

**WORKING
WOMEN**

**OUR STORIES
AND
STRUGGLES**

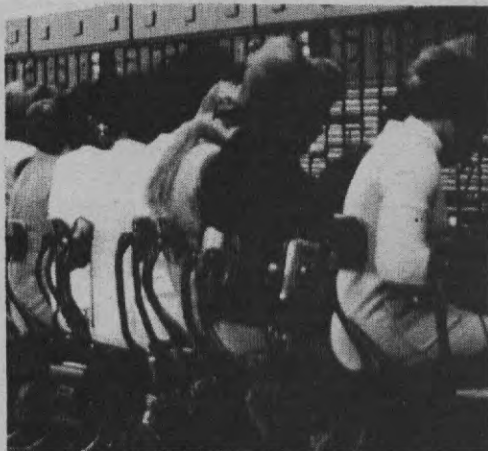
STRIKE

**Prepared by Women of the
Center for United Labor Action**



The Working Women's Movement

By Barbara Teel, from the Center for United Labor Action



In the last few years we have become more and more conscious of our oppression as women, and we have begun to struggle against it. We have all heard of, and some of us have participated in, the Women's Liberation Movement, many of whose goals affect us all. Equal pay for equal work, an end to job discrimination, good, free child care, paid maternity leave, safe, free abortion on demand, and an end to male chauvinist harassment on the job are things we all want. But sometimes the emphasis of the women's movement seems to be more on combatting beauty contests and individual male chauvinism than on these things. Those of us who work feel oppressed economically, not just socially and sexually. There's no comparison between the grievances of the company executive's wife and the oppression of the overwhelming majority of women who work, slave, pinch pennies, are on welfare, live in rat-infested housing, and are subjected to the most brutal exploitation in such areas as laundries, textile factories, domestic work, and other industries where the work is hard and the pay is even less. To say that all women are equally oppressed, and that all men are our enemies is to ignore the basic conflicts between the poor who work and the rich who profit from others' work, between white and nonwhite. Happy Rockefeller may be oppressed by her husband, but she oppresses and exploits her maids, butlers, chauffeurs, and cooks, as well as living off the labor of thousands of working men and women. We may resent the male chauvinist remarks of a gas station attendant, but it is J. Paul Getty who makes millions from selling Playboy magazine.

Almost half the women in this country have jobs. Most of us are unskilled or semiskilled factory workers, waitresses, saleswomen, clerical workers, or domestics. Almost all the skilled workers' jobs, the professional, scientific, and managerial positions are "for men only" — the labels have disappeared from the want ads, but the barriers still exist. Those of us with small children

have trouble getting any job. Because the bosses are too greedy to let us off when our children are sick, they claim we're not good workers. But statistics show that mothers are absent no more than men are—we need the money too much to miss many days. But where are our children while we're at work? If they're in good, inexpensive day-care centers, we are very lucky. Such centers are few and far between. The day-care facilities now existing can only care for a fraction of the children of working mothers, and many of these are either terribly expensive, or crowd too many children into a center with too few teachers, or both.



Once we find a job, what happens if we get pregnant? We stop working late in pregnancy — usually forced to leave — we're left with no income and no promise of a job in the future, though many of us need to go back to work several months after our children are born.

If we do find jobs and manage to keep them, we're paid even less than the men are. The average wages for all women are half those of men, and Black and Third World women are paid even less. The bosses claim that we don't really need the money — that we're working for "pin money" or because we enjoy it. How many women would work in a sweatshop, a dime store, as a waitress, or a domestic if they didn't desperately need the money!

Many of us used to think that employers had a right to pay us less than the men, that they had a right to deny us jobs, and throw us out when we got pregnant. We grow up having it drummed into our heads that we're stupid. We're told that we're weak (but not too weak to carry children or lift bags of groceries). We're taught that our role — and our only role — is to be wives and mothers, that women have always done this. In this way, we're taught not to question what the bosses do.

But when those who profit from our oppression want to, they quickly change their tune. During World War II, when women were needed to replace men in industry, the industrialists suddenly decided that we were strong enough and smart enough to work in their factories. They set up day-care centers in the plants — 24-hour day-care centers which cared for infants as well as older children. But as soon as the war was over, they pulled a switch. Again we were "incapable" of doing anything but housework, our "place" was in the home! (Except, of course, when they wanted to exploit us as maids, garment workers, and so on. But we're not supposed to notice that contradiction).

Who is it that supports the oppression of women? The solution can be found by asking "Who benefits from it?". The ones who benefit from paying some of us low wages and keeping the rest of us out of the work force (to be brought in at a moment's notice) are the big businessmen. They're the ones who pocket additional millions of dollars from our poorly paid labor, just as they're the ones who pocket extra millions from the super-low wages of Black and other Third World workers.

We can fight our exploitation as workers, just as we can fight our oppression as women. Women have played and are playing a large role in the union struggles in this country. The garment workers, always largely women, suffered, fought, and struck along with the men in the movement to win the 8-hour day. Some of the most bitter and heroic strikes of the 1930's and earlier were led and organized by women. These struggles are not just an inspiring history — they are also part of the present.

Millions of women in this country are in



We can see from the status of women in several other countries that we are capable of doing, and doing well, many jobs that only men are allowed to do in this country. In the Soviet Union, for example, a majority of the doctors are women, and many of the leading scientists are women. In China, there are women factory managers, women operating heavy machinery, as well as women in leading scientific and political positions. Women in these countries are able to assume these responsibilities because they know that their children are being well cared for in 24-hour day-care centers, and they know that they can leave a job during pregnancy without having to worry about how they're going to eat or if they will have a job when they wish to return to work.

unions, and more are organizing. We can and should demand that the union leadership bargain not only for high wages to benefit us all, but also for our needs as women — for an end to hiring and wage discrimination, for paid maternity leave and day-care provided by the company. We have a right to be represented in the union leadership.

We will fight along with other working people, women and men, to see that we are not robbed by the rich who own everything but work at nothing. The workers have the real power — we control the machines in the factories, we cook and clean for the rich, we type their letters to each other. Fighting together we can take what is rightfully ours.

Slavery 1971

By Sharon Chin

Some years ago, a picture hit the movie circuits in my neighborhood. It was billed as one of the great flicks of all time. I finally got around to seeing it a few years later. It was one of the most racist movies I've ever seen. It was made in the '30s (not so long ago) and glorified the slavery era of this sick society. It was called "Gone with the Wind."

In that flick, in all the media, in hundreds of flicks before and after, Blacks were depicted as being mindless subhumans who were happy-go-lucky and obedient. Black women especially were supposed to be typical Aunt Jemimas, i.e., fat, slovenly, dumb and docile.

Many years have passed since we were forced to work the field, be house maids, raise the master's kids and succumb to his lust, but things haven't changed very much. Technology has advanced a hundred fold, but if you look around you, into the ghettos, you'll see that many things of yesterday still exist. We still live under horrible conditions in a society that we are locked out of and under an economic system which perpetuates our oppression. Indeed, life in America in 1970 is not the wonderful, beautiful thing that we have been told it is. Black children still starve, Black people still get lynched, Black women still get raped.

We are still slaves only in a slightly different and more subtle way. We may not have physical shackles on us, but those invisible chains of the ruling class are gripping us tighter than ever. The slavery that exists today is known as "wage-slavery!"

Most Black women today work, i.e., are wage-slaves. Even among those who are married and have children, statistics show that 55 per cent work as compared with 44 per cent of white women. The reason for this is because Black men have a hard time getting jobs which pay enough to sustain a family. Sometimes the woman is the sole provider for her family even if the husband is present. This is sometimes referred to as a "matriarchy" or family breakdown by the racist ruling class. I know a lot of families where they can only survive if the woman works or goes on welfare while the man works, because his income is so low. And of course, it is a fact that non-white males have the highest unemployment rate of any group. Non-white females don't have it too much better. There are many more of us unemployed than white women. In fact, 8.3 percent of non-white working women are unemployed as compared with 4.3 percent white women -- nearly twice as many.

The time of being a field nigger or house-nigger is not so far away, for when we do get work, look at the types of work we do. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, 49 per cent of all non-white working women do service work (i.e., maids, servants, cleaning women, etc.), 18 per cent are blue collar workers (factory workers, sewing machine operators, etc.), 2 per cent are farm workers, and 31 per cent are white collar workers.

All together that means 69 per cent of non-white women workers do overtly slave-type jobs--menial, laborious and humiliating work, as compared to 41 per cent white women doing similar type jobs.

Of the 31 per cent of us that do so-called "white collar" jobs, this 31 per cent can be broken down into 1.5 per cent managers and officials, 10 per cent professional and technical, 17.4 per cent clerical and 2.1 per cent sales. It might seem that the white collar worker is something to be aspired to and that white collar workers have it good. However, in this racist system we can never have it good. Besides, as a white collar worker, I know that it is still hard to make a living. There is only room for so many of us and in order to be hired you have to act like some sort of super-nigger. Super-competent, super-neat and super-brainwashed. In most cases it is not a matter of whether we are qualified for a particular job or not, it's whether the bosses happen to need a Black woman to fill the bill--either because they've been vamped on for being a racist organization or because they might have a conscience. Sometime they just think we'll be dedicated little slaves.

Getting one of the better paying jobs is like prostituting because what's going to decide whether we get the job isn't whether we can do it. We have to sell ourselves. Look a certain way, act a certain way, talk a certain way. I was told before I went out on different job interviews everything from how to wear my hair, to being told to shorten my skirt, to how I should flirt with my prospective buyer. I can imagine it was just like being on the slave block--only they didn't inspect my teeth. As women we have to contend with all the crap that comes from male chauvinism as well as racism.

Along the line of wages, here again we are messed over. White men make more than Black men who make more than white women who make more than us. We're at the bottom of the ladder and that's where it's at. The median income



in 1966 for white women was \$4,152, while for non-white women is was \$2,949 (only 71 percent of what they make). This difference is attributed to the high percentage of non-white women doing service jobs. But as I pointed out before, there's not much choice as to type of jobs--you are forced to work to survive and you've got to take what you're "qualified for." I can't, now, go into the reasons why we're not qualified and why we are not making it within this system. But what I can say is that the reasons the ruling class gives are just so much racist bullshit.

Sisters, when I think I once believed that we live

in a democracy and that we are all free, I find my own naivete incredible. Indeed, we are not free, most of the people in this country are not free, and the only ones who dare to call themselves that are those greedy, racist industrialists and bankers that are in power. Slavery still exists today for all of us, Black and white, and it is in a form that makes it even more profitable than before. We must point our finger of hate, we must direct our cries of injustice and our struggles to those who justly deserve it--the rich few who run this country and profit from low wages and racism. Self-determination for Blacks and all Third World peoples!

Waitressing

-All you have to take for a tip!!

by Elizabeth Ross

All restaurant work is lousy. The cooks are in a vile temper because of the heat and the speedup; the dishwashers are miserable because of all the slops, the boiling hot water and the low pay; all the kitchen workers are brutally exploited and harassed and hate their work.

Waitresses are in a special category though. They have to face the customers, be pleasant and subservient even when the "guests" are unreasonable or insulting, they have to take all the male-chauvinist remarks or lose their tips and, to top it off, are at the mercy of the cooks, too. Any cook who has a grudge against a particular waitress can hold up her orders, mix them up and make it impossible for her to keep her job. (Male waiters have it tough too, but waitering is work few men will put up with. In 1968 there were only 331,000 waiters in the U.S. That figure includes bartenders -- there are a lot of them -- while in the same year there were nearly a million waitresses.)

Many women get work as waitresses because it's one of the few kinds of jobs that are available without previous training, and also because it's much like the kind of work they've learned how to do in the home. It's the kind of menial, hard, low-paying position that 65 per cent of all working women are forced into -- service work where the employee has to put up with bad working conditions and degrading, male chauvinist remarks to boot.

A waitress works piecework. Unlike most others in the eating and drinking industry who are paid a fixed salary, the waitress is dependent on her tips for a living, and can only make out when she has more work to do than any human being can easily handle. This means she has to constantly push herself to the limit and put on a perpetual smile to please the customers whose tips her livelihood depends on.

(I knew a waitress once who had a job in a club where tipping was not allowed, and she was paid a decent salary. She said it was the only job she'd ever had that she enjoyed. Her relationship to the customers was on an entirely different basis -- it wasn't so much the slave-master relationship. She said she remembered with disgust all her other jobs where the thought of how big the tip was going to be was always in her mind and the customer's too.)

During the Second World War, I had a variety of waitressing jobs in swank hotels to tea-rooms to night clubs, and I found that the "better" the establishment the harder the work, with the pay only a little higher.

One place I remember vividly was a one-day engagement (thank goodness it wasn't any longer) at the Park Lane, the luncheon spot where Buffalo's elite gathered.

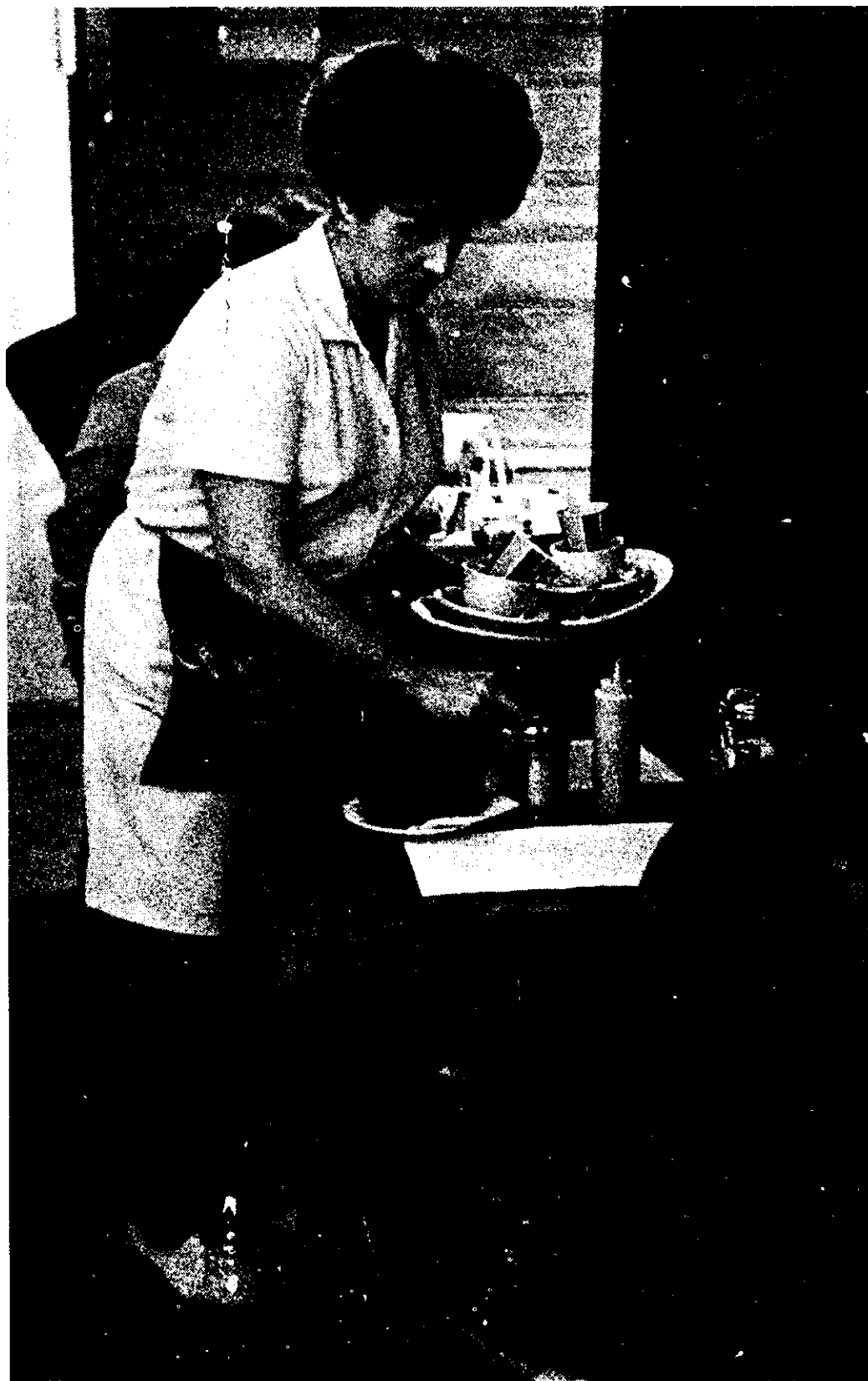
It was a luncheon and fashion show for rich women -- with about two hundred women attending and six waitresses to take care of all their wants. The lunch room was on the second floor, at the top of a winding staircase, and the kitchen was on the ground floor. We had to set up the tables from scratch; there was nothing up there but the bare tables. But we didn't get the salt, sugar, water, ice, silverware, etc., from the kitchen. No, all that stuff was in a sub-basement below the kitchen. So we had to carry it all on heavy silver trays up two flights of stairs before we even started serving the luncheon. As we passed from the kitchen toward the stairs leading to the second floor, I noticed another dining room right beside the kitchen where waiters were standing with white towels over their arms, and one or two guests were seated inside.

"Why don't they have the men work upstairs, and the women in the dining room beside the kitchen?" I asked.

"Oh, they refuse to carry trays up all those stairs," one of the waitresses answered. "The management always has to hire women when they have a special luncheon or banquet in that room."

We held our trays over our shoulders on one hand while the cooks piled one plate on top of another, three or four deep, with silver risers in between. Going up the stairs with that load made your legs tremble, and getting the tray down off your shoulder without spilling anything seemed almost impossible. But somehow we did it, with the sweat pouring down our backs and into our eyes.

Women in the Women's Liberation Movement are often confronted with taunts of, "Do you want to be a construction worker?" Well, if you've ever been a waitress you know what heavy, dirty, exhausting work it is! You're on your feet 8 to 10 hours a day lifting weights and running back and forth. For this miserable job, the Park Lane paid



us each \$2 for the four hours' work (which was twice as much as Schrafft's paid at the time) and the rich people at the luncheon "kindly" took up a collection for the tip. It amounted to \$30 -- \$5 for each of us, and with the \$2 we got from the manage-

ment that was \$7 -- the highest wage I ever made in Buffalo.

I went home dog-tired, but feeling pretty happy to have so much money. Three of the other waitresses were going to work a banquet that evening.

Laundry -- Sweat and Pain



Every minute of every hour for 40 hours a week, women, almost all Black, Haitian or Puerto Rican, stand in front of huge, consuming machines in commercial laundries, feeding them the sheets and pillow cases from fancy hotels. Ten women, in formation, bending down and then forward to keep pace with the hunger of this machine. And each time these women bend, more sweat gathers on their

foreheads. The room's temperature never reaches under 100 degrees and the bands the women wear on their foreheads are soaked with the heat of their torturous labor.

The 10 women are packed together in front of this machine and movement is difficult. But their pay depends on how fast they move, how many sheets they can feed this machine. This drives them

to fight among themselves for that little extra room to work faster for the 3/4 of 1¢ for every additional sheet they do after the first 400 in a day.

On the other side of the machine are women who receive and fold the hot, pressed sheets. They don't work on the incentive plan as do the other women who feed the machine. But as part of the job, they must maintain the same pace. There are only 4 women to receive what 10 women have put through the machine, and they must work quickly. It doesn't take long for the hot sheets to burn through the toughness of their callouses.

The entire operation is coordinated by the boss to sweat out every available ounce of profit from the very bones of the workers. Their legs are streaked with varicose veins from standing; their arms are muscular from lifting the heavy bundles of wet sheets. These are the women and mothers of the barrios and ghettos.

The average woman in this laundry earns \$1.90 an hour plus "incentive" which she gets from doing piece work. She takes home on the average \$68.00 a week. Out of this she not only has to pay for rent, food and living expenses for her children and herself, but also for a babysitter if she's lucky enough to find one.

Unable to cope with the heat, sweat and terrible working conditions, some women are driven to drink.

They get cramping pains in their legs from stooping and pulling and in addition suffer the terrible indignity of pressing sheets exactly right for the rich clientele of fancy hotels like the Waldorf Astoria. The women often say, "Here we are fixing their sheets real pretty but we'll never even be allowed to use the bathroom in the Waldorf."

In another area of the laundry, where the shirts and uniforms are done, the arrangement is different but the work is equally monstrous.

Here each woman works boxed in, surrounded by four presses. She must work in tune with every click of each machine. The click tells her when each side of a shirt is done and each click records her work. As she places the arm of one shirt on one machine, she must whip around to take out the collar of another shirt. All day for 8 hours she spins from one machine back to the next as the machine clicks her on.

Josephine has worked the same spinning job for 23 years. Each year she has slowed down just a little bit--her paycheck has shown that. Each year she and her four children have a little less to eat. Josephine is the sole support of her children and very often when the babysitter doesn't show up she has to bring them in with her. Now one daughter is grown and also works in the factory. Often her granddaughter comes and spends the day in the factory because their apartment doesn't get heat in the winter.

To get bread for her family, Josephine has spent her working life in the laundry. As a result the last two fingers of her left hand are soldered together, melted by the machine, skin and bone wetted and mauled. The machines lock down on any foreign object and a worker's hand is a foreign object. By the time any of her coworkers were able to open the press, her hand was cooked. On her right hand the thumb is mangled, the skin discolored and overlapping, like melted saran wrap draped over a shriveled thumb shape. This is the most common type of accident in a laundry factory.

It is eloquent testimony to the all-time low that the union officialdom has sunk that they do not force these profit-hungry sweat-shop owners to install safety devices to prevent loss of life or limbs of workers.

The accident rate in the press room has soared this year. The men upstairs who do the washing have just been put on piece work to "increase their efficiency." In order for them to make enough on this system the men have been cutting on the drying time of shirts. There just aren't enough dryers for the amount of laundry that gets washed and the men get paid by how much dry laundry they produce.

But when the men cut down on the drying time, even though the shirts are dry enough to pass for them to get paid, they are not dry enough to stop from sticking on the presses. Wet shirts will stick to the metal part of the press and remain glued to it. The women must get it off before it burns, and that stuck shirt is hard to budge off. If the women pull quickly the shirt might tear and then they must pay for it out of their paycheck, and if the worker tries to do it carefully, nine out of ten times she'll get burned. In this way the company drives wedges, not only between men and women but between women and women, to increase production. To the workers in the plant there seems no way out.

The heat in the plant never goes below 100 degrees where the women work. Air conditioners that have been installed are worse than useless. What good is it to have half of you burning and the other half cooling? It's better to be hot than to be sick.

Forty years ago some of these women worked for 8¢ an hour on an 84-hour week. Today the wages are just as meager, the hours somewhat more human, but the dangers of the job are just as horrifying. The labor is still exhaustive and leads to an early death.

As a philosopher eloquently said: "They mutilate the worker into a fragment of a woman, degrade her to the level of an appendage of a machine, destroy every remnant of charm in her work and turn it into a hated toil."

By Kala Whittman

Sweatshops in the Sun

By Jeanette Fusco Merrill

There were green shoots growing out of the brown earth covering the miles and miles of fields along Routes 62 and 75 traveling south from Buffalo. And though there was no sign of human life for miles on end, I could almost see the stooped and bent figures made real by vivid memories of so many years past. In just a few weeks, the peas would be ready to pick — and then in a regular cycle strawberries, blackberries, raspberries, cherries, beans, corn, tomatoes, beets and squash.

As summer drew closer in Western New York, and thoughts of those scorching days became more realistic, my memory flashed back some thirty years when, as a child of eight, I used to pick beans and berries in those very fields. In the depression years, "picking" was the last resort for countless families in the Italian neighborhood in which I grew up—but for women and children in particular.

As I drove along the country roads through Hamburg and Eden, New York, toward the North Collins-Brant area, how real those memories were. How can any person ever forget getting up at 4 a.m. during summer vacation from school and often not returning home until 8 p.m.! No one had to tell us why we went "picking" — our mother's purse always told the story.

Rushing about in what still seemed to be the middle of the night, we'd grab a lunch and still half asleep would run to the nearest corner and climb onto the waiting trucks. Our only seats (if we were lucky enough to get one) were planks of wood braced on orange crates or milk boxes. They served as a hard reminder that another long day was just beginning.

After a while, we got things down to a science. We'd get up a few minutes earlier, run to a truck stop a few blocks back, hoping to find a seat. Sometimes we'd get one, too — only to give it up when older women—our grandmothers, mothers, aunts or friends would get on at later stops — their faces and hands, their whole bodies reflecting the years of struggle and hard work — their long aprons a symbol of their strength.

It took an hour or two of bumping along back roads to get to the farms. Sometimes we'd sing just to make the hard ride somewhat pleasant. As dawn approached, we'd begin trudging through the wet fields either dragging our knees through the mud or assuming a stooping, bent-back position. In either case, by lunch time, we were tired and worn.

There were whole families who went "picking," and those of us who went without our mothers became children of the people's farm community. We wore large brim-hats to shelter us from the hot sun. But even then, many — especially older women and those in advanced stages of pregnancy — would have heat strokes. It wasn't uncommon to see sick bodies stretched out beneath the shade of nearby trees.

There was no medical insurance or any benefits for us. The exploiter-farmers for whom we worked had a heyday. We were a source of dirt cheap child and female labor. We were paid less as women and children but when it came to lugging our 75- to 100-pound sacks of beans or crates of berries, our "frailty" went unnoticed!

If you got sick on the job and couldn't work all day, your lunch might cost more than the few pennies you brought home. To have a sack of beans or a crate (or even a quart) of berries stolen was the final blow! But this was an indication of the depth of the oppression!

The farmers had all sorts of angles to deprive us of our hard-earned pennies. They would let our berries sit in the sun so the berries would "sink" and we would have to refill the boxes without any further compensation. On pay day, they would claim lack of funds. I would never have gotten paid at the end of one summer if my uncle hadn't threatened the life of one farmer who tried not to pay me.

But we, too, devised ways to even out the score — like all exploited workers do. We padded the bottom of berry baskets with straw or leaves, or dropped a few stones into the bottom of our bean sacks before they were weighed.

I finally reached my aunt's house in a small farming community. We reminisced about so many things. She's 79 now — the mother of six grown children, and grandmother and great-grandmother many times over, but she's still working in a farm factory labeling and pasting. Her bent fingers and wrinkled but sturdy face emphasize her years of toil.

"You'd think I'd own the damn place after all those years," she said, recalling the last 30 to 40 years of her life as a farm worker. How well she remembered forty years ago, in her eighth or ninth month of pregnancy, traveling about 25 to 30 miles to Wilson, New York, to work in a farm factory. When she was about to deliver, her two young children worked in her place.

Talking with my aunt reminded me of another conversation I had had with a former neighbor—a very dear friend of many years. Anna told me how, as a child, she and her sisters were taken out of school in May and never returned until October. For six months out of the year, they lived with their mother in a small shack on the edge of the farm. "No wonder

we were so dumb," she said. I reminded her that she and millions upon millions of youngsters are still denied education because they must work to help their families get by. Besides it's not our parents' fault that we had little schooling, but the farmers': we had to work to supplement our parents' wages while the farmers lived well on the profits they didn't pay us.

Anna and I talked for a long time: "We were so darn poor — there were times when we ate peas for breakfast, peas for lunch and peas again for supper I did everything — picked peas, berries, and beans, hoed, tied vines and cut grapes My mother used to take her old cotton stockings and cover our arms so we wouldn't get scratched I had forgotten this scar on my arm — cut myself with a knife while picking grapes; I didn't even know how to hold the knife I was so young I used to like to pick peas most of all; it wasn't so back-breaking uprooting the whole plant And the rain on the tin roofs, I'll never forget that. To this day, whenever it rains, I think back to those days There were some happy memories. That's how I want to remember everyone"

She didn't have to explain — I knew exactly what she meant. Many of the older women and even some her own age (mid-fifties) had died, and for those who remained, the oppression and exploitation had left its deep scars: the swollen legs and ankles, hands twisted by arthritis, whole bodies made older by the harsh conditions of a lost childhood!

Times have changed some on the farms in Western New York. They have machines now to pick beans, till the soil, pick potatoes and even some berries and grapes. But throughout this country, so many Black, Chicano and poor white sisters and brothers and their children are still enslaved in these factories in the fields.

The most immediate necessity for the poverty-stricken farm laborers of today is the unionization of these sweatshops in the sun. This process has already begun, particularly on the West Coast where Chicano workers under the leadership of Cesar Chavez in the AFL-CIO are showing the way through courageous struggles which they have waged in the grape and lettuce strikes.

Today, I know that the only way to lift the oppression of those fields is, as other workers have done, through the unionization of the workers whose hands harvest the nation's food crops.



Hospital Workers --

Sheets, Mops, and Bedpans

We have all seen headlines about the deaths of women who have died from abortion complications. But how many of us know about women who die a little each day—I mean all the women who work in the hospitals.

Many of these women are the breadwinners in their families. They get a meager paycheck to support themselves and their family. Many of them are Black and Third World women. Most of them work nights and evenings and are often forced to leave their small children alone or in the care of an older child. On top of working full time, they then have the children to care for all day, which means they carry on two full-time jobs almost without rest.

At work the nonprofessional women are expected to do nursing procedures they were never taught or trained to do. Often they are left in charge of a floor when there is no nurse available. This job entails everything from floor mopping to giving medication—which is illegal. But if they don't do the tasks assigned, they lose their job. This is particularly true on the night and evening shifts when there is only a skeleton crew on duty. The only white workers seen at night are the nursing supervisors and some of the private duty nurses who care for rich patients. The doctors are rarely seen at night except when there is an emergency.

The overwhelming majority of doctors are men. Few women are able to get the money or qualify for admission to medical schools in this country. But this is not the case all over the world. In fact, in the Soviet Union, more than 75 percent of the doctors are women. So it isn't that women haven't the ability to be doctors—it is that in this society women just aren't given the opportunity. Naturally women get less pay than men—from the kitchen to the nursing office.

Each department is identified by a different color uniform. (Where I was a student, the central supply workers wore green.) This signifies the levels in the hospital hierarchy. In some hospitals this system is reinforced by keeping separated dining rooms and dressing rooms for the various workers on the hospital staff. For example, doctors have a separate dining room that is off limits to all other staff. In some places nurses, too, have separate facilities.

Nurses are expected to conduct themselves in what is considered an "appropriate" manner. If you are white, you are expected to associate with white nurses in the same category as you.

By Sharon Eolis, R.N.



If you are Black, you are expected to associate with Black nurses (usually practical nurses). It is considered wrong for you to mix with workers in the unprofessional jobs like the aides or women in the laundry or housekeeping.

How do I know these facts are true? Well, I was a nurse's aide before I went to nursing school. When I trained as a nurse's aide I was the only white woman in a class of thirty women. The only reason the instructor allowed me in

the class was because it was understood that I was working in a hospital to get some experience before going to nursing school. The whole class was hired to work nights and evenings. I was in high school and worked part time on Saturdays and full time during the summer for two years.

I entered a three-year hospital nursing school program in the early sixties. From the beginning we were indoctrinated with the idea that we were "angels of mercy" and that it was our duty to "serve god by caring for the sick." We were also told we were expected to obey orders and not question them. To ensure our respect, we had to stand up for the MDs and nurses when they entered a room or the nurses' station in the hospital. I remember sitting with a pile of medicine tickets all sorted out on my lap, and having them become totally scrambled as I jumped up to give the doctor my seat!

As students we worked nights, weekends and split shifts. We worked alone at night with no one around to supervise and no one to help care for the patients. We were doing procedures that are usually done by MDs! By the time we finished training we could see we had actually been paying the hospital to use our services for three years. In many hospitals they even expect you to work for a year after you finish training to show them your gratitude.

The hospital where I trained had no interns or resident doctors. If there wasn't a doctor around when a woman arrived to have a baby, the nurse delivered the baby and the doctor would arrive in time to take the credit and the fee.

There was no instruction about birth control for the patients or the staff. Any women who came to the hospital to have a baby and wasn't married was given a hard time by the nursing staff. Abortion was an undiscussed subject. As a result of this lack of information, six of my classmates left nurses' training because they were pregnant. Only women who had access to money and time to travel to Puerto Rico or other places were able to obtain abortions. Today, even with the new liberalized abortion law in New York State, old attitudes toward abortions still exist in the hospitals—attitudes which are reinforced by the hospital hierarchy.

As a nurse I have worked in several hospitals since I graduated. The bigger the hospital, the bigger the profits, the more the workers are oppressed. The hospital administration and its board of trustees don't want to pay decent wages to workers (let alone employ as many well-trained people as necessary to provide decent medical care for all), but they find huge sums to pay themselves, the doctors and the drug companies. They don't want to spend money for daycare centers for workers (or patients). Medical care is not readily available to hospital employees. Housing is available for doctors in some of the large medical centers and, in some, for part of the nursing staff, but no provisions are ever made for the nonprofessional hospital workers.

The hospital administration like all bosses, uses the tactic of divide and conquer, by reinforcing



conditions that keep the workers apart—nonprofessionals from professionals, Blacks from whites, women from men. The administrators know that if the workers unite they will lose some of their profits.

But we who work in the hospitals don't care about their profits. We're fed up with the conditions we slave under 24 hours a day. We're tired of seeing patients be victimized too. We're getting ourselves together so that soon **THE HOSPITALS WILL BELONG TO THE PEOPLE.**

I come from a small family in Oak City, North Carolina, a little town of about 500 people known as Tar Hill Country.

...I've always wondered why it was called Tar Hill. Maybe it's because Black people never had shoes to wear in those days and we had to walk on tar pavements all the time. Anyway, a railroad track divided the Black people from the whites.

On our farm—I guess it wasn't really our farm because we didn't own it, we just worked on it—we grew various kinds of crops like tobacco, corn, peanuts, cotton, etc. By the time I was 9 years old, I knew how to cook, clean, and do all the housework because my mother and father were always out in the fields working. So it was necessary for me to know all these things... Almost every day I'd have to have dinner on the table when they came in. But we all had to work in the hot sun, from sun up to sun down. I remember having to work so hard—being tired then was never like being tired now.

In processing tobacco, we had to pick little things off the tobacco so that it would grow nice for the white man. There were about 5 to 6 acres of tobacco alone; and the rows were so long, about two to three miles long in all. Then we had to pick the cotton, corn, peanuts, etc.

In order to help my father, we'd have to get up at 6:00 in the morning to clean peanuts. My little brother and I would attach a huge rake to a horse. The peanuts were in rows of about two miles long. My brother would go to the end of the two miles and send the horse over to me with the rake dragging behind it; then I would send the horse back to my brother. After that we'd go to school, and when school got out at 3:00, we'd have to return back to work. Rain or shine, this work had to be done.

Sometimes the sharecropper, the white man, would come over behind us and inspect the crops. He would come by with some other whiteys and say, "Look at my tenants. They're good niggers cause they help me get my crops in. They help me make money."

I hated the farm, but what I didn't know when I was that young was how much we were being cheated. We worked about 50 acres of land, and yet the white man got most of the money. My father made only \$2.50 a day, just enough money to buy one week's worth of meal. And, of course, my little brother, my mother, and I were never paid.

We had a very good crop one year; that was the year I was graduating from high school. The sharecropper made a lot of money from it, and my father didn't get his share of the money. My father was furious, but he couldn't hit the white man—if he did, my father would have been hanging by his balls from the tallest tree. So we quit working for that white sharecropper. The last thing I swore to my parents was that I would never live near a farm, much less live on one. So when I graduated from high school, my mind was made up to leave.

I left North Carolina to come to New York City where "a person can make a lot of money—where the people are a lot nicer." But when I came, I was made to feel dumb, like I didn't know anything, like I couldn't think. When I tried to get a job I was told that I had to get some experience, and that

Hired House Slaves

By Rueko Higa

I should get a sleep-in job, a domestic job. So an employment center got me a job in New Rochelle. I got all ready for my new job... I had my suitcase with me, as I waited for this white woman to pick me up to take me to work. Up she comes in an elegant car and said, "I didn't want you to bring your suitcase; I just wanted to interview you." She asked if I could cook, take care of her kid, clean windows, etc. Of course I could do all those things . . . I'd been doing all that since I was 9 years old! I guess she thought she was doing me a favor as she said, "Since you already have your bag, I'll keep you. You'll sleep in, stay here every night, and you'll get \$40.00 a week."

The house had to be spotless. I wasn't allowed phone calls or visitors. One of the things I hated about that white bitch was that she would come from behind me (just like the white sharecropper), and





run her fingers across the furniture to see whether I had left any dust on it. She would even leave money around the house, sometimes \$10, sometimes \$5, just to see whether I would take it or not. Everyday, I would have to run her bath—you'd think they could at least run their own bath! Why, she acted as if she was damned paralyzed or something! And when her friends came over for dinner, I'd have to wear a white uniform and wait on them hand and foot—just like a slave.

I had to take care of her child, Todd, most of the time. I had to sleep in a room next to Todd's. That was because when he woke up at night, instead of his mother taking care of him, I'd have to. One time Todd got sick and this white woman called the doctor. Todd kept yelling, "I want Trudy, I want Trudy!" His mother called me upstairs. The doctor looked at me and said, "I thought Trudy was a dog

or a monkey." He said that to make me feel little, like dirt, like Trudy couldn't have possibly been a human being! He could see that I wasn't a dog or a monkey! In the south, whiteys don't play these games—they come out and call you whatever is on their minds. But here, they do it in sly ways, ways that hurt.

Well, I stuck it out for two years. The reason I left was because Todd, that little spoiled brat, spilled ink all over their new beige couch. I thought for sure they were gonna beat my ass in—so I quit. And do you know that for a long time afterwards, I felt bad about leaving. Black people have been so conditioned to being submissive, I think, I actually felt bad—like I deserted them!

I have a family of my own now; I have a beautiful little boy and a good Black man, my husband, whom I dig a lot. We try to spend as much time as we can with our son, but it's hard especially when the two of us have to work. We go into bookstores a lot, and when we do I want to get books for Black children. I don't want my son to say to me, "Mommy, I want to grow up to be like Joe Namath" or some other white man. I want him to say to me, "Mommy, I want to be like Roosevelt Greer or Willie Mays."

At one time, we used to straighten our hair and whites would say that we were trying to look like them or be like them. So when we let our naturally kinky hair grow out—whites didn't like that either. All I can say to that is, I'm letting my son grow an Afro. I want my son to be proud to be Black. We've been denied our history and our culture for so many years. Our "place" in society has always been pounded into our ancestors, into our people.

Those Black men and women who revolted, who have struggled from the days of slavery until now, have been swept under the rich carpets in the white man's history books that are used to "educate" Black people. All those millions of Black women who have been raped by the white man, all the hangings and burnings of Black people are not forgotten, even though history books don't mention them. I can't forget how the white man cut out my great-grandmother's breasts and hung them on poles. I wasn't there but I can still feel the pain. It hasn't been long since the "emancipation" of Black people—no, Black people haven't been emancipated yet!

I want my son to know all of this. I want him to stand tall, as I stand tall now—I would never take a sleep-in job again. I wish I could have told that white woman in New Rochelle, "Fuck You!"

I want my son to know who Marcus Garvey was, who Malcolm X was, who Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth were. I want him to know who all the Black leaders in this country are. I want my son to know why we are the poorest people in this country—why the white man treats us the way he does. I don't want him to go to school learning all the shit that I learned.

The greatest thing that happened in this country to Black people is that we have a national identity. If white people can't understand this, if they don't respect the decisions that we make, as Black people, if they can't deal with their racism, then I'll say it like I never said it before, and I stand proud when I say it — FUCK YOU!

Garment Industry -- Lint and piecework

Gloria Colon
Education Ministry
Young Lords Party
El Barrio Branch
(Reprinted from Palante)

The Puerto Rican woman used to work only at home. She washed clothes by the river; coconut shells were her brushes. She ironed her husband's and son's guayaberas with coal irons. She cooked in a wood stove. She picked beans from bushes planted in her own yard. She sewed her family's clothes with thread and needle under the light of a gas lamp. She got water from the public faucet and carried the full cans back to the house on her shoulders or head. At nights she toasted her own coffee while waiting for her husband to return from the streets, and when the children were sick she spent the night at their bedside preparing tea from medicinal herbs which she had also grown. It was a hard life of constant sacrifice and suffering . . . a lot of suffering.

During the forties the situation became worse, munoz marin was then governor and he put into practice the u.s. plans to exploit the colony. The plan was called "operation bootstrap" which changes Puerto Rico from an agricultural to an industrial economy. It took the jibaro from the mountain and into the city where he ended up in the slums, because he couldn't read or write and didn't have any skills to work in any industry. The u.s. labor department offered a "solution"--to work in the farms of the u.s. Thousands of Puerto Rican men had to leave their families, while migrating "to pick tomatoes in New Jersey." The Puerto Rican woman was left behind with the children and more problems. The u.s. labor department offered another "solution"--to work in the amerikkkan fac-

tories in Puerto Rico and to work for salaries much lower than those of the men in the same industry. What a capitalist hustle!

The Puerto Rican woman now not only worked in the home but also became part of the working class and her main battle field was the garment industry. Meanwhile, the migrants in the u.s. had begun to send for their families. In the u.s., the Puerto Rican woman also ended up in a clothing factory.

Today there is very little difference between working in the garment industry here (34th street) or in a factory in the outskirts of any city in Puerto Rico. The working woman works in either her uniform or in her street clothes. Both get dirty with white cotton dust--that also affects her chest and produces a dry cough. The clothes get blood stained when the woman's fingers slip under the machines' needles. Many times these broken needles in the sisters' fingers are removed with pliers when they penetrate the bone. The foreman pours alcohol on the wound and sends them back to work, after scolding them for being careless. She works either hourly or piece-work, in any case she will end up earning more or less the same, around 80 dollars for 35 hours. This is almost always determined not by the worker, but by the union. The union charges a lot of money but when the moment comes for it to meet with its obligation to back the worker, the union shows it has become a company tool. It is almost always obligatory to belong to the union if you want to work in that factory. Five or six dollars are collected



Diary of a Tired Mother

By Diana Leech



weekly to begin with. The woman works very hard for a lousy salary but the union dues are collected weekly.

She gets an hour for lunch--usually leftovers brought from home from the previous nights' meal

The Puerto Rican woman knows little english and in the u.s. with this she has to get by.

After a couple of years in the factory--sweating, worrying, constantly trying to prevent common accidents, the Puerto Rican woman ends up wearing glasses (she goes blind), and with aches and pains throughout her body.

This is the way that capitalism continues wringing out profit from our people--drugs in schools used against our children, the army killing our brothers, the farms and camps in the u.s. exploiting our fathers and husbands, and the factory, the garment factory destroying our women.

QUE VIVA PUERTO RICO LIBRE!

7 a.m. Get up. Get the kids up. Start making breakfast -- run from the bedrooms to the bathroom to supervise the kids, and then on to the kitchen to watch that the oatmeal doesn't burn. Solve a million problems: "What's the weather like?" "Where's my shoes?" "What sweater should I wear?" Feed the kids and husband and make lunches.

8:30 a.m. Get them all out and on their way.

8:35 a.m. Feel like collapsing, but-- now comes the time for organizing the house -- make the beds, tidy up, vacuum, dust mop, wash the dishes -- Oh!

Those miserable never-ending dishes! Then to the overcrowded, hot and noisy laundromat and the constant battle over the machines. (This battle has more than once reduced me to tears!) Then on to the supermarket and the process of sorting out from the mess of overpriced, overpackaged and overprocessed foods, those items that are the most wholesome and within my budget.

3:30 p.m. The children come home, very often tired and irritated by the oppressive conditions in school. They need comfort and attention but by 4:30 p.m. I'm back to the mad rush of preparing for supper. Some chefs go to school and train for years to do that job alone!

7 p.m. Supper is over, the table cleared, dishes washed, pot put away. Then there's homework to be done and, suddenly, I'm a teacher! Baths to be taken and the kids are put to bed.

9 p.m. I've been working steadily for 14 hours and I'm exhausted. There are still things to do like mending and ironing, but somehow I am always putting them off until it's an emergency. And then, when the day is finally over, I get into bed with the thought that it will all be there again tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow

And then, when someone asks, "What do you do?" I answer, "Oh, nothing. I'm just a housewife and mother." But we women are required to do more things than any person in any kind of job you could name. What other job demands that its worker be a cook, cleaner, doctor, lawyer, judge, carpenter, lover, financier, repairwoman and teacher? And all this is without pay, sick leave, and paid vacations! We really hold an extremely important job. We are responsible, almost single-handed, for the health and growth of our children. So why are we made to feel that we are nothing -- a zero in this society?

I had always thought of myself as fairly independent of much of society's values, but when I got married something happened. I felt that I was no longer just me, but a "Housewife," and then, when the children came (I have three), a "Mother." I really went overboard serving and catering to my family. But it didn't work. Nobody was really happy, least of all me. My kids became more demanding and less loving; and my husband couldn't understand why I was so angry so much of the time.

I was confused; here I was married, with a loving husband, children, a home — all the things that I had thought would make me happy, make me more of a woman. So what was wrong? I felt less of a woman and more of a drudge, a mere extension of my family's needs.

My husband would try to help, but still, the burdens fell overwhelmingly on me. At the end of a long, hard day's work I would be tired and frustrated at the pace and boredom of this job. He would come home with only one thought in mind, "to shower, change, sit down, and put my feet up and read the paper." I wanted to do that too, but my job was far from over. The 4:30 to 9:00 p.m. slot was just beginning! (Of course, rich women can relax all day long if they want to. But at whose expense? At the expense of their maids and cooks who still have to go home at the end of the day and take care of their families.) And despite my husband's best intentions, it sometimes seemed easier to do it all myself, than to answer his questions and direct his efforts.

Just when things seem to be working themselves out, one of the kids gets sick. Then comes the worry, the constant care and the bills. And then, the time when I get sick — I really never thought much about it until last year when I had to stay in bed for a week — there was chaos! But there is no way to get around the chaos unless you have money. Besides the bills, there was no one to care for the kids and the house. Except for the occasional help from a friend, the burden of the work fell on my husband, who still had to work eight hours a day. It made him think twice not only about my job, but the plight of the working mother who has to work two jobs — every day.

When I got sick, that old feeling of wanting my mother to come and take over for me returned. But then, I realized — how many times must she have felt the same way. It was about that time that I began reading about women in Cuba. Women there can go to work, freed from the worry of what to do with their children, because there are free twenty-four hour day care centers for every child starting at the age of two and a half months. And the women don't have to worry about the kind of care or education their children are getting because day care and education in general are top priorities. At the end of the day, the children are fed and bathed; and the mothers and fathers can eat at cafeterias where they work. Then they go get the children, go home and have time and energy to enjoy being with each other.

Why can't we have something like that here?

Mother Jones

By Helen Richardson

Mother Jones was one of those strong, defiant women that the history books like to ignore. She lived and helped forge that period of history when the working men, women and children fought so valiantly to organize themselves into a force strong enough to defy the merciless industrial might of nineteenth century America.

Mother Jones was a union organizer -- one of the greatest who ever lived. A daughter of an immigrant, Irish railroad worker, her 100 years were ones of back-breaking work, personal heartbreak and dedication to the workers' struggle against the bosses.

She was born in Cork, Ireland in 1830. "My people were poor," she said. "For generations they had fought and died for Ireland's freedom."

She grew up in Toronto, Canada, and came to the U.S. as a teacher. However, she soon gave up teaching and opened a dressmaking shop in Chicago. "I preferred sewing to bossing little children," she said.

In 1861, Mother Jones married. She was 31 years old -- a "spinsterly" old age for a "lady" to marry! Six years and four children later, a yellow fever epidemic killed her whole family. She returned to Chicago and to dressmaking. She sewed for the rich and lived with the poor. In 1871 the great Chicago fire burned out her sewing shop, and she and thousands of other homeless and hungry workers lived and starved together.



For 41 years Mother Jones had struggled to survive as a woman, a mother and a worker. At this age her strength, her defiance and her militancy, so often the lonely legacy of the working woman, forged an undying dedication to the union struggle. After the fire, Mother Jones joined the Knights of Labor.

Mother Jones organized during the time of union ferment and the Haymarket massacre. She went wherever there was a need for union organizing. She lived and worked with the workers and their families -- the guts of their struggle was hers. The bosses tried to threaten and intimidate her -- they threatened the people who took her in. But always she defied the orders and went, very often landing in jail when she got to wherever she was going.

In 1899, the United Mine Workers began to organize the immigrant workers in the coal mines of Pennsylvania. When the miners began to waiver, she was called to a meeting and she said to them, "You've got to take the pledge. Rise and pledge to stick to your brothers and the union till the strike is won!"

"The men shuffled their feet but the women rose, their babies in their arms, and pledged themselves to see that no one went to work in the morning.

"The company tried to bring in scabs. I told the men to stay home with the children for a change and let the women attend to the scabs....On a given day they were to bring their mops and brooms, and the army would charge the scabs up at the mines.

"I selected a leader...an Irish woman who had a most picturesque appearance. Up the mountain side, yelling and hollering, she led the women, and when the mules came up with the scabs and the coal, she began beating on the dishpan and hollering and all the army joined in with her. The sheriff tapped her on the shoulder.

" 'My dear lady,' said he, 'remember the mules. Don't frighten them.'

"She took the old tin pan and she hit him with it and she hollered, 'To hell with you and the mules!'

"He fell over and dropped into the creek. Then the mules began to rebel against scabbing. They bucked and kicked the scab drivers and started running down hill, followed by the army of women with their mops and pails and brooms.

"From that day on the women kept continual watch of the mines to see that the company did not bring in scabs. Every day women with brooms or mops in one hand and babies in the other arm wrapped in little blankets went to the mines and watched that no one went in. And all night long they kept watch. They were heroic women. In the long years to come the nation will pay them high tribute....The strike was won."

This was not the only time that Mother Jones and her army of women were seen taking the offensive during a strike--"Join the Union!" was their battle cry. Very often, it was their defiance in the face of bayonets and soldiers that became the catalyst for organizing the union.

Mother Jones fought at every level and in every aspect of the union struggle from storming the bosses, to agitating among the workers, to finding clothes and food for the strikers and their families. When all the men were sent to jail, it was Mother Jones--if she was not sent to jail, too--who organized the women and children and kept them strong. She traveled from mine to factory, "My address is wherever there is a fight against oppression...my address is like my shoes: it travels with me."

Mother Jones was not only a progressive union organizer, but she was a woman conscious of the plight of her sister working women. All through her autobiography (the only book written on her 100 years of struggle!) she interweaves the militant struggle of the women workers and workers' wives so that their history speaks the truth.

Mother Jones refused to join the suffragette movement because of its roots in the middle class. "The plutocrats have organized their women. They keep them busy with suffrage, prohibition and charity," she said.

When asked to speak at a suffragette meeting she said, "You must stand for free speech in the streets."

"How can we," piped a woman, "when we haven't a vote?"

"I have never had a vote," she said, "and I have raised hell all over this country! You don't need a vote to raise hell! You need convictions and a voice!...The women of Colorado have had the vote for two generations and the working men and women are in slavery....No matter what your fight, don't be ladylike! God Almighty made women and the Rockefeller gang of thieves made ladies."

LONG LIVE MOTHER JONES!
LIVE LIKE HER!

Strike! Women of Gastonia, N.C.

By Kate Stovall

"I'm the mother of nine. Four of them died with whooping cough, all at once. I was working nights and nobody to do for them, only Myrtle. She's eleven and a sight of help. I asked the super to put me on day shift so's I could tend 'em, but he refused. I don't know why. So I had to quit my job and then there wasn't any money for medicines, so they just died. I never could do anything for my children. Not even keep 'em alive, it seems. That's why I'm for the union. So's I can do better for them."

These were the words of Ella May Wiggins, a 29-year-old working mother who was murdered by a goon squad during the 1929 strike at the Loray cotton mills in Gastonia, North Carolina. And it is not by chance that it was a woman who was shot. Ella May Wiggins and thousands of women like her were not bystanders in strikes such as the one in Gastonia. In textile mills across the U.S., it was women who made up the majority of the workers. It was women who very often led the battles, and fought and died beside the men for better working conditions and for union recognition.

Gastonia was a typical southern mill town. Almost all the workers had come to the town from the surrounding hill and mountain country, where they had lived at or near starvation for decades

and were finding it more and more impossible to live by farming. All but a small handful were white—Black workers, if employed at all by the racist owners, were given the most menial, low-paying jobs. (In many southern mill towns at that time Blacks were not employed at all by the mills, but had to eke out an even poorer existence than the mill workers as domestic or handy workers—that is, yard mowers, etc.)

The bosses had an abundant supply of cheap labor—unskilled workers who had previously worked on the land, women and children whom they paid still less than the men, as well as a large reserve of unemployed labor. This reserve which they could use as a threat to keep wages as low as they liked, consisted of whites still living in the hills and of the many unemployed and vastly underemployed Blacks who lived in the area. The pay was \$12 a week for a 10- to 12-hour day.

Loray mill owned the houses the workers lived in, renting them for a high rent, keeping them in bad repair, and requiring a certain number of family members to work in the mills before they were eligible to rent a house. Many of those who rented houses had to sublet space in order to pay the rent. The company store and the credit system kept workers in debt all the time. There were also company boarding houses and a company playground. The ministers in the company churches—which were all of them—preached against the strike when it broke out, as did the *Gastonia Gazette*, the company-controlled local rag.

The conditions of women workers were unbearable. Not only did they have to work 10 or 12 hours in the mill, but they had to do all the housework when they came home. Their wages were lower than those of the men. And they got only a few weeks off before and after the birth of a child. In addition, they suffered the terrible pain of knowing that their children who were too young to work or to go to school were at home all day with no one to care for them.

One of the sparks of the Gastonia strike and the attempt to organize the Loray mills was the introduction of greater speed-up and piece-work euphemistically called the "rationalization process" by the bosses. Speed-up was labeled "stretch-out" by the workers because they had to tend a larger number of machines—literally stretching themselves over a larger area. The machines were already moving at double-time at the time of the speed-up.

The Loray mills, owned by the Manville-Jenkes



Company, were the largest of their kind in the entire United States. If Loray could be organized, the whole Southern factory system and company towns would be threatened.

In February, 1929, Fred Beal, an organizer for the National Textile Workers Union, went to Gastonia to organize the Loray workers. During the first two months, he organized a few of the workers into a small, secret union. Through the company's extensive spy network, the union was discovered and some of the leaders were fired. This attack so enraged the workers that they held a mass meeting and decided to strike -- 25,000 workers walked off the job on April 2, 1929.

Women in today's mill towns are still the most exploited and oppressed of the workers. The 8-hour day and child labor laws have improved conditions somewhat, but most of the mills remain unorganized. Women, who must bear the children, care for them, and do the household chores, must still work in the mills so their families can survive. Black women must still work chiefly as domestics -- and their family incomes rarely meet survival levels. And the women must suffer the reality that their children will be likewise enslaved, for the schools are purposely designed to ensure that (especially for the children of Black mothers).

Women are the chief victims of the all-pervading religious and social pressures of the "Bible Belt" south -- foisted by the mill owners on all the workers through ministers, teachers, etc., as a means of making them content with the misery of their lives. Hope of a "better life in heaven" is their only way to avoid complete despair.

But another way of coping -- and winning! -- is being discovered by the workers. The militant labor struggles initiated by Blacks, whom the owners recently have been forced to employ, are contagious. Whites are increasingly joining these struggles, as they discover that white racism is the bosses' chief tool to keep all workers "in their place."

And, as in the Gastonia strike, once women begin to fight back, they are among the most militant and courageous fighters. Then the chains of tradition -- the bosses' traditions -- are eagerly and quickly ripped off.

On the same day, the governor of North Carolina, who was himself a cotton mill owner, sent in five companies of militia to quell the strike.

From the very beginning women played leading roles in the strike and were among the most militant workers. This was evident in an incident described in the Baltimore Sun: "When they (the militia) arrived they began to clear the streets around the mill to the accompaniment of the nagging cries of the strikers. When one of the soldiers ... started to push back a ... woman who stood her ground, she told him to stop pushing; that she would go away but would not be driven. The soldier

did not take the hint and the woman cracked him over the head with a stick. It required four soldier boys to carry her from the field and deposit her in the calaboose. The woman, Mrs. Bertha Tompkins, with four children under five, whose receipt of \$4 for three nights' work of 11 hours each had put certain unconventional ideas in her head, was released on \$100 bail."

Another incident was recorded by an on-looker who "saw a woman striker knocked down and stuck with a bayonet until she bled profusely. She struggled to her feet and marched on -- in the parade."

The mill owners' slogan was "Mob Rule versus Law and Order" -- but the real mob was the Committee of 100, the red baiting and the race baiting organized by the bosses, the workers increased and intensified their struggle. Workers in mills throughout North and South Carolina joined their revolt for varying lengths of time.

The union made special efforts to struggle against racism and succeeded in uniting the white workers with the few Black workers in the strike. Red baiting completely failed to sway the militant struggling workers who supported the union wholeheartedly.

The strike lasted for over six months and the strikers stood firm in spite of every kind of attack. The Committee of 100 raided the union headquarters and the Workers' International Relief Store in predawn raids -- the authorities "investigated" but never found any clues about the masked raiders' identity. Sixty-two families were evicted from their company homes, but the union and the Relief Committee set up tents and aid for the families. The strike went on. The union headquarters was attacked again and this time the workers fought back with guns, killing the chief of police and wounding three officers!

For two more nights and three more days after this the mob hunted strikers and union members. They raided homes, routed women and men from their beds, beat them and dragged them to jail and then beat them again. More than a hundred workers were arrested. Seventy were charged with murder, assault with intent to kill and conspiracy. The International Labor Defense came to the aid of those arrested throughout the strike, providing bail and other forms of legal assistance.

In spite of the valiant fighting of the workers, the battle at Gastonia in 1929 was eventually lost because the wealthy bosses, who are the power behind this country's police and army were able to exercise all their power to brutally break the much less powerful organization of a relatively small group of workers.

But this struggle was not the only one fought during that period. The combined power of the women and men workers who engaged in militant strikes throughout the country in the years that followed forced the bosses into finally granting union recognition and such improvements such as the eight-hour day, five-day week, minimum wage and child labor laws.

Even though the strike ended years ago, the spirit of the Gastonian workers' struggle lives on. Who knows what it may inspire in the years to come!

Don't think, just type

By Nikki Green

"Why, I'll just get my 'girl' to do it." "You made one mistake in this letter. It should be perfect. Do it over." "What do you mean you haven't gotten the letter done? I dictated it to you 15 minutes ago. What do you do all day?" "What do you think we're paying you for? To sit and gossip all day? You're very lucky to even have this job. You are replaceable, you know!"

That's the kind of abuse a secretary has to take every day that makes being a secretary one of the most degrading and dehumanizing jobs. The work itself is boring, tedious, unproductive and uncreative and necessitates subordinating your own needs and personality to that of your boss. Just as the wife is supposed to serve her husband, so the secretary is supposed to serve her boss—serve him coffee, make his appointments, type his letters, answer his phones and do anything and everything else he demands of her.

And if the boss wants to call you stupid, inefficient or lazy, you're supposed to sit with your tail between your legs, submissively answering, "Yes, sir." Heaven forbid a secretary should answer back! That would mean that she has a will and spirit of her own—something that threatens the boss's superior role. All he cares about is that you're there to do his work. If the boss goes for a two-hour lunch, "on business,"

that's okay; but if the secretary comes back five minutes late, there's the boss, running around in a frenzy, yelling, "Where is she? Where is she? She's five minutes late. My phone has been ringing for ten minutes and she's not here to answer it!"

I work in what is called a "nonprofit" organization, and at one point I worked for the Medical Director, a doctor and his assistant, a woman. The first week I was there, he didn't deign to say "hello" to me or even ask me what my name was. He was too "good" for that—I was just a lowly secretary, put there to do his work. Every day they would pile more work on me—letter after letter, press release after press release, memo after memo—too much work for one person.

One day, the "good" doctor called me into his office. He looked me straight in the eye and said, "Nikki, you are very inefficient. You cannot type a letter without one mistake in it. You're very slow. Plus, you seem not to really like your job. You're not an 'eager beaver' about your job. And you always look so grim—you never seem to smile! How can I have a secretary who doesn't smile? And if I tell my secretary to do something, I expect her to do it! And not complain about it! Which brings me to your raise. Now, I regard a raise as a reward for good work, and you cer-



tainly have not done good work. Therefore, I am not giving you a raise. And from now on, you better watch it."

I tried to explain to him that one person couldn't do work for two people. But, of course, he didn't listen—I was just supposed to DO, not feel or think.

The verbal abuse, day in and day out, wears you down; and secretaries are constantly being reminded every minute of the day what their job is, what their role must be. And there is also physical abuse. Most secretaries are hired on the basis of how pretty they are, how they smile, what kind of clothes they wear and HOW GOOD THEY WOULD LOOK SITTING ON THE BOSS'S LAP!

Even within the limited framework of secretarial jobs, there is a caste of higher-paid and more prestigious positions. The executive secretary is paid up to \$150 more per week than the average secretary. She therefore gains a more respectable social position in the office milieu—she considers herself superior to other office workers.

In my office, they are starting to fire people—secretaries, of course. What the bosses want is a few "competent" secretaries to do all the work,

the work of two or even three women. And, of course, they won't give us any more money. They cry poverty, but they have plenty of cash to re-decorate their already walnut-paneled, wall-to-wall carpeted offices and give themselves raises!

It's all right for the executives to go into their plush offices and close the door and have their nice little "conferences" (probably about who they're going to fire next). But if the boss sees any of the secretaries talking to each other, he starts ranting and raving about how the "girls" never do any work, how all they do is talk. But they're only covering up the real reason why they don't want us to "socialize"—they're afraid. They're afraid that we might be getting ourselves together.

And that's just what we should be doing. The only way that we secretaries are going to realize our own force is by doing just that—by getting together. Machines do what they're supposed to, they can't talk back, they have no personality. And that's precisely how bosses would like secretaries to behave—like machines. Then they would have no problems.

But, as it is, they're the ones who give us problems. So let's get off the boss's lap and stand together to end this exploitation that we suffer as women and workers!

NYU Clerical Workers Wage a Union Fight

By Barbara Teel

For the last year and a half the office workers at New York University, three-fourths of whom are women, have been fighting for the right to be represented by a union (District 65). We have been fighting for higher wages and better benefits for all workers at the university.

The organizing drive began a year ago, in the libraries, where the workers made ridiculously low salaries (\$80-\$90 a week) and worked under miserable conditions. After six months of unsuccessful attempts to force the university to recognize that they were unionized and to negotiate a contract, the workers went out on strike. They quickly found out that workers in other offices also wanted to be unionized.

Secretaries, university mailmen, clerks, and other office and technical workers went out on the picket lines with the library workers. The university promised immediate elections for union representation, and the strike was ended. The election was held several weeks later, and most of the workers voted for the union to represent them. But in order to crush the union, the university, through underhanded maneuvering and legal red tape, kept us from getting a contract. The university, after months of stalling and intimidation of the workers, finally allowed a new election

to be held on their own terms. The vote went against the union, but the fear which prompted that vote will soon change to anger, as the university's threats and promises all prove to be lies.

Union organizing is something most women have little experience with, although women have had a long history of militant labor struggles. Many of us were hesitant about the continual talking with other workers, men and women, and the confrontations with the university administration which are necessary to win union recognition and a good contract. But we soon found out that we were very good at organizing.

Working in offices, as we do, we have special problems trying to convince our co-workers to fight for their rights. Many of the workers who voted to have the union represent them in contract negotiations are afraid to fight for the things they voted for. Working in isolated offices, they don't realize the strength we have in fighting together. But weeks of talking and a lot of bad treatment from the university is beginning to push people into the fight.

We are learning how we, as women, can play a significant role in the trade union struggle. When we go out on strike, as we are sure we will eventually have to do, women will be on the front lines keeping scabs out of the buildings.

Dial "0" for Oppression

By Brenda and Peggy, Boston telephone operators

Have you had trouble getting a telephone call through lately? If you have, the next thing you probably have done is call the operator. Now, assuming you can reach the operator, you take out your anger at the phone company on the operator. But did you know that the operator, too, has had trouble getting calls through all day; and on top of that, she is forced to politely accept not only your abuse but the abuse of thousands of other customers of the phone company.

Perhaps you have wondered what exactly an operator does. Does she simply push buttons all day and say, "May I help you?" No! Her main function is to serve as a scapegoat for the telephone company's inadequate circuits and service. Instead of improving the company's equipment and lines, the management decides it is easier and cheaper to put on a courtesy campaign through the operators.

During training, we are shown films and given written instructions demanding that operators always be "courteous and patient." We cannot interrupt a customer, accuse the person of dialing the wrong number or hang up if someone is swearing obscenities at us.

If we can put up with all the nastiness and rudeness people give us, we may even receive a letter of commendation from a customer! This very rarely happens and when it does, the operator is required to reply with a personalized thank you note! Occasionally, the company will "reward" an operator by printing her name on a piece of paper and tacking it on the bulletin board with a blue ribbon!

Women telephone operators are the most exploited of all phone workers. We are paid the lowest wages and work under the worst conditions of any other group of telephone company employees. Operators in Boston start at a net pay of \$80 a week, or \$2 an hour, and receive only 5 cents an hour increase every six months. Top pay in Boston — even if a woman has been working for 25 years — is \$110 a week. Few women can stand the conditions for more than a few months. The turnover rate is 60 percent in six months.

Operators are mostly working mothers, students or young women living at home. Half of the operators are Black and Third World women while the management is almost all white. Racism is an unwritten company policy—they feel they are doing Black women a favor by "keeping them off welfare."

Being an operator is like being a link in a chain of women who serve businessmen. All the high-paying jobs in the phone company are given to men. Men

decide pay, hours and lay-offs. In an all-woman telephone operator's office, the manager is always a man. He even decides the kind of clothes the women wear! The rank-and-file operator never sees "him"—only the chief operator talks to "him," and not very often.

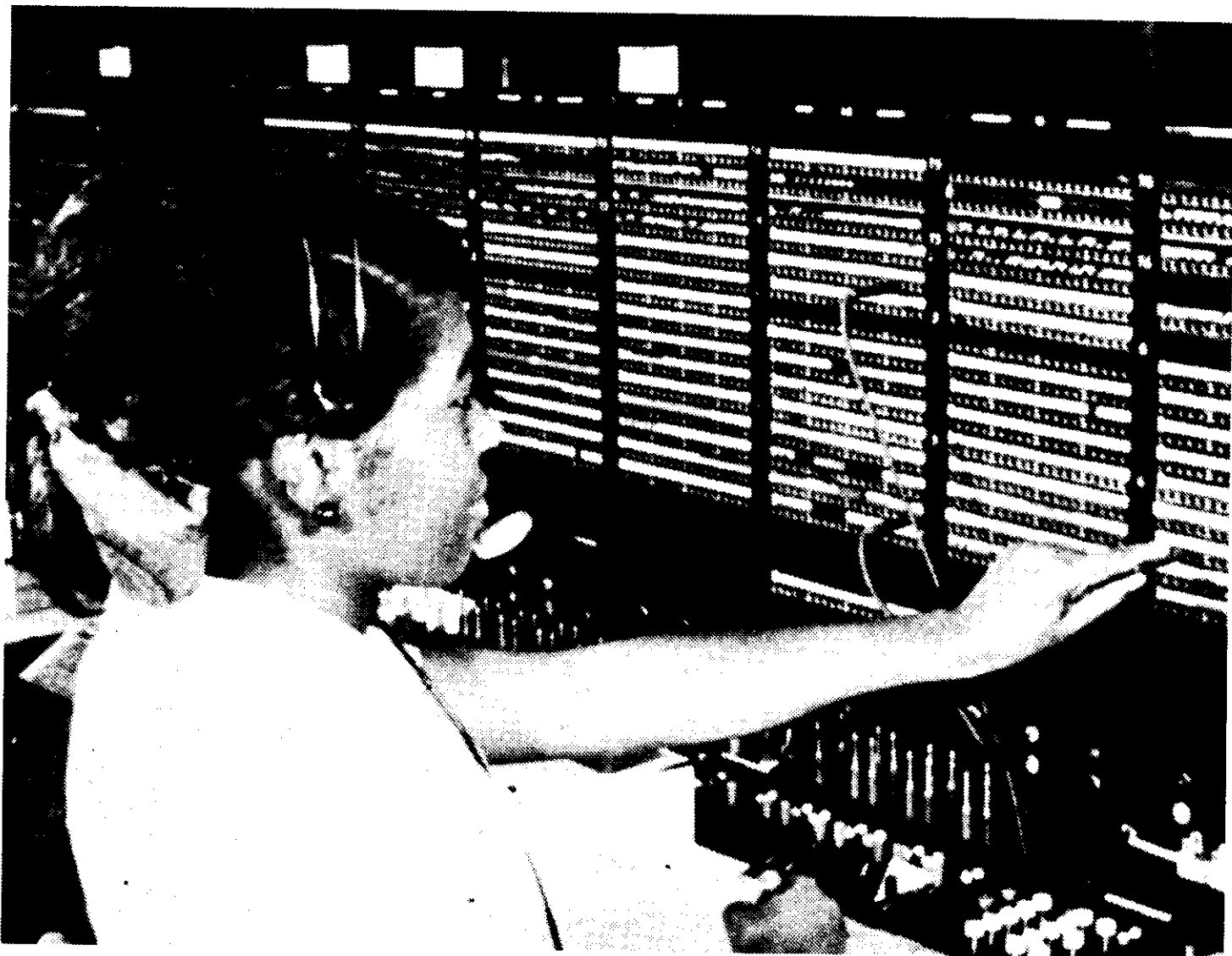
A full-time operator works nine hours a day, including a compulsory 45-minute lunch break that is taken out of her time. After that we are allowed only two 15-minute breaks during the day. The rest of the time we are expected to sit at the board. We're not supposed to look up from the switchboard or turn around, much less talk to the women next to us, even during slow periods when there are five minutes between calls. We must just sit there and watch the clock.

"Superfluous" talking is forbidden even between operators and customers. Instead, we are forced to memorize pat formulas designed to fit any situation, and if the customer doesn't understand the formula, we are supposed to sweetly repeat it. This, of course, only infuriates the customer more.

An operator is not allowed to make any mistakes. All calls taken by each individual operator are checked by computers in the Central Ticket Investigating Bureau and all errors are recorded. Then, we are confronted with our mistakes periodically. Each mistake is treated as if it has sent electric shocks through the entire Bell System.

Besides, this, supervisors act like spies and leeches, constantly harassing us: "Work faster! Stop talking!" "The customer is always right!" An operator can be fired on the spot for a "bad tone of service" or for a "bad attitude." The supervisor can secretly plug into any call an operator is handling. She can also plug directly into the operator's headset and accuse her of an infraction. The operator cannot even turn her head to her accuser to defend herself — if she does, she can be fired for "insubordination."

Out of an office of 60 operators, only two are allowed to go the bathroom at a time. When we want to go, we have to call over a supervisor who puts us on a waiting list. Supervisors count heads every half hour to make sure no one has escaped! We are reprimanded if we leave for lunch, coffee break, or home one minute early. It is our problem if we get stuck on a call and have to leave five minutes late. Women get so tired of sitting at the board that they offer to do anything for the supervisors — just to relieve the boredom — including washing the boards, sinks and toilets for just a few minutes.



Why then are women attracted to working for the phone company? Most women think of it as a half-decent, clean, good-paying, stable job. When an operator starts the job, she is told she will get a lot of benefits if she stays long enough. One example is half-rate on your own phone bill. But the company does everything it can to disqualify the operator for this — you can't even get this "benefit" for at least a year or more. One woman was fired and rehired in two weeks so that she would lose all the benefits she had earned. Every sick day is taken out of our pay despite all the so-called medical benefits. If a woman has to leave early for illness or home problems her pay is docked.

About one-half of the operators work part-time. Despite the lack of operators (how often have you gotten a busy signal when you've dialed "0" or had to wait five, ten minutes and even longer for an operator?), women who call in for emergency "voluntary time" are denied it. Part-time operators are the first to be laid off — without warning — no matter what their seniority. Many women who desperate-

ly depend on their jobs are given no warning — "that's your tough luck" they are told. When women complain, the management says, "It's the union's fault" or "It's due to inflation." But, of course, the company has been advertising and hiring all along.

But the real reason for the lousy, low-paying jobs, unexpected lay-offs and miserable service has nothing to do with the workers. The real reason is that the giant monopoly AT&T is run not in the interest of the workers or the customers, but in the interest of the few who get rich from the low wages and poor communications.

So the next time you dial a wrong number or call the operator for help — the next time you're ready to rip your phone off the wall — don't take it out on the operator. Remember, she's your sister, and as hard a time as you may be having, multiply her frustrations by 100 — at least. After all, we're only playing Bell Tel's game when we take out our frustrations on the operators.

MA BELL — GO TO HELL!

Walkout

Off the Board!

By a New York City telephone operator

On July 14, 500,000 telephone workers across the country went on strike against Ma Bell. Two days later a picket line was set up outside the building in New York City where I work along with 500 other information operators -- all women. We had waiting for two days for the strike to reach us.

We were waiting, because for the first time the New York City operators were going to strike along with the craftsmen, who are mostly white, men, and belong to the Communications Workers of America (CWA). The operators, on the other hand, are all women and 95 percent Black and Puerto Rican; they are "represented" by a company union, the Telephone Traffic Union (TTU). The TTU sides with the company on all grievances and, contrary to the purpose of unions, provides the women with absolutely no job security. The telephone company has used the TTU to keep the men and women divided by sex and race -- the operators have not supported the craftsmen's strikes in the past and, in return, the craftsmen have not supported our strikes.

Management never expected us to walk out. Everything from our so-called union to our working conditions is geared to keeping a woman isolated by the exploitation she suffers. We are not allowed to look at each other, much less talk while we are on the boards. The shifts are staggered so that only a few women come in, go out for lunch and breaks, or leave at the same time. And when the union stoolies did see us talking together before the strike, they tried to intimidate us through threats.

But for operators to stay out legally according to the National Labor Relations Board, there had to be a picket line in front of our building. That meant that the CWA had to send union men to start the line because there are only women operators in the building. Well, after two days of waiting, we finally got word that a picket line had been set up--but 15 women from the building first had to call the union headquarters to demand a picket line!

On my 12:15 break (15 minutes), I went downstairs with another woman to start the walkout. We only went back inside to let the other women know that the time had finally come. And then, women came down, one by one, during their breaks or lunch--some even left after asking for "a minute" to go to the bathroom! They tried to stop letting us go after that; but by that time over half the morning shift was out!

There was an indescribable feeling of excitement and determination as the women walked out and joined that line--and it spread. The evening shift stayed out almost solid; and we stayed out for five days.

We stayed on that line for hours every day, talking to each other for the first time about the low pay, harassment, lack of benefits, and the racism of the company. And we kept up that line with loud, militant chants of "Ma Bell--Go to hell" and "Ma Bell is a dirty cheat. She doesn't care if families eat!" The whole time our chief and group chief operators came down to spy and try to sabotage our walkout. They phoned women at home, threatening them with loss of jobs. They told us outright lies like "There is no picket line." They even said, "We understand why you're out -- but don't you need the money? What about your families?" But this low, crass intimidation only made the women more determined to stay out -- since when does Ma Bell give a damn about our families!!!

Why did so many operators, mostly Black and Puerto Rican, walk out all over New York City, on a strike of higher-paid, mostly white craftsmen? Why did so many operators, who are often the sole support of four and five children, go out on strike with a union that doesn't legally support them? Because we know that any blow against the hated Bell system means a gain for us.

But most of all, it was just the opportunity to walk out on our oppressive jobs. It was an operators' wildcat, and we were walking out to show that we are no longer willing to accept the unhealthy, sweatshop conditions -- where cable bugs crawl all over our legs and women get lead poisoning from the spray they use on the operators' directories (so the pages don't stick and we can get that number just a second faster). We have had enough of the rotten food, the overwork, erratic shifts, low pay, and company racism.

For years the Third World women have suffered from the most blatant racism. Not only do the white supervisors discriminate against them, but if the sisters dare to answer the constant racist abuse from the customers, they can be fired on the spot. This strike has raised the consciousness of all the women--we no longer feel isolated. The Third World women have begun to talk openly about the racism of the company and are going to let Ma Bell know that it



can no longer deny them dignity.

On the last strike of the craftsmen, many of the operators who crossed the picket lines were called scabs (a word that has an even more vicious, degrading meaning for Black women) and sometimes physical violence was used against them. A lot of women refused to respect the craftsmen's strike just because of the men's attitude and their lack of understanding of the operators' situation. When this strike started, the company tried to use past experience to frighten the women. They even told us to stay upstairs, because if we went outside, the men (whom we'd called for) would beat us up!

But this time all the workers knew the situation was different -- the men and women wanted unity. It has been the rank-and-file pressure on the bureaucratic leadership of Local 1101 of the CWA that is behind the CWA's drive to organize the operators. Last month at one of the biggest membership meetings that Local 1101 ever had, the men voted to stay out on strike if any operator was harassed or fired for supporting the strike. When we walked out, the rank and file made sure that the strike benefits available to union members were available to us. And operators responded by keeping up the picket lines in greater numbers than the men. Though there were still some hostile incidents by some craftsmen at other buildings, most of them had a new respect and desire to know more about our jobs and to understand why we had been divided in the past, and how we could work together now to win.

Both the telephone company and the corrupt union leadership are threatened by this beginning of a

breakdown of racism, chauvinism and craft elitism that has kept us apart. When Beirne, national president of the CWA, announced his sellout contract less than a week after the strike began, the workers in New York City and some other parts of the country refused to accept the contract and have not gone back to work.

I know that every operator in the city says "more power to the New York craftsmen!" Everywhere in the office, women are talking about the upcoming union election that will dump the TTU and get us into a real union. It was the walkout that really got the movement to join the CWA (or possibly District 65) moving. The women are really excited about it and there is even talk of another operators strike when the TTU contract runs out some time in August.

Management's response has been one of intimidation of individuals, on the one hand, and, on the other, of treating us collectively with more respect. Now we exchange all the latest information while at the boards--we even read strike and union literature. There is less yelling from supervisors and, for the first time, the window shades are up! In some offices lemonade and sandwiches have appeared!

But it is not through any change of heart in the phone company that these things have been happening. They know that the strength, understanding, and respect for ourselves that we gained in this strike is just a beginning. No longer can the company say they don't need us, but they're afraid of our growing strength!

MA BELL
YOU'RE GOING TO HELL

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We at the Center for United Labor Action are fighting for the rights of all workers, both on and off the job. We are struggling in the shops for higher wages, better benefits, and improved working conditions, working through unions where we are in them and trying to organize unions where we don't have them.

We know that if our money isn't taken from us by low wages, it's taken by high taxes, rents and transportation costs. We have gone to the hearings on rents, taxes, and utility rates to demand that they not be raised by the politicians to line the pockets of their friends, the bankers.

We recognize the special needs and oppression of women workers, and know that Black and Puerto Rican and other Third World women workers suffer the greatest. We have experienced the low pay, the exclusion from the higher-paying jobs in offices and factories because we're "weak" (but not too weak to carry thirty-pound babies) or because we have children, the lack of day-care and maternity leave. We demand an end to racist hiring and wage practices, equal pay for women, equal access to higher-paying jobs, paid maternity leave, and good, free day care for our children. We demand that unemployed women receive unemployment benefits, even if pregnant or without babysitters. We demand that the union leaders include these things in contract demands, and stop their collusion with the bosses to perpetuate racism and discrimination against women.

If you have any grievance, from low pay to being refused a job because of being a woman, or if you are involved in any struggle, let us know -- we may be able to help you. One woman struggling alone is almost powerless -- but we know that fighting together we can win.

Women of the Center for United Labor Action

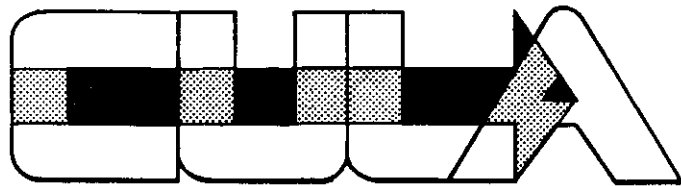
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