is a lot more opportunity for women these days. The demand is actually here for more women representatives in international unions, and I can remember, years back – gosh – when I was the only woman here; in fact, I was the first woman to head a council in all of AFSCME, about some 70 councils.

Shirlee MacCourt: Women themselves did not have confidence in another woman because the management guy was always a man, and they thought only a man could do this job. I think that is being overcome in recent years, but I think there is still a good deal of that there.

It took some of us not to have that fear, to get out there and show these guys we can do the same thing that they do. I have a great working rapport with all management. Ten years ago, I do believe, it was more difficult for me than it is today.

Eula McGill: Sometimes I think the worst thing is that people don't feel that they are being mistreated and discriminated against and put upon, like they were. It was so obvious to us, but now, there's so much public relations, and these labor counselors have dressed up their act so. Some people don't really feel that they're hurt. It was so evident in the past. Everybody felt like, "Look, we've got to do something about this." The first opportunity – there was no problem getting people to sign cards. First thing, they had great confidence in Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and, particularly in Alabama, we had some outstanding congressmen and senators, who the people respected. The politicians needed Roosevelt, they all had their hands out. But the main thing the people knew, "Look, I'm living my life here, and I'm just existing." They felt like, "I can't go on, something has to be done." I always said that, in the old days, they cut your throat with a dull knife. Today, they cut with a sharp knife – but your head falls off just the same.

Jeane Lambie: One thing I think: there are going to be a lot more women organized than there have been before. I think that unions are going to have to start working more on women's issues. I know they are harder to organize, usually, and a lot of unions don't want to put that much time and effort and money into the organizing campaign where there is mostly women. I think the women's movement has helped tremendously in showing women that they can do anything, if given the opportunity, and I look for a lot of women to come on up through the ranks.

I think unions are going to become stronger because I think the Reagan administration is going to push them to be. The conservatives are going to create a solidarity that we have not seen in a lot of years. I think they are going to be almost forced into it, and that is a real hope that I have, and I believe it is going to happen.□

Higdon Roberts is a professor of labor studies and education at the Center for Labor Education and Research at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. He was a trade-union activist for 14 years in the railroad, warehousing and construction industries. Ralph Johnson is associate professor of labor studies at the Center and was a steelworker.

School for Women Workers

by Laura Batt

Labor union women from 13 states and 17 unions across the South came to Kentucky to participate in the 1980 Southern School for Labor Union Women.

photo courtesy AT&T

"A few years ago, people said that Southern women wouldn't turn out for this kind of school," said Debra Barnett, a labor educator from the Tennessee Learning Center. "But they were wrong. There's a growing movement. This is the beginning of a new era in the South." Southern union women are becoming more involved and are learning to assume leadership roles in their unions.

The first modern-day women's school in the South was organized by Marge Rachlin and Judy Ellis of the University and College Labor Education Association (UCLEA) Task Force on Women and was run on a shoestring budget at the Presbyterian Center in Montreat, North Carolina, in September, 1977. Rachlin talked of the initial skepticism they met with when they first raised the idea. "The idea was to provide an opportunity for Southern women to share their experiences and learn skills to work more effectively in their unions. Some said it couldn't be done, that not enough women would be interested; but we went ahead with it anyway. Fifty-eight women attended the first women's school. We ran a quality school; we broke the ice and proved that we could get the support of the state federations of labor and that women could get their locals to send them for training."

Since then the school has grown, with 85 women attending in 1980. Angie Celius, a hospital worker and member of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), Local 1991, in New Orleans, went home from the 1979 school and helped organize a local chapter of the Coalition of Labor Union Women. According to Celius, "The first year, I came to the school by myself, but then I came back and brought six new women with me. That's how our movement's growing. We've got to keep organizing. We've especially got to get the younger women involved."

Why a special school for union women? According to Debra Barnett, "Women are traditionally excluded from leadership roles in their unions where they would gain experience to contribute to the union cause. In practical terms, when labor schools are held, women traditionally are not sent." As a result, they are afraid to get more involved in their unions, afraid they lack the education and qualifications. As Silvia Hobbs of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) noted, "I've been a union member for 11

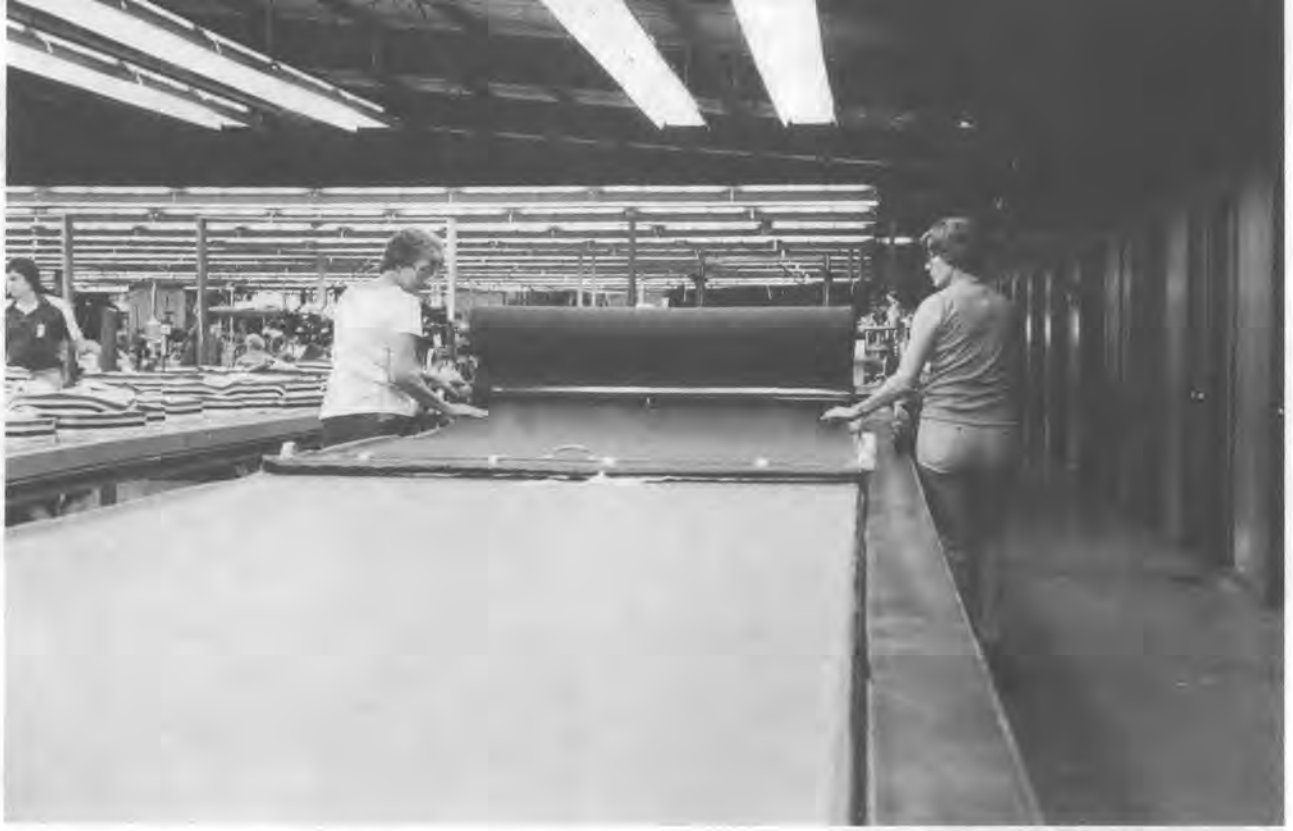


photo by John Spragens, Jr.

years, but I only became active in the last year or so. I always wanted to get involved but was afraid to because I didn't think I was qualified. I think it's hard to get other women active because they feel like I did." Now Hobbs is a shop steward and is finishing her high school education.

There are special difficulties faced by working women, particularly union women who live in Southern right-to-work states. Suzanne Feliciano of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), Local 227, went straight to the point. "We live in the most male-dominated and anti-union region of the country. Domineering men make it hard to organize women, and anti-union management is much stronger in the South. It's double jeopardy."

Women in the South are concentrated in industries which have a predominantly female work force. Yet they work under male-dominated management and not uncommonly face sexual harassment. Under such conditions they often feel intimidated and reluctant to assert their rights, particularly when high unemployment rates make them "easily replaceable." As workers concentrated in low-paying, traditionally women's jobs, they must often work overtime to make ends meet. And as working mothers they have two jobs. Gladys Draugn, a member of Local 3177 of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU) in Ruffin, North Carolina, finds it hard to attend union meetings because she works seven days a week to support her family. Silvia Hobbs is a mother of nine and works 12 hours a day, five days a week to support her family. As she says, "To take care of a family and work at the same time is a constant uphill struggle." Like other women, only since her children have grown up has she been able to become active in her union.

Women are also concentrated in industries which are traditionally non-union. Nationally, seven million – 16 percent – of the 43 million women in the labor force are organized, as compared to 33 percent of the male labor force. But in Southern right-to-work states, the proportion of unionized workers is considerably less. Organizing the unorganized was a major concern of the women attending the school, many of whom had worked on organizing drives in their own locals. Rosa White of UFCW Local 223 in Norfolk, Virginia, was one of them. "In our area there's no way anyone can learn anything about unions that's positive. There's too much anti-unionism. That's why I came to this school. What I'm interested in is organizing."

Another theme of the school was the problems faced by women in nontraditional jobs, including sexual harassment, discrimination and economic insecurity. Women are particularly hurt during this period of economic recession, when they are among the last hired, first fired. "The fact that I have skills doesn't help me that much," says Nesta Duncan, an industrial electrician at the Union Carbide atomic plant in Paducah, Kentucky. "I don't have it made except at a plant large enough that it has to comply with government regulations and will hire me because of that. Otherwise, my being a woman will hurt me." Almost a thousand workers were laid off at the Paducah Carbide plant

1981 and on to '82

The 1981 Southern School for Union Women, held at Unicoi State Park in north Georgia, drew 73 women from 20 international unions. Young and old, black and white, blue-collar and white-collar, sophisticated about unions and brand new to the labor movement, the group shared in an exciting and intense week of learning.

Students chose three workshops from among 12 offered, such as basic and advanced grievance handling, bargaining on women's issues, women in Southern labor history, public speaking, telling labor's story through the mass media, and new jobs/new roles (for women in nontraditional jobs). Daily general assemblies covered legislative issues, occupational safety and health and union women's history. Evening programs included the film "The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter" and the University of Kentucky Labor Center band, the Knights of Labor, with "Women's Labor History through Song and Story."

Planning for the Southern summer school is done in the winter by a committee of student delegates, elected at the previous school, and staff. For information on the 1982 summer school, contact Flo Estes, Center for Labor Education and Research, University of Kentucky, 643 Maxwelton Court, Lexington, KY 40506.

– Brenda Bell

in 1980, including most of the women, "because they were the last hired. The women who remain will almost all be janitorial or laundry workers."

Women who attended the school went back with a new set of skills and knowledge and renewed energy to work actively in their unions. Participants eagerly went through a week of training in technical areas such as grievance handling, collective bargaining, costing a contract, health and safety regulations and parliamentary procedure, as well as broader areas such as public speaking, assertiveness training, organizing and political action. Evening classes were added to the schedule as participants requested supplemental instruction. Women discovered their own union legacy in a special class focusing on women in labor history which dispelled some common myths about working women and reviewed the important roles that they have played in the labor movement. For example, Della Freeman of North Carolina Local 294T of ACTWU came away from the class and said, "When I look back and see what women workers of the past have been through, it just makes me want to get in there and fight. I'm 55, and now that my family is grown, I have more time to devote to the union. If I can make it easier for my daughter and my granddaughter, then that's what I want to do."

Rosa White, a three-year veteran of the school, paid her own way back this year when her local's treasury was depleted after a recent organizing drive. "I came back to the school this year to recharge my batteries. This school makes a difference because you know you've got all your union sisters supporting you."

"It's just too bad that every union woman couldn't come to a school like this," added Beth Hargrave of the United Auto Workers, Local 561, in Tennessee. "It gives you a lot of determination to go home and work in your union. And you really get a good idea of how women in other jobs and unions are treated."□

Laura Batt is an organizer with the National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees, 1199. This article is reprinted from Kentucky Labor News.

photo courtesy Western Electric

IT'S THE LAW

by Tobi Lippin

Your legal rights are important tools for winning workplace improvements.

Knowing your legal rights as a worker is important. If you are employed in a nonunion workplace, your legal rights may be the only tool you and your co-workers have for receiving fair treatment. As a union member, knowing about workplace legal rights can make your union a more effective and powerful organization.

Laws affecting the workplace usually cover both male and female workers. Many laws are federal, but enforcement may be by a state or local agency. Laws such as workers' compensation and unemployment compensation are state laws administered by the state. These laws vary from state to state.

This article provides a broad overview of the worker protections that presently exist. However, you should be aware that the present conservative administration has made its lack of commitment to workers and women evident in proposals weakening important regulations. You should check with a women's employment group, labor law center, legal aid office, American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) chapter or attorney before you initiate any action, particularly in areas of discrimination or safety and health. When hiring or seeking the advice of an attorney, be sure she or he is experienced with the type of case you have.

illustration by Kim Dorée Read

Discrimination

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination against any person based on race, sex, religion or national origin as related to any condition of employment. Title VII covers you if you work for or seek employment from: private employers who employ 15 or more workers; state and local governments; public and private educational institutions; employment agencies; and labor unions. Title VII covers discrimination in hiring, firing, benefits, promotions, working conditions and personnel policies.

The Pregnancy Disability Act of 1979 is an amendment to Title VII. The act says that discrimination on the basis of pregnancy, child birth or related medical conditions is unlawful sex discrimination. This applies to hiring, firing, promotions, leave policies and other fringe benefits such as health plans. The general rule is that pregnant women must be treated the same as all other temporarily disabled applicants and employees. If an employer provides sick leave and disability insurance for employees, the benefits must include benefits applied to pregnancy. Abortions

Illustration by Kim Dorée Read

do not have to be included in insurance plans, but do have to be covered by sick leave and any other benefit plans. The law does not require an employer to offer a disability plan.

Sexual harassment is any unwanted sexual attention ranging from looks, gestures, physical contact and pressure for sexual activity to rape. Sexual harassment is a violation of Title VII. See the article on sexual harassment on page 114 for more details.

The Equal Pay Act of 1963 was passed to guarantee that women and men receive equal pay for substantially equal work. Equal work means jobs with equal skill, equal responsibility and equal effort done under similar conditions. The act covers private employers with 15 or more workers, public schools and local, state and federal governments. Remember, "equal pay" refers to pension plans, vacations and other benefits in addition to actual wages.

The Age Discrimination in Employment Act protects workers between the ages of 40 and 70. The act makes it unlawful for any employer, labor union or employment agency to discriminate on the basis of age in hiring, firing, wages and other benefits. All state and local public employees and people who work for private employers with 20 or more employees are protected by the law.

If you feel that you have been a victim of discrimination in violation of any of the above laws, you should file a charge with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission within 180 days. See the article on page 110 for an explanation of how EEOC works.

Executive Order 11246 forbids discrimination on the basis of sex, race, religion or national origin by certain federal contractors and subcontractors. Which contractors are covered and to what extent is determined by the size of their work force and the amount of the contract. These levels are called thresholds. Proposals by the Reagan administration aim to raise the thresholds, thereby decreasing the number of workers covered by the executive order.

The importance of the executive order is that it forces federal contractors to adopt affirmative action practices. Federal contractors are everywhere. They include most banks, defense contractors, highway construction companies and any other private businesses that sell goods or services to the federal government. The executive order has been a powerful tool in the past for civil-rights and women's organizations concerned with affirmative action. Order 11246 was the key to success for the Coal Employment Project's effort to open the coal mines to women (see page 47 for the full story).

If you feel you have been a victim of discrimination and believe your employer may be a federal contractor, contact the Office of Federal Contract Compliance. All discrimination charges must be filed with the appropriate agency within 180 days of the discriminatory act.

Some states have their own laws prohibiting employment discrimination. You should check with your local legal services office or the ACLU to see if this is the case where you live. It may mean that discrimination complaints or charges are filed with a state human-rights agency instead of with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Wage and Hour Laws

These laws set the lowest wage your employer can pay you as well as the most hours you can work before you are paid overtime. Workers with the following employers are covered by the federal wage and hour laws:

- Businesses such as factories, department stores, hotels or businesses which are part of a national company or chain (examples: restaurants, insurance companies). Also covered is any business which does at least $325,000 worth of business a year.
- Private hospitals and nursing homes, private schools for the mentally ill or handicapped, and *private* pre-schools, elementary and secondary schools.
- Laundries and dry-cleaning services.
- Construction companies.
- Domestic service workers (including day workers, housekeepers, cooks and full-time

illustration by Lauren Jones

babysitters) if they work at least eight hours a week or earn at least $100 a year.

- Clerical and other workers who regularly use the phone or mail to get in touch with businesses in other states.
- Federal government employees.

Employees of state and local (city, town and county) governments are not covered, and workers who are "executive, administrative and/or professional" are also not covered. This includes school teachers. To find out whether your job fits the executive, administrative or professional category, or if you are not sure whether the federal minimum wage and overtime laws cover you, call the Wage and Hour Division of the U.S. Department of Labor. See Resources, page 107, for the address.

The federal minimum wage law says that workers who are covered must receive a minimum wage of $3.35 an hour. This minimum is raised periodically by Congress to increase with inflation.

Those workers covered by federal overtime laws must be paid one-and-a-half times their regular rate for every hour worked over 40 in one week. This is frequently called "time and a half." If you work more than eight hours in one day, but your weekly total is 40 hours or less, you do not have to receive overtime pay for the overtime hours you worked that day. There is no federal law limiting the number of hours your employer can require you to work in one week, unless you are under 16 years of age. Domestic workers and workers employed in movie theaters are not covered by federal overtime laws.

Under federal wage and hour laws, tipped workers are those who regularly receive more than $30 a month in tips. These tips can be considered part of the worker's wage, but can't count for more than 40 percent of the hourly wage. For example, a waitress must be paid at least a minimum wage, which is $3.35 an hour. Her boss is allowed to let the waitress's tips pay for 40 percent of that amount, or $1.34 an hour. Her boss will pay her $2.01 an hour (no less) to add up to a total of $3.35 an hour.

State minimum wage and overtime laws vary from state to state. In addition, other wage laws may exist in your state. Check with the state department of labor to see what they are.

Unemployment Compensation

Unemployment compensation is the insurance that's paid to eligible workers who become unemployed through no fault of their own, such as being laid off. It is usually administered by each state's Employment Security Commission (ESC). This office may be known as the job service or unemployment office. Its two main purposes are to help anyone who is unemployed find a job and, if work cannot be found, to pay eligible workers unemployment insurance. Unemployment compensation is *not* a free handout. It is insurance against the loss of income for eligible workers. Covered employers are required to contribute to the unemployment insurance fund in case their employees become unemployed.

For you to be eligible, your employer must contribute to the fund. Most large employers are required to contribute. Domestic and agricultural workers are sometimes covered. To find out if your employment is covered, you should ask at the ESC in your community.

The law varies from state to state as to who

illustration by Lauren Jones

and what types of unemployment are covered, allowable reasons for termination and the amount of money workers are eligible for. The amount of unemployment insurance you receive is based on your earnings during the 15 months before becoming unemployed. Temporary and partial unemployment may also be covered. You must be able and willing to return to work to be eligible.

It is important to file for compensation as soon as possible after you are out of work. In most cases, you will only be eligible for unemployment if you have been laid off, your hours have been reduced, or your employment is seasonal. However, you may quit a job with good cause and the ESC may still determine you eligible for benefits. For example, a woman required to change work shifts may be unable to arrange child care and be forced to quit. Because the employer changed the terms of the original employment causing unreasonable hardships on the worker, she may be covered by unemployment insurance even though she quit.

Sometimes employers fire workers without "good cause," and the reason given for the firing may not be the real reason. If a worker is labeled a "troublemaker" for standing up for her legal rights, her employer may retaliate by firing her. However, the employer may give insubordination as the reason for the termination or say the worker violated a company rule which has never been enforced before. In cases such as these the terminated worker should file for compensation and become informed about the appeal procedures for disputed cases. During appeals hearings, workers can bring witnesses to testify and present other evidence. If you are ever in such a situation, seek the advice of a union representative, attorney or women's organization familiar with the laws and procedures. They can support you and help you to prepare for your hearing.

illustration by Lauren Jones

illustration by Lauren Jones

Workers' Compensation

Workers' Compensation covers workers who are injured as a result of an accident on the job or are suffering from a disease caused by the type of work they do. All states have workers' compensation laws. Which employers are covered and procedures for filing processing claims vary from state to state. Check with your union representative or legal aid office to learn what the rules are in your state.

The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA)

The NLRA is the law which protects your right as a worker to organize for better working conditions. This includes such activities as forming or joining a labor union; choosing representatives who will bargain with your employer for you on wages, hours and other working conditions, or working with your co-workers to ask your boss for a cost-of-living wage increase. The NLRA makes it illegal for employers to prevent workers from organizing into workers' groups or unions, and outlaws certain actions by unions.

The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) is the independent federal agency that administers the NLRA. The NLRB's two functions are to prevent and correct unfair labor practices by both employers and unions and to hold elections to decide whether workers want to be represented by a union.

The NLRB can also help if you are harassed or punished for organizing or asking for improved working conditions. This is known as "retaliation" and refers to anything which results in poorer working conditions for you because of your activities to seek better working conditions. Examples of retaliation are anything from transferring you to another room to lowering your wages to firing you. Note that the NLRB does

not have the power to force your employer to improve your working conditions; it only protects your right to ask for and to organize for better conditions.

NLRB headquarters are in Washington, DC, but the NLRB regional offices handle NLRB matters in their areas. These offices are listed in the resource box on this page.

The NLRA covers you whether you are in a union or not. As a matter of fact, the NLRA states that you and your co-workers have the right to "engage in concerted activities," which means that you can join with your co-workers to improve working conditions without becoming part of an established union. The NLRA even protects you as an individual if you ask for better working conditions, as long as the changes you ask for also affect your co-workers.

Some examples of rights protected by the NLRA are:

- asking as an individual for improved sick benefits which will affect all workers.
- complaining to any state or federal agency about problems on the job;
- joining a union whether the union is recognized by your employer or not;
- discussing work problems with your co-workers and choosing one or two workers to talk to your supervisor about your concerns.

Some examples of employer violations of the NLRA are:

- transferring you to another room for joining with other co-workers to ask for better lighting where you work;
- firing you for filing a complaint with the Wage and Hour Division;
- threatening you and your co-workers with loss of your jobs or benefits should you join or vote for a union.

It is also illegal for your employer to discriminate against you for filing charges against him/her with the NLRB or for testifying at an NLRB hearing.

The NLRA covers only companies which do business, directly or indirectly, across state lines. Most manufacturing companies, retail stores, restaurants and businesses are covered under the act. Small local businesses, such as family-owned grocery stores and restaurants that are not part of a chain, are not covered, nor does the NLRA cover domestic workers, individuals employed by a

A GUIDE TO GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

If you feel that you are being or have been discriminated against in hiring, job classification, promotions, benefits or firing, there is a federal agency – the **Equal Employment Opportunity Commission** – which was established to help you file a discrimination complaint against your employer. Contact this agency for information about such discriminatory practices.

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
Office of Field Services
2401 E St. NW
Washington, DC 20036

Regional offices are located at:

1301 E. Morehead St.
Charlotte, NC 28204

1407 Union Ave., No. 502
Memphis, TN 38104

Citizens Trust Bldg.
Tenth Floor
75 Piedmont Ave. NE
Atlanta, GA 30335

Dupont Plaza Center
Suite 414
300 Biscayne Blvd. Way
Miami, FL 33131

1900 Pacific Bldg.
Thirteenth Floor
Dallas, TX 75201

Federal Bldg., Room 1101
3320 LaBranch
Houston, TX 77064

Federal Bldg, Fifth Floor
600 South St.
New Orleans, LA 70130

2121 Eighth Ave. N.
Birmingham, AL 35203

National Labor Relations Board

The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) is the law which protects your right to organize for better working conditions. The NLRA is administered by the **National Labor Relations Board (NLRB)**; it works to prevent unfair labor practices by both employers and unions and holds elections to decide whether workers

illustration by Grace Iglehart

want to be represented by a union. For more information, contact:

National Labor Relations Board
Division of Information, Room 1710
1717 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20570

You can also contact the regional office located closest to you:

601 Grant St.
Porter Bldg., Tenth Floor
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Federal Bldg., Room 1695
1240 E. 9th St.
Cleveland, OH 44199

Federal Bldg., Room 2407
550 Main St.
Cincinnati, OH 45202

Marietta Tower, No. 2400
101 Marietta St. NW
Atlanta, GA 30303

Federal Bldg.
Fourth Floor
251 N. Main St.
Winston-Salem, NC 27101

Federal Bldg., Room 1019
Baltimore, MD 21201

Federal Bldg., Room 706
500 Zack St.
Tampa, FL 33602

Federal Bldg., Room 8A24
819 Taylor St.
Fort Worth, TX 76102

Plaza Tower, Room 2700
1001 Howard Ave.
New Orleans, LA 70113

920 One Allen Center
500 Dallas Ave.
Houston, TX 77002

Mid-Memphis Tower
Eighth Floor
1407 Union Ave.
Memphis, TN 38104

Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs

The **Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP)** of the U.S. Department of Labor is empowered to enforce Executive Order 11246, which bars discrimination by private businesses holding contracts with the federal government. OFCCP can investigate patterns of discrimination throughout a firm's workforce, as well as individual cases. For more information about OFCCP and to locate the nearest area office, contact the regional office.

REGION III
3535 Market St.
Philadelphia, PA 19104

REGION IV
1371 Peachtree St. NE
Atlanta, GA 30309

REGION VI
555 Griffin Square Bldg.
Dallas, TX 75202

Social Security

Most classes of workers are covered by social security, including domestic and farmworkers. Social security is a form of insurance that guarantees an income when you retire or become unable to work because of sickness or disability. You and your employer pay equal shares to the federal government each pay period. There are special rules for certain kinds of employment, such as work in the home of a relative, work at a school by a student and jobs which include cash tips. There are more than 1,000 social security offices located throughout the country where you can get the information you need. Check the white pages of the phone book under **Social Security Administration** for the address and phone number of your local office or contact one of the regional offices. They can tell you how to apply for a card and whether or not you are covered. Addresses of the Social Security Regional Offices are:

REGION III (DC, MD, VA, WV)
3535 Market St., PO Box 8788
Philadelphia, PA 19101

REGION IV (AL, FL, GA, KY, MS, NC, SC, TN)
101 Marietta Tower, Suite 2001
Atlanta, GA 30323

REGION VI (AR, LA, TX)
1200 Main Tower Bldg.
Dallas, TX 75202

Wage and Hour Division

For information on federal wage and hour standards, contact the U.S. Department of Labor **Wage and Hour Division**. There are special rules concerning different groups of workers; to find out if you are covered, contact the nearest Wage and Hour Division office in your community or the nearest regional office listed below.

REGION III
Gateway Bldg., Room 15230
3535 Market St.
Philadelphia, PA 19104

REGION IV
1371 Peachtree St. NE, Room 105
Atlanta, GA 30367

REGION VI
555 Griffin Square Bldg., Room 800
Dallas, TX 75202

illustration by Kim Dorée Read

parent or spouse or employees of the government (federal, state or local). Ask the NLRB whether or not your employer is covered.

A complaint should be filed with the NLRB when you feel your employer is guilty of an unfair labor practice and you can't settle the problem by talking with your boss. Filing a complaint is a big step and an important decision. Because the NLRB process is long and complex, you should seek advice *before* you file. You must file within six months of the unfair practice. If you belong to a union, you should first talk over the problem with your union representative or with your shop steward. You are starting off in a much better position if you do belong to a union because the union can help you file your complaint and provide the moral and legal support which you will need. If you don't belong to a union, you may want to consult a lawyer or women's organization. You should also call the NLRB office in your area to make sure your complaint is covered under the act.

You should remember that your employer will not take too kindly to having a complaint filed against him/her. Even though the NLRA says that it is illegal for an employer to take action against a worker for filing a complaint with the NLRB, your employer can find subtle (and not so subtle) ways of harassing you which are unlawful but difficult to prove. The burden of proof is on you, not your employer. Before going to your employer or the NLRB, plan carefully what your argument is going to be by gathering facts (dates, names, times, places) and lining up witnesses who will support you.

You should keep a diary describing all that has happened. This will help you to remember important details. You should keep in mind that if you complain to the NLRB you will have to wait a long time for the problem to be settled because the NLRB is slow in handling cases since they have so many. If possible, have your union deal with the problem. Unions represent many workers and will have far more influence with your boss than you alone will have. If you don't belong to a union, think seriously about joining with your co-workers for strength, support and protection.

The NLRA states that if a majority of workers in a workplace decide to have an organization or union represent them, their employer must bargain with the organization or union. Your employer may refuse to recognize the organization or union as your representative. If this happens, you can ask the NLRB to hold a secret ballot election so that workers at your company can vote and establish officially that the organization or union represents the workers. The NLRB will hold an election only if you and your co-workers, the union or your employer files a petition asking to have one. If the organization or union wins the election, the NLRB makes it the official representative of the workers. Your employer is then legally required to recognize it.

Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA)

In 1970, the U.S. government passed the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA), which guarantees every worker a safe workplace. This act is enforced by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (also known as OSHA), an agency which sets standards for safety and health where you work and inspects your workplace to make sure your employer follows the rules. In some states the state department of labor enforces OSHA.

OSHA sets minimum standards for working conditions. These standards are legally enforceable. Standards are written guidelines which you can use to evaluate the safety of your plant, site or office. The legal limits for chemicals and working conditions are not always safe limits. Even with the current noise standard, research shows that one out of six exposed workers will suffer a hearing loss. Standards are not set for all hazards; some standards are strong, and even the weak ones are better than the conditions in many plants.

It is critically important to keep records of all your talks with your boss. If you decide to call in OSHA, your case will be stronger if you have documents to prove your efforts to get the hazards corrected. When you make a demand, do it in writing. When your boss promises action, get it on paper.

Illustration by Lauren Jones

If you think that conditions in your workplace violate the law and your boss won't clean up, you should file a complaint with OSHA. You can get an OSHA complaint form by calling the OSHA office in your area or by writing to OSHA. To find the location of the OSHA office in your area see page 122.

Your answers on the complaint form will probably be the only description of your workplace the inspector will see before she or he comes to your workplace to investigate your complaint. If possible, your complaint should include:

- your name, address and phone number
- the name of the company, address and phone number
- a clear description of the hazards and the workplace
- that the hazards are a serious threat to the health and safety of many workers
- that your boss has done nothing to correct the hazard

You have the right to tell OSHA *not* to use your name when they inspect, so your employer will not know who filed the complaint. Be sure to keep a copy of the complaint for yourself in case proof is needed later.

If you know a danger is likely to cause death or permanent physical harm, explain the hazard to your foreman or boss or shop steward. Offer to do other, safer work until the hazard is corrected; be sure that you have other workers there as witnesses when you talk to your employer. Give your employer a chance to respond. If nothing is done, call the OSHA office in your area. They have a special inspection procedure for these "imminent danger" complaints. OSHA should inspect no later than 24 hours after you complain. If you think it's taking too long, call again and ask why there has been a delay. Be sure to tell them there is an *"imminent danger"* at your workplace. If you feel your life is in danger, you have the right to refuse unsafe work. But make sure you have told your boss, in the presence of other workers, why you refuse to do the job and that you're willing to do other work.

If you're fired or disciplined for refusing dangerous work, you should file a section 11(c) complaint with your local OSHA office within 30 days of the disciplining. If you have been working on this safety issue with other employees, you can also file a complaint with the National Labor Relations Board.

Section 11(c) says you can't be discriminated against by your employer for requesting an OSHA inspection or asking your employer about health and safety. If you think your employer has taken action against you for this reason, file an 11(c) complaint. These forms may be obtained from the OSHA office. You *should* also file a charge with the NLRB.

The OSHA director usually determines whether your employer should be fined or given a citation for safety and health violations. A citation is a list of violations the inspector found at your workplace. It also tells how long the company has to correct them. Simple violations, such as a faulty fire extinguisher, must be fixed sooner than hazards that require more complex improvements.

Plans have been made by the present administration to weaken OSHA's powers, to lower the standards that industries must meet and to make it harder for workers to complain about unsafe conditions. For example, the Reagan administration is trying to rewrite and weaken the long-fought-for cotton dust standard. It has also postponed implementation of the noise standard and most likely will try to weaken this, too. These moves threaten to undo all the hard-won gains in worker safety and health made since 1970. Write to your congresspeople and let them know that health and safety standards should *not* be weakened. Conditions will only get worse if we don't take action.□

Tobi Lippin is a community organizer living in Greensboro, North Carolina. She is former director of Women in the Work Force.

The information in this article is based on a series of worker rights handbooks: "What Every Woman Worker Should Know About . . ." discrimination, job safety and health, unemployment compensation, minimum wage and overtime laws, sexual harassment and the National Labor Relations Act. The handbooks are available for 50 cents each (35 cents each for 50 or more copies) from: Women in the Work Force, AFSC, PO Box 2234, High Point, NC 27261.

Mapping the Maze

by Liz Wheaton

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission was established to help you fight discrimination on the job.

If you discovered that your boss was secretly withholding a hefty portion of the workers' paychecks, you'd probably head down to the local district attorney's office to file embezzlement charges.

But what if the boss isn't actually taking money out of your paychecks, but simply confines women workers to lower-paying jobs? Legally, that's not embezzlement. But the effect is the same – someone pockets part of the money that women workers should have earned.

Despite the enactment of scores of anti-discrimination laws, women still earn an average of 59 cents for every dollar earned by men. The problem with equal employment law is that enforcement is up to the victims of job discrimination. The vast majority of employers in this country don't give a hoot about federal equal employment or affirmative action guidelines as long as they can get away with violating them.

What can women do to prevent or stop job discrimination? First and foremost, you must know how to spot discrimination. There aren't many employers who'll tell you flat-out that they won't hire women, nor are there many who pay women less for doing the same work as male employees. Job discrimination in the 1980s can be very subtle, and as women enter previously male-dominated occupations, new forms of discrimination emerge. (See page 113 for descriptions of various forms of job discrimination and the laws under which charges may be filed.)

If you feel that you are being or have been discriminated against in hiring, job classification, promotions, benefits or firing, there is a federal agency – the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) – which was established to help you file a discrimination complaint against your employer. In fact, you must go through EEOC if you intend to sue your boss under federal anti-discrimination laws; the federal courts will not accept such lawsuits unless EEOC has first screened the case.

EEOC has field offices in every state, although in most states they are located only in large cities. To find the nearest EEOC office, check your phone book under "U.S. Government;" if it is not listed there, call the information operator.

EEOC enforces Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act (which prohibits discrimination based on race, sex, national origin or creed), the Age Discrimination Act and the Equal Pay Act. Procedures for age discrimination and equal pay complaints vary slightly from those under Title VII described here, but your area EEOC office should have pamphlets available which describe the various discrimination laws and the time limits and other restrictions which apply to each of them.

There are two important factors you must consider before filing an EEOC complaint: discrimination laws do not apply to employers with fewer than 15 workers, nor can discrimination laws be enforced if the act of discrimination took place more than 180 days before you filed the complaint. In the first situation, this means that if you work for a "mom and pop" type of business which employs only 10 people, you have no legal recourse if they refuse to hire women, pay women less than men or discriminate against women in any other way. It does *not* mean that you can be discriminated against if you work for a small, locally owned franchise of a larger corporation – in that case, EEOC would view the corporation as the employer, not the local franchise.

The 180-day restriction on filing EEOC complaints also has different applications. For instance, if you are working in a situation in which the discrimination is ongoing – women are not hired for certain types of work, are paid less or are continually subject to sexual harassment – you may file a complaint at any time, as long as you are working there. If you are forced to resign, denied a promotion, fired or not hired due to sex discrimination, then you must file with EEOC within 180 days of that action.

The helpfulness of local EEOC offices varies. In most areas you can phone or write for the necessary forms, and the preliminary work can be conducted through the mail if it is difficult for you to get to the office. It is, of course, always better if you can meet personally with an EEOC officer to make sure your complaint forms are filled out correctly and with all the necessary information. If that is not possible, you may get help in filling out the forms through your local human relations commission, women's commission or organizations such as the National Organization for Women, the American Civil Liberties Union or the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

A few EEOC offices, however, have told people that they must personally come to the office to file a complaint. If this is a hardship for you, if it would mean taking a day off from work without pay or traveling long distances, write a letter of complaint to the field office and send copies to EEOC [2401 E St. NW, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 634-7040], your local or state human relations commission and the state ACLU. Follow up these letters with phone calls and insist that your right to file a complaint cannot be taken away solely because you cannot file in person.

The more information and documentation you can include with your EEOC complaint, the better. If you have written letters to your company's personnel office or to your union, keep copies and attach them to your complaint. Likewise, if you have witnesses who will verify your complaint, or if you know of others who have experienced similar discrimination at your workplace, you should include statements from them with your complaint. Some EEOC officers may try to tell you that this kind of documentation is "unnecessary" or that it is not their policy to include such information with complaints. Insist, in writing if necessary, that it be included in your file.

Once your complaint has been filed with EEOC, things should move quickly. Under a recently adopted policy called "Rapid Charge Processing," an EEOC officer will be assigned to write the specific charge against your employer. As the complainant, you should be aware that EEOC's intent in establishing "Rapid Charge" was to eliminate a three- to five-year backlog in complaints. The backlog was due primarily to the fact that EEOC had been thorough in its investigations and often expanded individual complaints to class actions on behalf of all workers affected by a particular employer's discrimination.

Under the old practices, discrimination victims were understandably frustrated by the length of time it took to get through the EEOC procedures. But what the new policy makes up in time, it takes

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away in thoroughness. Your interviewer may try to narrow your charge as much as possible, so that your complaint will either stand or fall on its own. This is especially destructive in situations where your complaint may appear insignificant on its own, but when taken in context with other similar complaints, could make an airtight case of discrimination. For example, if you applied for a supervisory position in your company and were passed over in favor of a less-qualified man, it would be relatively easy for your employer to argue that you were not promoted because you have a "bad attitude." But if it could be shown that qualified women were never promoted to supervisory positions, the employer would have a very difficult time disproving the discrimination charges.

Job discrimination rarely occurs in a vacuum, and by discouraging victims from filing group charges or refusing to look at company-wide discrimination patterns, EEOC is, in effect, making it much easier for employers to discriminate on a wholesale basis. You can, however, demand that your EEOC officer broaden your complaint to a class action, or group charge if you have evidence to back up your claim. But be prepared for a fight.

Once the charge is written, your EEOC officer will investigate your complaint and attempt to negotiate a settlement with your employer. The investigation will probably consist of no more than a phone call or two to your company's personnel office to get their side of the story. Your EEOC officer will request the company to negotiate – to rehire you, to put a stop to discriminatory

Nicole Hollander, I'm Training to be Tall and Blonde, *St. Martin's Press, New York*

practices, or whatever settlement the EEOC feels is appropriate. Few companies agree to settle at this stage, so your complaint will probably move to the next stage: the "fact-finding" conference.

The fact-finding conference is supposed to be held within 120 days after your complaint is filed. Many EEOC offices go beyond the 120-day goal, so it is especially important for you to keep in close contact with your EEOC officer in order to prod him or her to schedule your hearing within a reasonable time limit.

The fact-finding conference is like a court hearing, except that no one is under oath and you cannot present witnesses or evidence in your behalf. If you can afford to do so, hire an attorney – *one who is experienced in employment discrimination law* – to represent you in the EEOC hearing. If you cannot find an experienced attorney or cannot afford one, contact one of the resource groups on page 109. They probably can't provide you with a lawyer, but they can offer knowledgeable guidance and support. If you do not have an attorney at the fact-finding conference, you will probably face your employer and perhaps the company personnel officer and attorney on your own.

The EEOC officer will act as judge as well as negotiator, and again the emphasis will be on reaching a settlement. If you settle, you waive your right to take your case to court, so it is important that you make several decisions before going to the hearing: 1) Do you want back pay; do you want reinstatement in your job; do you want the promotion you were denied? 2) What action on the part of your employer do you think would be *most* fair? 3) If you cannot negotiate your most fair settlement, would you accept a compromise? 4) How far are you willing to compromise?

If you do not reach a settlement at the fact-finding conference, EEOC will forward your case to an investigative unit for further study to determine if discrimination occurred. The EEOC-established goal for this stage of the procedure is 120 days, but as with the earlier time line, this is just a goal and the process may take longer. If EEOC takes more than 120 days, you may request a "right to sue" letter, after which you have 90 days to file suit against the employer in federal court.

If the investigative unit determines that discrimination has occurred, they may try to negotiate a settlement with your employer again, or send you their determination along with a "right to sue" letter. If EEOC decides against you, it does not necessarily mean that you do not have a legitimate complaint. You will have to request your "right to sue" letter and proceed on your own to find an attorney who will prepare and file your case in federal court. Once you do get into federal court, it can still be years before your case is heard and decided upon.

If all this sounds extremely frustrating, disheartening and time-consuming – well, it can be and often is. And the prediction is that under the Reagan administration it will get worse. Although no one believes that Reagan will go so far as to dismantle EEOC entirely, the division responsible for investigating class-wide discrimination will probably be eliminated by the budget cuts. Since many forms of job discrimination are too subtle to identify on an individual basis, victims will have a much more difficult time of proving their claims, especially in the areas of promotions, reproductive rights and pay equity. And when we consider that the Reagan administration is also eliminating federal guidelines in affirmative action, contract compliance and sexual harassment, the employment picture for women looks grim, indeed.

But it's not hopeless. EEOC is expected to process discrimination complaints pretty much as it has in the past, and more women's and civil-rights organizations are beginning to develop programs around employment issues. And remember, many of the organizations listed in this book will help you find your way through the EEOC maze.

Even if the worst comes to pass and EEOC and equal employment laws are gutted, all is not lost. We asked Izabelle Pinzler, director of the ACLU Women's Rights Project, what recourse people have if and when equal employment services and regulations are gone. She reiterated the time-tested philosophy: "People are going to have to enforce their equal employment rights by collective action."□

Liz Wheaton is a staff member of the Institute for Southern Studies. She was formerly on the staff of the American Civil Liberties Union's Southern Women's Rights Project.

SEX DISCRIMINATION ON THE JOB

Equal pay: Workers who perform identical jobs must receive equal salaries and benefits, although employers may compensate workers with more experience with more money. (Equal Pay Act of 1963)

Assignments: Employers may not refuse to hire women for certain jobs or to confine women and men to separate job categories unless the employer can prove that assignment by sex is a "*bona fide* occupational qualification" (BFOQ). An example of a BFOQ would be hiring only men to perform male roles in a movie. (Title VII, 1964 Civil Rights Act)

Training and promotions: Women workers must be given equal opportunity to enter training programs and to work in job categories which provide opportunity for promotions. Women who work in fast-food chains, for instance, may not be confined to counter work if, in order to qualify for a promotion, workers must have experience using the grill or other equipment. (Title VII)

Weight, height or lifting requirements: Women cannot be excluded from certain jobs solely because they are not tall enough, do not weigh enough or because they have difficulty lifting heavy objects. Although there may be a few situations in which a woman worker's height, weight or strength would be a BFOQ, in most jobs women can perform as well as men if they have adequate training. (Title VII)

Sexual harassment: Unwanted sexual attention from a co-worker or supervisor has been ruled by the courts to be a form of sex discrimination. Sexual harassment can take the form of lewd comments or jokes, touching or pinching, requests or demands for sexual favors, assault or rape. EEOC has ruled that employers can be sued by victims of sexual harassment if they knew or should have known that such behavior was occurring. (Title VII)

Pregnancy discrimination: Employers may not fire or refuse to hire women workers solely because they are or may become pregnant. In addition, employers who provide insurance or medical leave policies must give pregnant women benefits and coverage equal to that of any other worker who needs medical services or who must take a leave of absence due to temporary disability. (Pregnancy Disability Act of 1978; Title VII)

New Forms of Discrimination

The following forms of discrimination are now being challenged in the courts, but to date have not been ruled illegal by the U.S. Supreme Court. If you feel that you are the victim of one of these forms of discrimination, it is most important that you contact an organization which specializes in new or "landmark" sex discrimination cases for guidance on how to proceed with your complaint. Women's rights attorneys are concerned that new cases brought to court on these issues by inexperienced attorneys might result in court decisions which will make it more difficult for other women to challenge such discrimination.

Comparable worth or pay equity: Women's rights groups have recently brought court cases challenging employment practices which pay women (especially those in traditional women's jobs) lower salaries than men who work in comparable or less-skilled occupations. In one recent case, women jail guards sued to get equal pay with male guards. Although the male guards performed somewhat different tasks from female guards, the Supreme Court ruled that their jobs were similar enough that they should be paid equally. In another case, nurses challenged a hospital policy of paying low-skilled maintenance workers (mostly male) more than the highly trained, mostly female, nurses.

Reproductive discrimination: Many employers who use hazardous chemicals or substances in manufacturing exclude women of child-bearing age from the workplace in order to avoid the possibility of damage to an unborn child. Some employers have gone so far as to make women who work with hazardous substances submit to sexual sterilization in order to keep their jobs. Although most scientists agree that materials which damage women's reproductive systems can be equally damaging to male reproduction, the courts have been very reluctant to view this as a sex discrimination issue.

Multiple discrimination: A federal district court in Texas ruled in 1980 on behalf of a black woman who was denied a promotion because of race *and* sex. The court found that even though there was no clear evidence of sex discrimination on its own and no clear evidence of race discrimination on its own, it was obvious that the promotion was denied because the plaintiff was black and female. Age, race, handicap, nationality and creed are all characteristics which may create an additional burden of discrimination for women.

For guidance on these new types of discrimination, contact: **ACLU Women's Rights Project,** *132 W. 43rd St., New York, NY 10036 (212) 944-9800.*

Speak Up, Speak Out, Say No

by Sylvia Ingle Lane

Most women workers are victims of sexual harassment. There are ways to fight back.

courtesy Alliance Against Sexual Coercion

"My first mistake was letting the sheriff know just how much I wanted the job. It gave him the upper hand, and he kept reminding me of the favor he had done by hiring me. One of the first things he said to me after I became a deputy – the first female one – was, 'A new rule is going to be that females have to go to bed with me.' To that I replied, 'Well, if that is one of the job functions, I'd have to find something else to do.'

"He sorta laughed it off then, but after that he kept trying to get me alone in his office. There, he would grab me, try to kiss me and talk real dirty – I think he got off on that. I tried crying, but that seemed to delight him. I tried being angry, but that didn't work. I threatened to tell my husband and county officials, but he knew how much I loved and wanted the job.

"When I did mention it to other deputies, they couldn't understand and said I shouldn't say things like that about the sheriff. But how could they empathize with me – he had never tried to grab at them or kiss them and they had never been threatened with losing their jobs if they didn't play along. The county supervisors said that it was just a personality thing. 'Oh, he's just generally being a man,' they'd say.

"I remember when it finally dawned on me how bad it was. He had ordered me to come into his office, and once I was in there he started grabbing at me. I found my hand going toward my gun. That frightened me, and I realized then and there that something was going to have to be done."

– Nancy, a former deputy in Virginia

"I was the only lady security guard, and one of my co-workers was showing me around the buildings. We was checking for fires and to make sure the doors was locked. He cracked on me that very first night and kept aggravating me the rest of the time.

"He'd get me over in the corner and say, 'There's not a camera over here; they can't see us here.' And he'd try to put his hands all over me. Later on, he was trying to get a safety supervisor's position and kept telling me, 'If I get it, I can do things for you. I'll help you get an apartment as long as I'm the only one you'll see.' I didn't want to see him; he was about 45 years old, and I didn't like him at all.

"I went to a captain to complain about it. He said he couldn't do anything about it but that he would talk to personnel. Well, it never came to that. In a couple of months or so, they thought up some excuse to fire me – said I had helped somebody steal something from the company. I didn't do it. I didn't do anything.

"I guess I complained too much. . . . That was the problem. And I guess I complained to the wrong people."

– Kathy, a former security guard for a Tennessee newspaper company

"My supervisor started showing an interest in me. He'd follow me home from work and insist on my fixing him drinks or something. He never really touched me, but he would say things like, 'All you need is a good lay.' Or one time he came into my office and asked me which finger I used to masturbate. I just walked out; I thought he was disgusting.

"This man was a Baptist preacher – he wasn't supposed to be doing stuff like that. Luckily, they transferred him to another section.

"After a while, I went in to talk to another supervisor about it. He asked me, 'Why didn't you just quit?' I thought what the hell kind of response is that, but then I realized there was really no other recourse but that."

– Sharon, a counselor for a drug abuse agency in North Carolina

These women are victims of sexual harassment, and their words describe more vividly than any statistics can an old problem that faces working women.

Although studies documenting sexual harassment are relatively recent, slave women knew the problem well; few of them escaped the sexual advances of their keepers. White women in colonial America most often confined their work to the home, but sexual violence was still a part of the domestic picture.

Industrialization brought widespread sexual harassment. Examples can be found in the experience of women in New England textile mills, many of whom had left their homes to go to cities for work. Supervisors in the mills forced their attentions upon the vulnerable young women, who were then disgraced and sent home.

Nor was it confined to factories. Louisa May Alcott wrote a newspaper article early in her career about working as a housekeeper for a Reverend Josephus. The Reverend, as she described it in 1874, first lavished "tender blandishments" and later, when spurned, gave her only the ugliest and dirtiest of work.

Alcott's candor about her experience is unusual, even today. Women's continued reluctance to discuss sexual harassment is indicative of the misunderstandings, myths and complex feelings involved rather than a sign that it doesn't happen often.

Even a definition of sexual harassment is hard to come by – the forms of harassment are as varied as women's responses to them. But a basic definition is: any repeated and unwanted sexual comments, looks, suggestions or physical contact that is objectionable or offensive and causes someone discomfort on the job.

For some, it's a lewd remark on the way to the water fountain or coffee machine. It's being forced to listen to dirty jokes or obscene comments about other women in the office.

For others, it's a pinch or a caress. It's a suggestion that a trip to bed will start the climb up the career ladder or threats that if sexual favors cease so will a job. And for still others, it's downright rape.

Women respond with a mixture of guilt, anger, fear . . . and silence. What happens all too often is that sexual harassment is meant to keep women in their place in the working world. The message women get is clear: you are more important as a sex object than you are as a worker.

The reluctance to come forward is one of the difficulties in coming to grips with the problem of harassment. Only in recent years have even sketchy surveys of sexual harassment been conducted. The numbers have been startling.

One of the first questionnaires on sexual harassment was distributed to women attending a forum at Cornell University in 1975 and to other women workers nearby. Of the 155 women surveyed, 70 percent had experienced sexual harassment at least once. More than 90 percent of them said that it was a serious problem. These included women of all ages, marital status, job categories and pay ranges. The victims included teachers, factory workers, professionals, waitresses and clerical workers.

A 1980 study by the Kentucky Commission on Women found that 95 percent of the women state employees who completed the survey reported that sexual harassment was a problem. About 56 percent of them had actually experienced harassment, and, of those who had been harassed, 79 percent had experienced it several times or still were being harassed on a regular basis.

Women respond to sexual harassment in a variety of ways. But, all too often, the guilt and uncertainty that are wrongly associated with harassment generate some unhealthy reactions.

"While all this was going on, I began to question my sanity," Nancy says now, some two years after she quit her job. "I started wondering what it was about me that let this go on and on and that there was nothing I could do to stop it. I felt somehow guilty and was reluctant to tell my husband everything, although I knew I had done nothing."

Nancy's feelings of guilt are typical of reactions to sexual harassment. "It's as if someone were telling these women, 'Hey, if you weren't dressing a certain way or sending out signals, none of this would have happened,'" said the head of a Winston-Salem, North Carolina, women's group. "But that's just not true, although this guilt and the fear of being stereotyped as 'easy' kept women from speaking up."

Few women know how to handle sexual harassment. Many, especially Southern women, have been conditioned to accept compliments graciously and often the line between a friendly compliment and a sexual innuendo becomes hazy. Too, their conditioning has made them less assertive and unsure about how to express anger.

In addition, women have been encouraged to use men's responses to their attractiveness as proof of their own self-worth. If a woman is "OK" then she is attractive to men. So any

attention or harassment seems, on the surface, to be a positive reinforcement. Beyond this surface approval, however, lies a total lack of respect for the woman as an individual – a point which is hard to comprehend.

Many women say nothing about harassment, either comply or do nothing, and because of increased stress, nervous tension and other psychological problems, end up quitting their jobs – a move that keeps them confined to subordinate economic positions in the work force and tends to perpetuate the sexual harassment problem. Kathy and Sharon both tried to ignore sexual remarks and come-ons to no avail. The actions continued. Studies show that in about 75 percent of the cases where women ignored sexual harassment, the behavior continued or got worse.

But speaking up is not without its hazards.

After she complained about the sheriff's actions, Nancy was relegated to duty on the courthouse monitors – a low-status job within the department. In addition, she and another female deputy, who also had been harassed, were sent out together to pick up mental patients. Always before, she said, that potentially dangerous assignment had called for a male deputy too.

Another female in the sheriff's department later filed suit against the sheriff, prompting grand jury and state police investigations. Nancy and other females subpoenaed to testify were threatened, and after publicity mushroomed and Nancy told her story on television, threats were extended to her mother.

Charges were brought against the sheriff, but later dropped because of a technicality. The threats and disappointment were just too much for her, Nancy said. "I was scared to death. I moved to southwest Virginia, as far away in the state as I could get."

Kathy is convinced that she was fired for what she calls a trumped-up reason because of her complaints to a supervisor. "I never got a chance to even tell my side of the story," she said.

Many women feel that quitting their jobs is the only way to stop harassment, but other options *are* available.

First, a woman should recognize sexual harassment and understand that *it is not her fault.* Whether harassment appears as subtle comments and accidental touchings or flat-out propositions and attacks, a woman has a right to complain and take action. This understanding and determination is the key to reacting positively to sexual harassment.

Here are some positive steps to take:

• An immediate and emphatic "no" will often put a stop to sexual harassment. "If a woman can deal with it herself by telling a co-worker or a boss firmly that she doesn't like what he's doing, then fine, that's the first step," said Jone Eagle, who once worked for Rape Line counseling service in Winston-Salem. "Just tell him, 'I'm here to do my job, and I don't go along with that sort of thing and I'm not interested.'" If necessary, one woman said, pinch back. Many men will stop when faced by a determined woman who forcefully communicates that this behavior is intolerable.

• If harassment persists, evidence is important. Keep memos that detail any remarks and advances. For example, "On such-and-such day and time, so-and-so came into my office or cornered me in the elevator and said this." A file of such memos or some type of record should be kept and shown to another person at work, preferably a superior. Lawyers say such files and memos are essential to a successful court case.

• Band together with co-workers. More than likely, the harasser has approached other women in the office, and they will have similar experiences to relate. If, as is often the case, a woman has only started working for a supervisor who is harassing her, she should try to identify the person who preceded her on the job (if a woman) or other women who recently transferred or left the company. These people possibly were subjected to similar treatment.

Collectively, women with similar facts and complaints will have more power and stand a better chance of getting action on their grievances.

• File a formal complaint with a supervisor, the personnel office or a union. Copies should be kept of any correspondence with management. Federal guidelines on sexual harassment were strengthened by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [EEOC] in 1980, and employers were told to undertake affirmative programs to stop harassment. Since then, the federal government and some large corporations such as American Telephone & Telegraph and IBM have made it clear to employees that sexual harassment will not be tolerated; personnel directors have been put on notice that they must take action on harassment complaints. Many companies now are more sensitive to sexual harassment than they were in the past, and some unions include sexual harassment in their grievance procedures. Unfortunately, though, companies and unions are often male-run and are unsympathetic on this issue. But women working together can change company policy and union procedure.

• Seek the help of outside women's groups. Many areas have local women's advocacy groups, counseling services, human rights boards and commissions.

• Consider taking legal steps against the har-

asser. If harassment includes actual or attempted rape or assault, civil or criminal charges can be brought against the offender. In addition, a federal lawsuit can be filed. Sexual harassment is a form

illustration by Grace Iglehart

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Organizations

Alliance Against Sexual Coercion
PO Box 1
Cambridge, MA 02139
(617) 482-0329

The AASC provides resources and materials for other organizations and agencies working to prevent sexual harassment and to help women who face this harassment. Write for a resource list.

Working Women United Institute
593 Park Ave.
New York, NY 10021
(212) 893-4420

WWUI acts as a national clearinghouse for information on sexual harassment. They maintain an information and referral network and provide a national legal backup center that aids lawyers in preparing cases. Write for a resource list.

Publications

Fighting Sexual Harassment: An Advocacy Handbook (1981)

This handbook, available from the Alliance Against Sexual Coercion (address above), defines and explains sexual harassment and contains ideas for organizing around the issue of sexual harassment and helping victims fight back. It explains legal options and tactics.

Sexual Harassment on the Job: Questions and Answers

A fact sheet on the definition of harassment, legal recourse and employers' responsibilities. Available for 25 cents from the Working Women United Institute (address above).

Sexual Harassment: On the Job Sexual Harassment: What the Union Can Do (1980)

This booklet is designed to help AFSCME workers use the union to respond to harassment problems. It contains a summary of recent court decisions, laws and regulations. Available from: American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, 1625 L St. NW, Washington, DC 20036.

Stopping Sexual Harassment: A Handbook (1980)

This handbook, written by Elissa Clarke, is designed for victims of sexual harassment who want to organize around this problem in their community or workplace. It includes ideas on personal strategies and outlines how to use union procedures and legal and organizational ideas. Available for $2.50 from: Labor Education and Research Project, PO Box 20001, troit, MI 48220.

What Every Woman Should Know About Sexual Harassment (1980)

This pamphlet defines sexual harassment and the various options for victims, including long-term tactics for a wider-scale effort. Available for $2.50 from: Women in the Work Force, PO Box 2234, High Point, NC 27261.

Films/Videotapes

The Workplace Hustle (1980)

This 32-minute film is aimed at employers. It details the real costs of harassment to its victims and to the employers and outlines the impact of recent court rulings. Includes suggestions for fighting sexual harassment in the workplace.

The film is available from: Clark Communications, Inc., 943 Howard St., San Francisco, CA 94103, (415) 777-1668. Purchase of either 16-mm or videocassette copies is $520; rental is $108. A 16-mm copy is available for a minimal fee from: NC Council on the Status of Women, 526 N. Wilmington St., Raleigh, NC 27604, (919) 733-2455.

See Resources on Legal Rights, p. 106, and the article on the EEOC, p. 110.

New Regulations

A new regulation about sexual harassment has been added to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) guidelines on discrimination. As a policy reaffirming that sexual harassment is an unlawful employment practice, the guidelines state that employers have the responsibility to keep the workplace free from sexual harassment. If you report your harassment and your employer does not take *immediate and appropriate corrective action*, he is breaking the law. The new regulation also says that the law has been broken if:

- responding to sexual expectations is a condition of employment (even if the expectations are only implied); or
- employment decisions about you are based in whole or in part on your response to sexual attentions; or
- the sexual pressures create an atmosphere that interferes with your work performance.

of sex discrimination, which is outlawed – just like discrimination based on race, religion or national origin – by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Many women are afraid to take a sexual harassment problem all the way to the courts. They fear the long, complicated process and the public exposure that legal proceedings bring. Here is where women's support groups can help. And women say that the legal process, although slow and at times unsuccessful, often generates a positive feeling of accomplishment.

"Once the legal action got going, even though I had not brought the suit myself, I felt somehow better," said Nancy, who went to the American Civil Liberties Union for help and support. "And even though nothing was ever really done in the courts, I felt we had done our part in trying to get this whole thing stopped." Publicity generated by the female deputies' complaint resulted in an overwhelming vote to defeat the sheriff in the 1980 elections.

When cases were first filed in the mid-1970s, courts were reluctant, on the whole, to term sexual harassment "sex discrimination," using arguments such as: (1) the overtures are purely private matters over which the courts have no jurisdiction; and (2) the actions are not discriminatory, meaning that one sex was not unduly singled out.

At least three recent court decisions, though, plus the strong guidelines issued by EEOC saying that sexual harassment is actionable under Title VII, have established the issue's firm legal footing.

The three cases – known as the *Barnes, Tomkins* and *Bundy* cases – have clarified sexual harassment and helped to pinpoint circumstances under which an employer is responsible for the actions.

Paulette Barnes was an employee of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Her job was abolished, she charged, because she refused to engage in sexual relations with her supervisor. She filed a sexual harassment suit, alleging discrimination under Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. She was eventually awarded $18,000 in back pay and attorneys' fees in an out-of-court settlement.

The *Barnes* case established that an employer – in this instance the EPA – is responsible for the actions of its supervisors. The appeals court stressed this, even though the employer might have had no actual knowledge of the sexual harassment.

The *Tomkins* case arose from similar circumstances. Adrienne Tomkins worked for the Newark, New Jersey, office of the Public Service Electric & Gas Company. She alleges that after she became eligible for promotion, her supervisor asked her to lunch, ostensibly to discuss her promotion. There, he made sexual advances and suggested that she would have to have sex with him in order to ensure her promotion and a good working reltionship. She refused and was detained by him against her will and threatened. She later complained to the company, after which she was demoted and began receiving poor job evaluations. Ultimately, she was discharged.

The court ruled that the actions constituted sexual harassment and were illegal under Title VII. The *Tomkins* case also set up a four-part test for determining whether Title VII is violated by this type of incident.

- A supervisor makes sexual advances toward an employee;
- Continued employment or job status is made contingent upon the employee's submission to these advances;
- Higher management knows or should know of the incident(s);
- The employer does not take prompt and appropriate remedies.

The courts went one step further in a 1979 ruling, saying that a company is responsible for the acts of a supervisor, even though officials of the company may not have known of the conduct.

Sandra G. Bundy was a vocational rehabilitation specialist for the District of Columbia Department of Corrections. She complained that men at work were constantly harassing her, but her complaints went unheeded or generated remarks such as:

"Well, any man in his right mind *would* want to rape you." She also said that she had been denied a promotion that she was due.

In 1981, the U.S. Court of Appeals in Washington, D.C., overturned a lower court's ruling on the *Bundy* case in a strong decision. Comparing the harassment to racial epithets, the court said that racial slurs (and likewise sexual innuendos) are not in and of themselves discriminatory, but they affect the work environment sufficiently to violate Title VII. Also, the court said that Bundy did not have to prove some direct discrimination or retaliatory action.

Lawyers cite this case as a victory for sexual harassment litigation: "Sexual harassment was really an open question until this," said Ron Schecter, a Washington, D.C., lawyer whose firm specializes in Title VII cases. "This is the first case that came out and said that sexual harassment should be stopped."

One other case deserves mention – largely because it indicates a new area into which sexual harassment cases might move. A federal lawsuit was brought recently by Judith Marantette, a waitress at Detroit's Metropolitan Airport. She and other airport waitresses have filed a class-action suit against their employers, Michigan Hosts, Inc., charging that the short, ruffly, low-cut uniforms they are required to wear subject them to sexual harassment by customers.

Uniform cases are not new to the courts, but the sexual harassment aspect of the Marantette case (and a few other developing cases like it) is a recent trend. Essentially, the women in the cases are arguing that because they are women they are expected to wear sexually revealing uniforms and to endure the resulting sexual harassment as part of the job.

In Detroit, the women are awaiting a court ruling on a challenge by their employer on whether they may sue under Title VII. But in a similar case in New York, a woman recently won a favorable ruling.

Women's rights advocates are viewing such cases with great expectation that they will affect other waitresses, receptionists and all workers who are required to dress a certain way to satisfy male employers.

Sexual harassment – like other forms of discrimination – may never be wiped out. Men and women who have been conditioned to assume certain roles will continue to have difficulty coping with changing roles in the work place. Sexual harassment will continue to be a tool to manipulate women and keep them in their place. But with increased education and awareness of the problem, fewer women will tolerate sexual indignity in the work place. Recent successful court cases and recognition by the federal government and private business of the sexual harassment problem are positive indicators that sexual harassment is, at long last, emerging from its murky past.

Kathy and Sharon now have jobs elsewhere. Kathy reports happily that sexual harassment is no longer a problem for her.

On a subsequent job, Nancy's boss started making what he considered innocent sexual remarks. "I bristled, and all the feelings came rushing back," she recalls. "There was no way I could even giggle with a boss anymore. So I just came out and told him that as a woman I didn't think I should have to put up with it. . . . I made no bones about it. I think it sorta surprised him."

She no longer works full-time. "I don't know that I'll ever get over it. I don't think I will ever enjoy working again. But I guess I'm glad I went through it all.

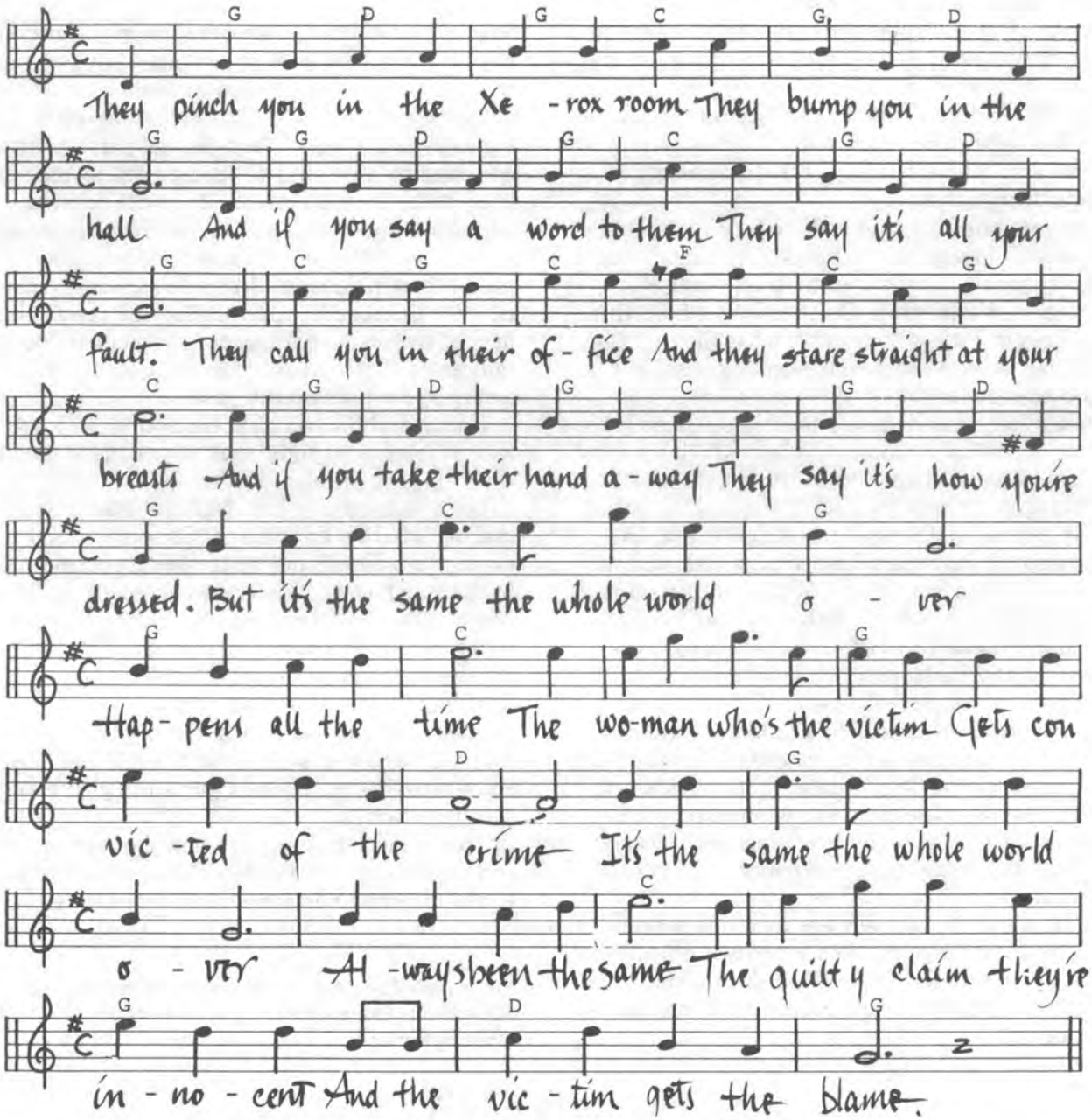
"It's something every woman should learn from, and men should take notice that women are going to start trying to do something about it."□

Sylvia Ingle Lane is city editor of the Winston-Salem Journal. *She has reported for the* Journal *and the* Durham Morning Herald.

photo by Jill Posener

The Victim Gets the Blame

WORDS AND MUSIC BY SI KAHN



calligraphy by Patricia O'Day

Additional verses:

The boss will say you asked for it
And don't you have a nerve
Or else he'll get you fired and say
You got what you deserve
If you speak out, he'll say you're only
Trying to smear his name
If not, he'll say you like it
And his friends will try the same *(Chorus)*

Now if sick folks caused diseases
Everybody'd have their health
And if poor folks caused poverty
We all would share the wealth
If soldiers caused invasions
The generals would fight alone
And if women caused harassment
They'd be safe at work and home *(Chorus)*

This song was written in honor of Ximena Bunster, Betsy Stanko, Lynn Olson, Nancy Villanueva and Naomi Blanki who are leading a struggle against sexual harassment at Clark University in Massachusetts.

A LITANY OF HAZARDS

by Barbara Smith

Job stress and reproductive hazards are among the least recognized and most serious occupational dangers. An effective workers' organization is indespensible to eliminate them from the workplace.

Right now, we are undergoing a terrible change and turmoil at the Bell system. . . . You talk about stress, strain, nervousness. You find people with ulcers, alcoholics, people with bad stomachs, people taking pills, hypertension, high blood pressure. I've walked out of the office, beat my fists on the steering wheel driving home and cried. And I'm not a crier. When you see me cry, I'm mad – mad because of what strain I worked under that day.

– Connie S.

In the heart of the female job ghetto, there is a storm center of "change and turmoil" involving new technology, the reorganization of work and the efforts of workers to protect their jobs and their health.

The origin of the controversy is the application of computer technology to office work. Data banks are replacing the metal file cabinet, word processors are taking the place of typewriters. For employers, computer systems promise higher productivity, instantaneous transfer of information from one location to another, reduced labor costs and other rewards. But for office workers, computerization has often brought monotony, loss of control over their daily tasks and an array of health hazards.

Norma B. spends most of her eight-hour work day in front of a video display terminal (VDT), a machine with a typewriter-like keyboard and a screen that displays information to the operator. Used in banks, airports, insurance companies and elsewhere, the VDT is the workhorse of the computerized office. It can be hooked into a central computer for data entry and retrieval, or used to write and automatically edit newspaper copy, letters and reports. But for workers like Norma, the VDT is at best a mixed blessing.

When I first started in this job, I didn't have to wear my glasses all that often. As I continued and started working more on the VDTs, I started wearing my glasses more. My eyes got very, very tired. Because the screen is curved, if the light hits it just right you have a blind spot, so you have to adjust your head, jerk your head around. That's why I tend to slump, to slouch way down in my chair – because it makes it easier to read the screen.

I had an eye exam just before I started work and an eye exam over a year later. Both eyes had become worse. The optometrist said it was one of three things: that my body was still growing and changing, that it was hereditary or – she thought this was more likely – because of my job.

Vision deterioration is one of the most serious hazards associated with VDTs. But it is by no means the only danger. Fears about the unknown health consequences of radiation coming from the machines have prompted some workers to demand

regular monitoring of radiation levels. Back and neck pain, high stress levels, headaches and dizziness are other frequent complaints from VDT operators. A recent study by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) found that workers constantly using the terminals for strictly clerical tasks have higher stress levels than any other group of workers the agency has studied. Among the NIOSH recommendations were the use of screen hoods and anti-glare filters, relocation of terminals to reduce the glare and contrast from overhead lights and windows, and a

JOB SAFETY AND HEALTH

ORGANIZATIONS

AFL-CIO Department of Occupational Safety and Health
815 16th St. NW, Room 507
Washington, DC 20006
(202) 637-5175 or 637-5366

The AFL-CIO will provide information concerning job hazards and will provide copies of existing and proposed laws concerning occupational safety and health. Write for a list of films and resources available from the AFL-CIO.

Coalition for Reproductive Rights of Workers
1126 16th St. NW, Suite 316
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 659-1311

This coalition of labor, women's and environmental groups does lobbying, outreach and education on reproductive rights. The group aims to protect the health and fertility of workers exposed to toxic substances.

Committees on Occupational Safety and Health

Several states have COSH organizations, coalitions of health professionals and workers trying to improve job safety and health. COSH groups in the South are listed below.

Kanawha Valley Coalition on Occupational Safety and Health
PO Box 5202
Charleston, WV 25311

North Carolina Occupational Safety and Health Project
PO Box 2514
Durham, NC 27705
(919) 286-9249

Tennessee Committee for Occupational Safety and Health
705 N. Broadway
Flat Iron Building, Room 212
Knoxville, TN 37919
(615) 525-3147

Safety and Health Project
University of Alabama at Birmingham
Center for Labor Education and Research
University Station
Birmingham, AL 35294

Women's Occupational Health Resource Center (WOHRC)
Columbia University School of Public Health
60 Haven Ave., B-1
New York, NY 10012
(212) 694-3464

WOHRC provides information, publications and technical assistance on particular health hazards faced by workers. They maintain an equipment information bureau and a library, and can sponsor workshops and training sessions.

PUBLICATIONS

A Workers Guide to Winning at the Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission

Written by Marcia Goldberg; published by Public Citizens Health Research Group. This very readable 1981 guide can help workers take an active role in pushing for enforcement of occupational safety and health standards. It covers the inspection, hearing, evidence, appeal and review processes and includes a glossary of terms and a listing of OSHA rules and offices. Sliding scale: $5.00 (1 to 10 copies); $4.50 (11 to 50 copies); $3.50 (51 to 100 copies); and $3 each for more than 100 copies. Order from: Health Research Group, 2000 P St. NW, Department 410, Washington, DC 20036.

Women's Occupational Health Resource Center News

This bimonthly newsletter covers new information on hazards and how to protect workers from these hazards. Available for $12 per year from WOHRC (address above).

Women's Work, Women's Health: Myths and Realities

Written by Jeanne Mager Stellman; published by Pantheon Books. This 1977 book dispels the myths surrounding women and their work and provides specific information on health hazards in 10 occupations. Available for $5.95 plus $1.00 for handling (prepaid) from: WOHRC (address above).

15-minute break every hour for operators with a heavy work load or repetitive tasks.

The controversy over VDTs, however, is only one aspect of a far-reaching transformation in the nature of office work. In ways similar to the early introduction of mass production in Henry Ford's auto plants, office work is being reorganized into an information assembly line. In large corporations, the personal secretary is a vanishing species, reserved for top executives. Replacing her is a pool of machine operators, each performing a routine task – key punching, word processing, electronic

Working for Your Life: A Woman's Guide to Job Health Hazards

Written by Andrea Hricko and Melanie Brunt. This book summarizes occupational safety and health hazards faced by women in several occupations. Prepared jointly by the Labor Occupational Health Project and Public Citizens Health Resource Group. Available for $8.00 from: WOHRC (address above).

GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

If you believe your workplace violates federal health or safety standards you should file a complaint with the **Occupational Safety and Health Administration** within 30 days of the violation. Regional offices can refer you to area or state offices.

REGION III (DC, MD, VA, WV)
3535 Market St.
Gateway Building, Suite 2100
Philadelphia, PA 19104
(215) 596-1201

REGION IV (AL, FL, GA, KY, MS, NC, SC, TN)
1375 Peachtree St. NE
Atlanta, GA 30309
(404) 881-3573

REGION VI (AR, LA, TX)
555 Griffin Square, Room 602
Dallas, TX 75202
(214) 767-4731

You may also request that the **National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health** (NIOSH), part of the National Institutes of Health, do a health hazard evaluation of your workplace or you may ask them to forward information from previous evaluations. NIOSH regional offices (regions correspond to those listed above for OSHA):

REGION III
PO Box 13716
Philadelphia, PA 19101
(215) 596-6176

REGION IV
101 Marietta Tower, Suite 1007
Atlanta, GA 30303
(404) 221-2396

REGION VI
1200 Main Tower Building, Room 1700A
Dallas, TX 75202
(214) 767-3916

illustration by Lauren Jones

FILMS/VIDEOTAPES

Song of the Canary (1979)

This 30-minute documentary outlines the hazards faced by chemical and textile workers and raises questions about who is responsible for protecting workers and consumers. Available for $5 rental from: AFL-CIO Department of Education, 815 16th St. NW, Room 407, Washington, DC 20006, (202) 637-5153.

Working For Your Life (1979)

This 57-minute film explores the hazards of traditional women's work as well as those found in jobs formerly held only by men. It looks at stress, fatigue and more visible dangers in industries including electronics, hospital work, agriculture and heavy industry. Available for $65 rental from: Labor Occupational Health Project, PO Box 315, Franklin Lakes, NJ 07417, (201) 891-8240. Copies can be purchased for $475 from: 2521 Channing Way, Berkeley, CA 94720, (415) 642-5507.

Your Job or Your Life

This is an excellent 26-minute color slide show which examines the economics of safety and health and the role organized workers can play in winning health and safety improvements. Rental copy available for $12 plus handling from: North Carolina Occupational Safety and Health Project (address above).

See Resources on Clerical Workers, p. 38, Coal Mining Women, p. 51, Farmworkers, p. 102, and Legal Rights, p. 106.

illustration by Lauren Jones

filing – over and over again. Supervision is relentless, but it has no human face: VDTs and other computerized equipment can print out the operators' productivity, accuracy and break-time at regular intervals.

But the changing nature of office work is like the advent of the industrial assembly line in another way: it is encouraging workers to organize. Finding that speed-up, stress, more routinized work and other problems cannot be challenged effectively by isolated individuals, office workers are turning toward unions as a source of collective strength and leverage. Those few who are already in unions are in some cases becoming more active.

June R., for example, is a union steward in the Communications Workers of America. She works in the business office in a Southern subsidiary of AT&T – Ma Bell. In her office, the speed-up accompanying computerization produced such intolerable stress that she decided to do something:

The girls were going berserk, and I said, "Hey, we've just got to slow our calls down. Do what you can do while you're on line, put that customer on hold, close out your memos, write your orders and just put them on hold. You're going to take less calls and you're going to get your work done. You're not going to have things stacking up." So everybody started doing that. We slowed down and it worked.

In our office, it was a matter of coming in and getting the employees here to join together. To realize we're not out against this person or that person, we're a whole, and we've got to do something together. Now the girls in the office are like that. They stick together.

Office work is of course not the only "traditionally female" job with occupational dangers. Laundry workers and dry-cleaners, for example, may come in contact with a variety of potent chemicals. Long-term exposure to solvents like trichloroethylene, used in dry-cleaning, can lead to permanent liver damage. Meat-wrappers, 98 percent of whom are women, can develop "meat-wrappers' asthma," a serious respiratory condition caused by inhaling the fumes released when plastic is cut with a hot wire.

Women who break into industrial jobs in steel, auto, coal mines and elsewhere confront the same multitude of hazards as their male co-workers. But many also suffer from the stress caused by isolation, sexual harassment and discrimination. At a large corporation in West Virginia, a sex discrimination suit recently resulted in the hiring of small numbers of women in outside construction work previously reserved for men. One woman recounted her experience there:

Women who work on the outside, oh, the stress that they go through just in everyday hassles with the supervisors. They're still discriminated against outside, especially by the male foremen. They still get the worst jobs – constantly.

Two of us who were working outside are now pregnant. They slapped us right into entry-level clerk jobs, $60 a week cut in pay. You show me one *man on temporary disability that they've ever brought in and put on an entry-level clerk job, cut his pay $60 a week. They would never even consider doing that to a man. I'm pregnant now. I don't need this worry every day. Don't they realize that of all the times in my life I need that money now more than I've ever needed it?"*

Discrimination against the pregnant worker has an even uglier counterpart in discrimination against the "potentially pregnant" woman working in a job with reproductive hazards. In 1977, corporate officials at an American Cyanamid plant in Willow Island, West Virginia, informed seven women workers that they could "choose" between becoming sterilized and keeping their jobs or being transferred to janitorial positions with a cut in pay. The women were working with lead, which can damage the nervous system, kidneys and reproductive system – *in both women and men.* Five women underwent sterilization, and the publicity surrounding their situation lifted the problem of workplace reproductive hazards into the national spotlight. Labor unions like the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers, of which these women are members, have taken the position that management should "change the workplace, not the worker," and make it safe for all. However, neither management nor the federal government has been so protective of workers' well-being: the Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission,

a federal appeal board, ruled in April, 1981, that Cyanamid's policy did not constitute a work-related health hazard, and dismissed a citation against the company.

It is revealing that employers in the health care industry – where there are potent reproductive hazards like x-rays and anesthetic gases – have not suggested exclusion or sterilization of women workers. The difference, of course, is that 75 percent of the work force in health care is female. Anesthetic gases are associated with a high rate of spontaneous abortions – not only among female employees, but also among the wives of male workers. X-rays and ethylene oxide (used to sterilize heat-sensitive equipment) are both linked to birth defects in the children of exposed workers.

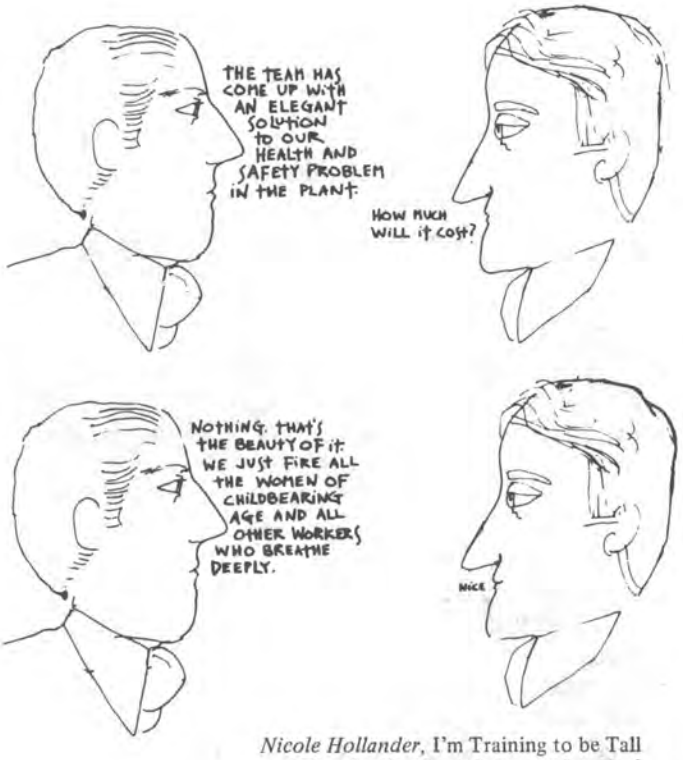
POSSIBLE JOB-RELATED HEALTH PROBLEMS

Area	Symptoms	Common Causes
Skin	redness, rashes, dryness, itching	solvents, degreasers, plastics, oils, fiberglasses
Ears	ringing, temporary or permanent deafness	too much noise
Eyes	redness, pain, watering	smoke, metal dust, acids, gases (like ozone)
Nose and Throat	sneezing, coughing, sore throat, running nose	wood dust, gases (like ozone), ammonia, solvents
Chest and Lungs	wheezing, congestion, dry cough	cotton dust, asbestos, detergent enzymes
Head	dizziness, headaches	solvents, degreasers
Muscle and Back	soreness, strain	too much or improper lifting, bending, uncomfortable chair

Management will probably not admit any connection between an illness and your job. They often blame illnesses on workers' poor health habits, allergies or smoking, but you don't have to put up with sickness caused by your job.

Talk with your co-workers and find out whether a number of them suffer the same problems. Make a detailed list of health symptoms that you think might be work-related. The list above may help you or you can contact an occupational safety and health group in your area. They are listed on page 122.

If you are not sure what is making you and your co-workers sick, you can request that a Health Hazards Evaluation be conducted by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). NIOSH will examine the health of workers and the conditions at your workplace to determine what is causing the problem. NIOSH addresses are listed on page 123.



Nicole Hollander, I'm Training to be Tall and Blonde, *St. Martin's Press, New York*

Ironically, the apparently sanitized environment of health care presents serious occupational dangers. Ellen H. graduated from nursing school in 1953 and has worked on and off ever since in hospitals and clinics.

Oh, there are many hazards in the hospital – exposure to radiation, continuous exposure to all the disease processes known to mankind. You work with these and deal with them on a daily basis. If you are working directly in the operating room, then the anesthetic gases are a tremendous threat, breathing them over and over again on a continuous basis.

Shift work is another problem. People that have never done shift work I don't think can possibly begin to understand the stress that goes with that. You're working holidays when everyone else in your family is off. You miss Thanksgiving, you miss Christmas. When you work night duty, bounce back to work day duty a couple of days, then go on three to 11, there are times when you really literally do not know whether you are coming or going, your system is so upset.

All of these things accumulate. Burnout doesn't happen overnight. It takes an accumulation of many, many factors. But it seems like every nurse I talk with these days is burned out.

Ten-question "stress tests," glossy articles on employee "burnout," stress management workshops – their proliferation suggests that stress has become the pop psychology issue of the 1980s.

Most of this current barrage of information and gimmicks is permeated with the message that stress derives from the individual's inability to cope with the "pressures of modern life." The solution, therefore, is to learn relaxation and other groovy coping techniques. No wonder that many companies are pushing such programs, for they hide the reality that much stress derives from monotony, oversupervision and other abhorrent aspects of work.

Indeed, stress may be one of the most serious and, until recently, least recognized occupational hazards in the U.S. Among its most important sources are a heavy workload, job insecurity, monotony, machine pacing and a lack of control over one's work. For many women, there is the additional problem of the double shift – the combination of home and work responsibilities that can virtually eliminate time for leisure and recuperation.

Daily exposure to a highly stressful workplace can lead to severe health troubles, including ulcers, psychological disorders and heart disease – the leading cause of death for adults in the U.S. Certain occupations consistently top the list of the most stressful, as measured by the incidence of these health problems among workers. A recent NIOSH study found that three of the top 12 most stressful occupations were in the female job ghetto; six of the top 28 were in health care alone.

Stress on the job presents a special problem and challenge to workers who would improve their occupational health. Combating it means challenging basic characteristics of certain jobs and the frequently taken-for-granted authority of management to determine the nature of work. Taking up the problem of stress means taking on management in a long-term struggle for power; at stake are what considerations will determine the conditions of work.

For this struggle an effective workers' organization is indispensable. Unionization does not win the battle for occupational health, but it makes it possible. As June R., the union steward who organized a slowdown to combat stress in her office, put it:

My union to me now is my backbone. It's our job security, it's our good wages, it's our right to a voice, it's our benefits, it's everything to me – as a woman and as a worker. □

Barbara Smith is an unemployed teacher living in Charleston, West Virginia.

GENERAL RESOURCES

ORGANIZATIONS

Women's Rights Project
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
132 W. 43rd St.
New York, NY 10036
(212) 944-9800

This ACLU-sponsored project files class-action suits on behalf of working women and undertakes organizing around issues of sex discrimination, nontraditional work and equal pay.

National Lawyers Guild
2000 P St. NW
Washington, DC 20036

A national organization of lawyers, the Guild has handled projects on sexual harassment and other issues affecting women at work.

Ms. Foundation for Women
370 Lexington Ave.
New York, NY 10017
(212) 689-3475

The Ms. Foundation funds women's projects and also helps groups with technical assistance. The foundation's staff is very helpful.

National Commission on Working Women (NCWW)
1211 Connecticut Ave. NW, Suite 400
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 466-6770

NCCW focuses on the 80 percent of women who are in nonprofessional jobs. Their work includes providing public education and technical assistance to

illustration by Grace Iglehart

local organizations and preparing resources for women workers. They have contacts with local organizations across the nation.

Women's Bureau
U.S. Department of Labor
Washington, DC 20210
(202) 523-6653

The Women's Bureau publishes educational materials on working women and the regulations and government programs which affect them. They also monitor legislation and compile statistics on women and employment.

Women's Legal Defense Fund (WLDF)
1010 Vermont Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 638-1123

WLDF monitors federal legislation and policy on such issues as job discrimination, safety and health and pension rights for women.

PUBLICATIONS

Atlanta Woman's Directory

A 1980 listing of organizations serving Atlanta-area women. Available for $2.00 from: Atlanta National Organization for Women, PO Box 54045, Civic Center Station, Atlanta, GA 30303.

Equality on the Job

This workers' guide explains affirmative action in terms of race, sex and national origin. It includes suggestions for monitoring and promoting enforcement of affirmative action guidelines. Available for $2.50 (discount available on large orders) from: Affirmative Action Coordinating Center, c/o National Conference of Black Lawyers, 126 West 119th St., New York, NY 10026, (212) 864-4000.

Grantseekers Guide

This book provides a comprehensive listing of foundations that fund social change projects. It includes information about deadlines, contact people and previously funded projects. Available for $5.00 (prepaid) from: National Network of Grantmakers, 919 N. Michigan Ave., Fifth Floor, Chicago, IL 60611.

Labor Education for Women Workers

Edited by Barbara Wertheimer; published by Temple University Press. This 1981 collection of articles focuses on how to design educational programs for women workers, including information on format, methodology and fundraising. Available for $22.50 from: Temple University Press, Broad and Oxford, Philadelphia, PA 19122, (215) 787-8787.

Women's Work Is . . . Resources on Working Women

This 1978 book offers extensive listings of resources and publications for working women concerning day care, safety and health and discrimination. It also includes statistics on working women and summaries of articles about working women's organizations, the problems they have confronted and the victories they have won. Available for $4.00 from: Institute on the Church in Urban-Industrial Society, 5700 S. Woodlawn Ave., Chicago, IL 60637.

West Virginia Women's Yellow Pages

Available from The Public Works, Inc., RFD 3, Box 186, Putney, VT 05346 (802)387-4211

If you like "Working Women" try these other issues in the Southern Exposure library . . .

on women

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- Adrienne Rich

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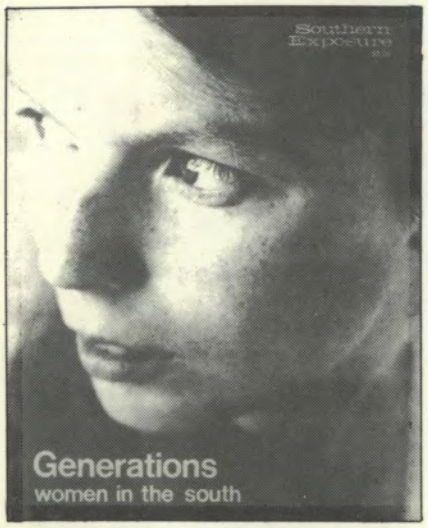

on labor

"Here Come A Wind" – the single most valuable resource available on the Southern worker. How Southerners respond collectively to the changing conditions of their workplace – through unions, education programs, legal initiatives, health-and-safety committees, insurgent movements, lobbying activities and organizing.

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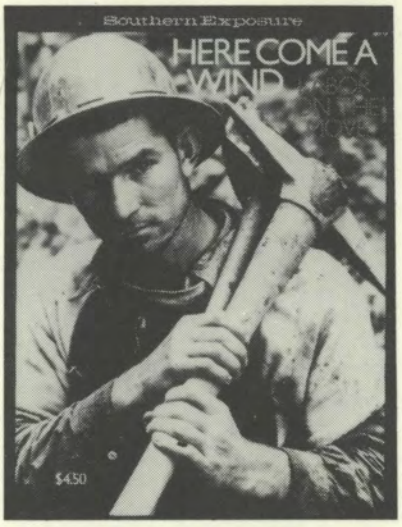

on freedom

"Stayed on Freedom" chronicles the past quarter century of the Civil Rights Movement, from the Montgomery Bus Boycott to the Greensboro sit-ins to current freedom struggles from Atlanta to Zimbabwe.

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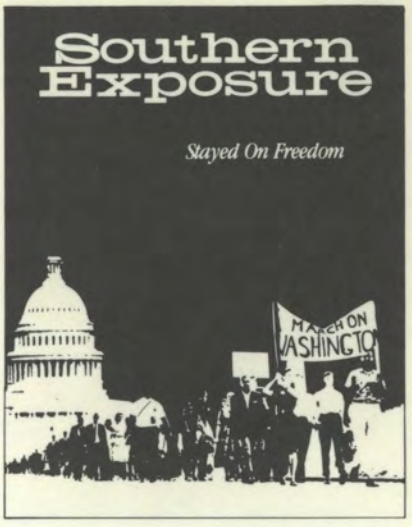
- Mary Kenyatta

$4.



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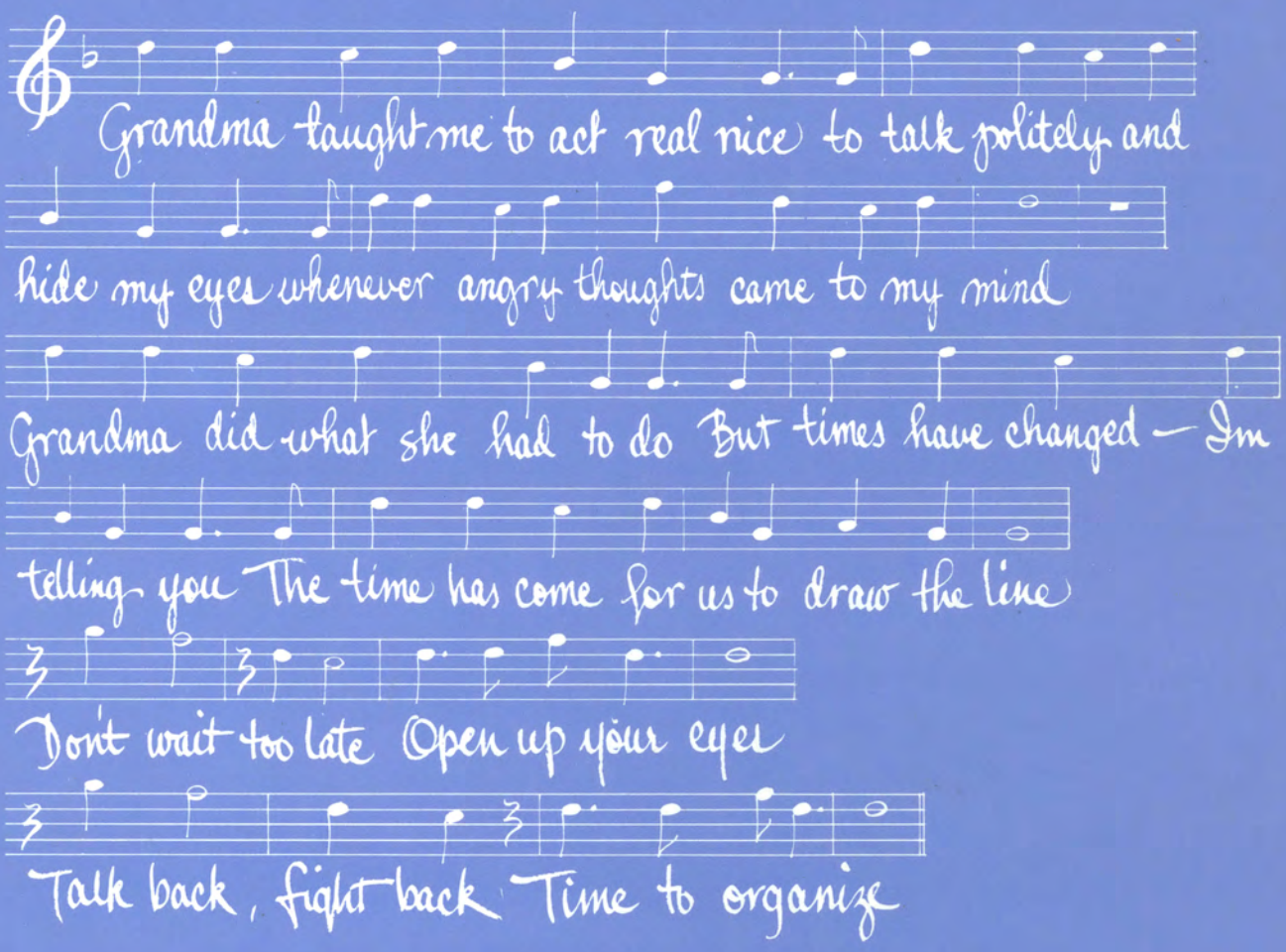
TIME TO ORGANIZE

words and music by Charlotte Brody



Floor boss is the boss' son
He thinks that he owns everyone
Just like his daddy owned us all before
I don't care 'bout his college degree
The man ain't one bit better than me
And I ain't gonna take his lip no more

Grandma worked in the weaving room
She coughed politely and watched her loom
Her paycheck bought her soul and cost her life
Well I work hard to get my pay
I never sold my rights away
I'm standing up for Grandma and my pride