



## WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE

### Introduction — a brief statement on sex and class

There are two attitudes generally taken to the Women's Liberation Movement, both of which say that struggling for the liberation of women and fighting a class struggle against capitalism are antagonistic to one another. The "Women's Liberation" people generally argue that all women should be sisters and can be "liberated" regardless of their class; and the "class" people argue that any struggle, including Women's Liberation, which is not directly relevant to white male blue-collar workers, is just a diversion and must be fought because it splits the anti-capitalist struggle.

I feel that this attitude of one struggle being superior to the other is not only ludicrous, but does great harm to both parts of the Movement. I would argue very strongly that the two struggles, for the liberation of women and against capitalism, *must not* be separated. Need it be said that *just as women do not constitute one class the working class does not constitute one sex?* It is not possible to fight for women's liberation without fighting against capitalism, for one of the main reasons women are in such a bad position today is because of the private ownership of property. Nor is it possible to fight successfully against capitalism unless women and men fight together; and it is not possible to fight for socialism without fighting for the liberation of women, since any definition of socialism which does not include this aspect of society is not defining true socialism. In fact, "the degree of emancipation of women could be used as a standard by which to measure general emancipation."<sup>1</sup>

I do not wish to continue this argument at the moment, but hope that it will be taken up during the Conference. I am merely stating it here as the basis for writing this paper.

### Women — an increasing labour force

Women are approximately one-third of the workforce. According to the 1966 Census, women were 29.5%<sup>2</sup> of the workforce, and these women were 25% of the female population. However, the special conditions under which women enter the workforce have never been analysed by the Left, primarily because of the male chauvinist attitudes which pervade Leftists, preventing them from regarding women as part of the workforce or the working class. The trade unions, the so-called militant arm of the workers, have ignored women for as long as possible. However,

both the trade unions, and government and industry, are finding they have a force to be reckoned with, and one which is increasing. The annual growth rate of the female section of the workforce from 1962-1966 was 6.3% whereas the growth rate in that period of the workforce as a whole was only 2.6%. When the trade unions and government and industry put forward proposals dealing with working women, they need to be examined closely. However, even more important are the questions concerning women which the trade unions have not even considered.

There are several factors affecting women who enter the workforce which do not affect working men. Most of these factors are due to the special conditioning which women have, solely because of their sex, and they have severe repercussions on the potential militancy of female workers. Until this conditioning is challenged and overcome, militant workers in Australia will have an extremely difficult time including women in their ranks. Because one-third of all workers are women, and one-half of the working class is female, women must be included in the anti-capitalist struggle if it is to be successful.

### Social conditioning begins early

Unfortunately, very little study has been done on the subjective attitudes of working women. But this should not invalidate general observations about the conditioning of women and the effects it has when they enter the workforce.

The social conditioning which goes into creating a "woman" in our society is started at the earliest possible age, usually before the girl is six months old. Throughout their first twenty years of life, women are given one goal in life — to "get a man", marry him, bear his children, and look after both husband and children. Young girls are given dolls and toy household implements to play with; older girls learn how to apply make-up and the importance of looking attractive; in schools they sit through sewing and domestic science classes. All of this is saying to women: "You have one function in life — to give birth to your husband's children, and to care for the family you produce." This teaching of the wife-mother role is the primary factor which affects women, but it is accompanied by a number of secondary factors.

Women are taught that in order to "catch their man", they must be feminine. "Femininity" includes being gentle, submissive, obedient, and unselfish. It includes not competing with men — don't be too intelligent or too forceful in an argument. Another secondary factor is the way women are taught to regard men. Obviously, women are taught to respect men in general, for they must find economic and emotional security (so they are taught) through a man, in order to fit into the wife-mother role. As children, women learn that ultimate parental authority lies with the father, who is given the credit for making all the decisions (whether he actually does so or not). As teenagers, women are looking for the "ideal man" to enable them to fulfil their roles as wives and Mothers.

And any woman, young or old, knows that those who make it in this society are men. This all teaches women to admire and respect men, and conversely to devalue all members of their own sex, including themselves. Although women often seek out each other's company, it is usually to exchange stories about men and children, and there is certainly no loyalty or unity among women when they are fighting to "get their man". Each woman finds herself regarding others of her sex as a potential threat.

### Women's economic role

Obviously, this conditioning of women is determined by the economic role they play. As housewives and mothers, working women perform an immense task for society, estimated by the Chase Manhattan Bank at 99.6 hours of labour per week, of which only 40 hours, at most, is paid work. This leaves nearly 60 hours of work which women do in the home, for which they are not paid and which is therefore not regarded as "real" work. It is vital to society that the feeding, cleaning, laundering and all other housework is done (although this work could be rationalised and industrialised to reduce the labour involved). It is also vital to capitalist society that this work be unpaid. For, the wages of one worker pays for the labour of two — the worker in the public economy and the worker in the home. Two-thirds of all workers in Australia only have one job to perform, that for which they are paid. They do not have to do the labour in the house, since this is done by the worker they are married to. If, however, all workers had to labour at both jobs, radical changes would need to be made in working hours (in the public economy) and workers would generally be much less fit for either category of labour — "real" work or "house" work. ("A story on the front page of the Vancouver Sun in January 1969 reported that men in Britain were having their health endangered because they had to do too much housework!")<sup>3</sup>

So capitalism benefits from maintaining the wife-mother role as the primary goal for women, since part of this role is the 60 hours of unpaid labour a week. However, the emphasis placed on the role, and the opportunities for getting out of it, vary with the economy of the society. When the economy is tight and jobs are scarce, the importance of the role is emphasized by every possible force in society: mass media, churches, government and industry. On the other hand, when the economy is expanding and capitalism needs fresh labour to exploit, the idea of the independent women, the career girl, becomes acceptable, and opportunities for women to leave the home are presented, such as childcare centres. Even so, the wife-mother role is never totally abandoned at such times. Most of the jobs available for women are defined as "women's work" or are unskilled, poorly-paid jobs. It would seem that when women are allowed into the workforce, it is done in such a way as to free men from the tedious, least rewarding jobs, and allow them to progress "on the backs of women". This has the effect of dividing the work-

force along sex lines, making men and women effective enemies and benefits only the bosses. It is unlikely that the wife-mother role can be totally abandoned by capitalist society, for without the ideology of that role, the capitalists would lose all the benefits they now gain from the social conditioning of women. (Though, needless to say, if capitalism could get more benefits without this conditioning, the role would disappear very quickly.)

### Working women and the home

Most women enter the workforce with a totally different attitude to their work than men have. They do not expect to have to work at a job for 40 years or more — they expect that they will be able to return to the home and fulfill their main functions as wives and mothers. Therefore, they are much less likely than men, for this reason alone, to take an interest in their jobs, to complain if they do not like the situation, and to fight for better conditions, wages and promotion rates. The composition of the female workforce by age and marital status is as follows:

Age group	Total female workforce '000	Married female workforce '000	Married as % of total in each group
15-24	563.7	101.8	18.0
25-34	230.8	158.3	68.6
35-44	275.3	212.2	77.0
45-54	227.8	154.2	67.0
55-64	108.9	52.6	48.3
65 and over	28.1	7.3	25.8

These figures clearly show what has been generally supposed: that most women only get a (paid) job until they marry and have children. When they reach marrying age, the 25-34 age group, more than half of the women in the workforce leave their jobs, to fulfill their function in the home. What of the quarter-million women who keep working during this time? 68% of these women are married. Are they deserting their wife-mother roles? No, they are simply doing two jobs at once. It is reasonable to assume that the vast majority of these married women have children as well as husbands — or in the case of divorced, separated, or otherwise single "wives", have children without husbands. I mentioned earlier that two-thirds of the workforce (men) do one job only, for which they are paid. The remaining third (women) do two jobs, the job in the public economy for which they are paid, and the job at home, caring for their husbands and children, for which they are not paid. This burden of two jobs almost always falls entirely on the shoulders of women, and is seldom shared by the working husbands. So these women have to labour 40 hours a week in unsatisfactory jobs, bad conditions, for rotten pay, and then go home and do at least 60 hours a week of unpaid labour to keep them and their families alive and able to continue labouring!

Most women who enter the workforce have accepted their conditioning to the primary goal of wives and mothers, and very few reject it. If any conflict between job and family life comes up, then the job must suffer, because the family takes priority over all else. The strength of this conditioning can also be seen in the jobs women "choose" (which, of course, are only those jobs which they are allowed to enter). Most women do not take jobs which involve a good deal of training, or which would allow them to make a career for themselves. The exceptions to this are the skilled workers (who usually do "men's work", such as sheet metal workers and printers), or the professional women — the teachers, nurses, and social workers. However, these professional women do not choose a career for themselves which is independent of this conditioning, for all of these jobs are extensions of the wife-mother role.

### Why do women work?

Then why do married women continue working, if they are not interested in the job they're doing? A survey taken by the Department of Labour and Conscription in a Melbourne factory listed the following reasons given by 67 married women working there: 50% wanted the extra money to put a deposit on a house, or to buy so-called luxury goods such as a television set, a car, or furniture; 17% said the money they earned was essential to pay for food, rent and clothing; the remaining reasons given were to send children to school or university, to pay hospital bills, and, very few, out of boredom and loneliness at home. Most of those women interviewed said that their main reason for working at that particular factory was because it was close to home, and the type of job available had very little influence on their choice of a working place. This is probably the case with the vast majority of all working women in Australia — their main interest in their job comes from reasons arising out of their home life, not from any interest in a particular job per se.

Another important factor with these women who were interviewed was the length of time they had been in that particular job. 50% of them had only been there a year, and 50% planned to stop work altogether as soon as their immediate goals had been attained. This indicates another factor which is part of the average working woman's life in the workforce: A large number of women change their jobs frequently, particularly those in clerical and service industries, not only changing employers, but also changing the type of work they do. A significant proportion of women also work at jobs on a part-time or casual basis. All of these factors mean that women do not get deeply involved in their job situation, and are unlikely to take any great interest in a struggle taking place on the job site, let alone to start a struggle of their own. Of course, the reason behind these factors is again the wife-mother role, and the importance placed on it by the women in the workforce.

## Effects on militancy

But there are other factors operating also. Because of their life-long training in "feminine" ways, women are much more obedient and submissive on the job than they would be if this training had never taken place. They have been taught to obey orders, especially when they come from men — and most women work under male supervisors. They have been taught to respect men more than they respect themselves, so are much more likely to follow orders they disagree with, to stomach intolerable conditions, than male workers. They have been taught not to compete with men, but with their own sex for men. This is re-inforced in the job situation. Most women work under men, with women, and segregated from the male workers in the factory or the office. Because of the competition which already exists between women in the fight to "get their men" which is added to by competition in working, it is very difficult for women to see their immediate fellow workers — other women — as allies in a common fight against the boss. On the contrary, since the "boss" is usually male, the women are more likely to compete with each other for favours from him.

Another part of their conditioning which has an adverse effect on women's militancy on the job is the fact that they undervalue themselves. Since most women are doing "women's work" — clerical work, waitressing and nursing and teaching, etc. — they are in a bad psychological situation when it comes to demanding better working conditions, equal to those of men. All their lives, women have been told that they are of less value than men, and the work they do — simply because it is women who do it — is of less value than the work men do. One such example is clerical work. At the beginning of this century, shorthand and typing were advertised as "men only" skills, and as the gateway to success in management for any young man. Now, industry has expanded enormously, and so has the clerical work it requires, and a much larger staff is needed. Obviously, not all of these workers can reach management positions, so clerical work has become a dead-end job. And, of course, it is now dominated by women, and is valued much lower than it was when only men were doing it. (The same can be said of doctors in Russia today, who are predominantly female.) Even so, men who do clerical work today get \$20—30 a week more than women, without the special skills of shorthand and typing! It is very difficult for women to go against their conditioning in this sphere — to assert that they are just as good as men, that the work they do is worth as much and that they should therefore be paid the same as men, with similar opportunities in their jobs. This is aggravated even more by the way in which social status is determined in this capitalist society. Social status depends on the income a person earns. Until recently, men were the only income earners in this society, so it was 'natural' that each woman's status was simply a reflection of the money-earning capacity of the man she was attached to. Today, although the economic reality has changed and women are also

income earners, social attitudes have not adjusted to this fact, and women are still judged by the earnings of their men. Women are told that their earnings are rather irrelevant; but they are also told that, in this society, you are what you earn. Since women earn only  $\frac{3}{4}$  the income of men, they are only  $\frac{3}{4}$  the value of men. Once again, women have to break out of their whole upbringing in order to be able to demand equal pay.

## Women and the Unions

The implication of all this is that if women are to be brought into any struggle in the workforce, their conditioning to accept the wife-mother role must be challenged and destroyed. The trade union's officials have started to notice that women are a part of the workforce, and part of their potential dues-paying membership. They are looking for ways to attract women into their unions, but have not even started to look at these factors which affect women who get a job, and which make it difficult for women to consider even joining a union, much less do anything more "militant". Most women regard unions as part of the "man's world" which isn't very relevant to them, and which they are culturally conditioned not to try to enter.

There are several reasons for the failure of the union leadership to act on women's questions, and to challenge the conditioning women have received. The primary cause, however, is male chauvinism in those leaders, and the almost complete domination of all union positions by men. The male officials (and those females who make it in the union structure) have adopted the anti-woman attitudes of society generally. They regard women's problems as being much less important than any other part of their union work and are reluctant to take any steps that would significantly benefit women in the workforce. They cannot attack the wife-mother role, because they enjoy the benefits of that role — they leave all the housework, the most petty and boring of all jobs, to their wives. They enjoy a superior status in this society solely because of their sex, and they are not going to relinquish that position unless they are forced to.

## Equal Pay?

The unions have brought up one issue which affects women: equal pay. But this fight for equal pay has been going on for more than fifty years now — which indicates just how seriously the union officials are fighting for it. Can you imagine any issue which vitally affected male workers not being resolved for that long? And look at the basis on which this fight has been placed, by the unions themselves, when it has been raised. The definition is "Equal pay for equal work." The unions are once again expressing their male chauvinism by saying that "women's work" is not equal to any work that men do. Since most women are involved in "women's work" of one sort or another they are totally ignored when the equal pay demand is raised in this framework. The only way to fight for equal pay —

and it must be fought for — is to challenge the whole notion of women being inferior to men, of women's work being of less value than other work. The demand should be "Abolish the sex differential" — which includes women doing nursing and clerical work — and not "Equal pay for equal work."

### Childcare

Another issue affecting women in the workforce which has been raised by the trade unions is childcare centres for working mothers. But this question has also been raised by government and industry, and in much the same terms. As long as the boom in the economy lasts, both government and industry are anxious to attract women into the workforce because they need their cheap labour. So the trade unions have obliged by suggesting that child-care centres should be set up. At the Workers Control Conference in Sydney last year, the only paper given which dealt with women in the workforce at all, suggested that these child-care centres should be paid for out of the pockets of the working mothers. So women are faced with the choice of working in order to pay for the care of "their" children (whether by a local baby-sitter or in a factory centre) and then going home to do their housework, or to stay in the home, doing only one job, and looking after their children free of charge. Such a proposal by the unions can hardly be expected to attract many new female members!

The demand of childcare centres must be raised in such a way as to attack the notion that it is a woman's main job to be a wife and mother. Childcare centres must be established at the factories where all parents work, not just mothers, so that the parents can choose, and possibly alternate between, the centres their children go to. These centres must be under the control of the parents whose children attend them and must be staffed by professionally trained people. A special scholarship fund should be established so that people can be trained to meet the needs of these centres, and a certain amount of the scholarships should be earmarked for men only. This is to remove the idea that it is "women's work" to look after children and that women are inately the most capable people to do this job. Above all, the money to pay for the building, maintenance and staffing of these centres must come not from the pockets of the working parents, or from government funds (since this only puts the burden back on the workers in the form of higher taxation) but from the profits of the individual industry. Obviously such a demand cannot be raised in isolation: it must be accompanied by some form of price control so that the industry does not take out the costs of the centres on the consuming public.

### Other demands of women

There are also demands vital to working women which have not been considered by the trade unions. The two most important of these are maternity leave and shopping time. We must fight to prevent women being penalised for bearing children — as they are

being at the moment. The boss's argument is that women are not as productive as men, since they keep taking time off to have children and look after them for a short time. This is looking at productivity in the most economist sense possible, for what is giving birth other than "producing" new fodder for the labour force? The main problem with giving birth is not that process itself, but the necessity to spend a lot of time looking after a very dependent and demanding human being. Women and men must both be given time off on full pay when a baby is born, so that either can choose to look after the new child. Special consideration must be given to women before their baby is born, so that they are not allowed to work right up to the time of birth, and are not allowed to be fired from their job (in other words, will be on full pay) for some time afterwards. Should the woman not return to work within this limited period, then the job must be available for her to return to, with the equivalent wage as when she left, and no loss of seniority.

Shopping time is another vital issue to women in the workforce, but although some companies allow such time — half a day once every two months or so — the unions have never brought this up as a matter which is relevant to all workers. This demand, too, must be fought on the basis of shopping time for workers of both sexes — again to get away from the double burden which women at present carry single-handedly. Men and women must both be given time off to shop — and reasonable time at least once a week — whether they are married or single, whether their spouses work or not. And the costs of such time off — such "unproductive" time spent buying goods — must be paid for by the industry. The workers must not be docked for this necessary time off.

These then are some of the demands which can be raised in the present context of the Australian workforce. There are many more as well. Women's Liberation must organise around these and other such demands which attack the wife-mother role, because it is the role which is the main oppressor of women, both in the public economy and at home. While this role is defended by women and they continue to believe it is their only role, they will be unable to insist on better working conditions.

*Coonie Sandford, April 1970.*

*This paper was prepared for the first national women's liberation conference.*

### REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Marx & Engels: THE HOLY FAMILY.

<sup>2</sup> All figures quoted in this paper are taken from the 1966 Census as reported in the Women's Bureau of the Department of Labour and National Service "Facts and figures".

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Margaret Benston in THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF WOMEN'S LIBERATION. Available also from Words for Women.

## MACHINIST

*Kath is married, 56, and has one daughter aged twenty. In this article she speaks to MEJANE about her life and work.*

**MEJANE:** *Who were your parents?*

**KATH:** Just ordinary people who came off a farm. . . came to Sydney to this house; I've been here in this house for forty-five years. . . she reared us in this house, just the typical mother, four girls and a boy. We had no father, so we had to bring everything we could into the house, so again we were very poor even as a machinist.

**MEJANE:** *How did you come to be a machinist?*

**KATH:** I was a machinist when I was fourteen. In those days, we were very poor, you had to have a trade. I went to the Catholic School. I never had sixpence to learn typing, so we didn't learn typing. . . so here I am. You had to learn a trade. My sister was a milliner, my brother was put to the glass factory and I was sent to X—, to be a machinist. We started off with 7/1 for a start and then two shillings rise, to 9/1 after six months, and when your wages were top they were four pounds. But by the time I got to the top they were back to two pounds — I'll never forget that, that was dreadful . . . the depression. That's the way it happened and the money did go back down, you see.

I learnt it when I was young and my memory of my young life. . . we were all the same age, there were three hundred of us, this was in 1928, and none of us had a penny. There was a really great. . . you can talk about football or anything, footballers talk about how wonderful it was before money came into it, you know. . . here we were and we learnt the trade. We had a foreman, he taught me the trade, he taught me everything. The atmosphere there was very good then.

I was nineteen years at X— and then I left there and had two or three years at home when my baby was little. Then I got this job, I went back to this factory; this girlfriend of mine that I know she said they had a job down here for two hours a day cleaning (if you don't mind!) from seven till nine, so Jack used to mind the baby from seven till nine. And then after that the only thing I had to do was put her in the kindergarten which I didn't mind and I'm very glad of.

Now I'm back to tailoring.

Now they break it all up, you see. We learnt it all when I started; but anybody now, new Australians, you only have to be able to sew a seam. In those days you did a lot more of the garment than you do now. . . now, it wouldn't matter if the part done before you was dreadful, you do your bit and that's it.

**MEJANE:** *How has being a machinist affected your life generally?*

**KATH:** Well, it's never affected me because anything grows on you and now at this age. . . At one stage our factory closed down, so I went into another brand of machining. . . curtains. . . which nearly killed me. I was horrified. I was depressed. I stayed there for six weeks and every day I came home exhausted and felt dreadful, but then I got another job as a tailoress and I was happy as a lark.

The difference between tailoring and curtains — I have never in all my life. . . you handle seven lengths of material, 7 foot long and 60 inches

wide and you join that together. You have a ruler in your hand and you can only sew that much (about 4") — that's all you can sew at a time. It's got to be one and a half inches—one and a half—not one and five eighths, not one and three eighths. It's a straight seam. There must be a lot of millionaires in Sydney because we sew orders of hundreds and hundreds of dollars deposit for curtains, for windows 20 foot long and 30 foot long, glass houses nearly.

I've always wanted to work and it does affect your home. It affects anybody who goes to work, naturally. It only ever took me two minutes to go to the factory, so I've got a great advantage over a terrible lot of people who have to catch a train and then have to catch a bus and then mind their children. . .

I could write a book on some of the mothers who take sleeping tablets to go to sleep and take pills to keep awake.

I've worked all my life with those sort of people. . . they've got too much to do and they've got to do it and the husbands are nearly always uncooperative. Most are between the ages of twenty eight and forty. At another factory I was at—it was good there — I was there for fourteen years — some of them. APC powder would keep them alive, but it would finally kill them. It's common as common. . . you know they installed an APC machine in our factory.

I can tell the time by them. They couldn't start work without they took an APC powder and at 9 o'clock, 11 o'clock, 1 o'clock, 3 o'clock. . . they say it gives them a lift — this is their idea of them. I've asked dozens of girls. Now this was a factory where they were all Australians and the new Australians don't come into it. I could go back ten years or more on that one. Now the factory finally closed down, so back I am at X— where they're all old or New Australians and there aren't any APC powders taken. There are about eighty people and mostly New Australians and about thirty of them are old Australians who've been there for thirty years — one for fifty, three or four at forty — well, they don't take APC powders, the old ones.

**MEJANE:** *What do the women do about their children?*

**KATH:** Oh. . . the lady up the street. There was one lady at Green Valley — it was a new suburb then — this is going back a bit now — she left her little boy with the lady next door when she came to work.

Most mothers, especially around here — I don't know whether you know the kindergarten, but it's in Riley Street: the Sydney Day Nursery — everybody takes their child there. You see it's from seven o'clock in the morning till five o'clock at night. You go out there of a morning and you see them all walking their babies, prams and things, taking their babies to work. Most of them are new Australian. Priority is for ones who have babies and they're not married, you know what I mean. One little girl I know of, Crown street did everything in their power to let her keep the baby and now it's in the Day Nursery. It's about three or four months old.

Most of the people, their life centers around clubs. This is really and truly bad, I think anyway, because clubs. . . they go to clubs and their husbands play poker machines and they're left with the kids. Or the kids are at home. That's their night out for the people I know that work in factories. Really and truly, they wouldn't know if there was a strike on. . . it's a different life altogether from a political life.

**MEJANE:** *What about the Union?*

**KATH:** Really and truly, the women, they're so far removed from the

union — metal trades unions they really get into it and they can really talk and get things done. But the clothing trades union never gets correspondence from the women. They're not interested.

It's men run the Clothing Trades Union. There are about four or five or six women, but they're really . . . some of them are so old . . . the women are not interested. It won't change in my lifetime, there's been that little bit of progress but it's so small, you know. They're so far removed;

*MEJANE: What about things like maternity leave and so on?*

*KATH: Oh no, you don't get maternity leave. You just leave and have your baby. God, girl, all they talk about is compensation they got for somebody, or general business. They never have union meetings hardly. They had a general meeting the other day. I was the only one. When they first saw me at the union meetings, all these people filed in — about six or seven of these fellers, organisers and one thing or another — they go, "hallo lady," they say, "is there any reason you're at the union meeting?" And they said, "where do you work?" "X—". "Oh," they said, "that's real good; there's no trouble up there."*

*MEJANE: How is the work supervised?*

*KATH: In X—it's all men supervisors and all men bosses and all women machinists. The men, they started off as pressers. One was a presser, and that's all he is. . . . A lot of them are self-taught; they know a bit about cutting the garment, and they keep an eye on the girls. At the underwear place, though, there was a forelady and a woman under the forelady.*

*Most women accept the supervision. . . . where I was making curtains, there was the boss — a man — the forelady — an old maid — another lady machinist — old maid — the presser who'd been there for forty years — an old maid. . . . well, there's only eighteen there including me. Well, what Mr. Strong, the boss, said, was right. I said to them, let's have a lottery ticket just among a few of us, you know. "Oh, we must ask, Mr. Strong."*

*Where I am now, you can't speak. That's the case in most factories. They say, "Here comes the boss, quick!" That's been going on as long as I can remember. Just that she's looking at you — that's the forelady, you know. They have pets, women. They have pets. I thought she liked me once. We had a union delegate who was her friend and he was the union delegate for twenty odd years and never did anything for the girls and never went against the union.*

*The bonus system is a bad system. It's a bad system. This is where APC powders come in very handy. Make money, make money. You know, oh dreadful, there's also the time system. Well, they'd time you, stand behind you, watch what you were doing, time you. . . . most work on bonus systems or time systems.*

*The German lady opposite me, never said a word. She made twelve dollars bonus a week; I made seven dollars fifty and there were times when I said to myself, "I'll see if I can go fast enough to keep up with Elke." I just wanted to see if I could do it.*

*July, 1971*

## THE BETRAYAL

I couldn't quite understand it. There we were — the women, I mean, of the Qantas printing department — organising the work to be printed. First it came through my hands in the rough draft — forms to be drawn up, articles to be arranged and typeset — then the layout. Another woman had to run off all the headings over 12 point, and I would paste them up. The finished artwork was checked and proof-read by another woman then passed on to the two girls on the camera where negatives had to be made if the final plate was aluminium, and on to the Xerox room to two other women if the plates were paper for short runs. From this point the plates were sent out to the men on the multiliths. They attached the plates to the machines, pushed a button and sat back to smoke or talk, until the number required registered on the machine. Then they would switch off, remove the plate and the finished copy, taking the latter, if necessary, to another woman in the collating room. And so on.

I couldn't understand it. I thought to myself — if that's worth \$42 a week, the work the women do is worth double. I shared what I thought with the other women. They agreed — they couldn't understand it either. That made seven plus two women packers dumb enough not to latch on. Seven women on \$30 a week and two on \$24. (The male packers downstairs would have been on \$36-40 a week at that time — 1962).

### Awakening!

And once we started thinking about that, we started wondering why it was that the men could talk without interference when, if the women so much as smiled at one another, Mr. Company Asslicker would frown or cough through the window at them. It wasn't as if the men's talk was very far from their fly buttons. It was a foul room for obsessive cunt and cock talk. I mean I never heard them discuss the state of the nation or anything like that. Yet there it was: you get two women making arrangements with one another to take it in turns to 'nick' up to Mascot in the Lunch half hour to do the family shopping and this goon of a printing officer started his warden walks up and down until silence fell. It irked me like hell. I fell into the pattern for about three months — until I had become thoroughly familiar with the workings of the place, long enough to learn from the others why I had been grabbed, whisked off to the doctor for company check-up and passed permanent overnight, when the normal procedure with the company was to try before buying. To feel indispensable is to be given enough lee-way to 'change the course of history' a bit. So, when Mr. C.A. passed my room, I'd carry right on talking and wave a hello to him. I let him know that when he was dealing with me, he was dealing



with quality. I wouldn't say he ever really got to love me — or even acknowledge me as quality but at least he learned to pretend because he never had the straight-out nerve to tell me to shut up. Even his cough cleared up because each morning I'd ask him how his cold was. I talked down to him with the concern of a good 'boss' lady worried about one of her staff and he never did learn to change positions. Or I'd just ignore him as though he was nothing. Which he was, in my eyes — being such a company man. Everything he did was according to the book. So help me, if someone dropped dead at his feet, he'd look up company rules and, I tell you, if there was nothing about 'dead bodies and disposal of', he'd stop right over the top. Every second sentence that dropped from his propeller-shape lips began with "Company policy is....." He'll get his reward.

### Indian Chiefs

But Mr. C.A. wasn't really worth worrying about. In the hierarchy that abounds at Qantas I decided to go over his head to the next Indian Chief. Of course, this one wasn't much help when I told him what a lousy deal I thought the women were getting. He was a 'yes, well that's the way it is' sort of man who'd then change the subject to his troubles — his lousy house with the tree roots tearing the foundations and his wife wouldn't have the trees removed, etc. etc. etc.. I never did learn to nail this one — he was a master at slipping out from under and I couldn't help admiring him for how he managed it. All he wanted was for everybody to be happy and love him. I used to think about him and wonder how I could pin him down to a straight reply. I never did, I went over his head to the office controller. That was one of the marvellous things at Qantas — if you had a position of responsibility that is — you could always dodge aside from it and let the next chief handle it. There was always another one, all the way to the top where you get blocked because the one with the most feathers was too important to deal with trivia.

I put in an application. I made it very simple.

Office Controller

P&S Section

Attn: Mr.....

Mascot

I wish to apply for an adequate increase in wages for the position of Vari-typist at the above-mentioned department. The work I am doing, which entails typesetting, layout and design, to my mind is not adequately rewarded by a clerical rate of pay and fifteen shillings margin.

Awaiting a reply as soon as possible,

Miss.....

And four days later, I couldn't believe, I had a reply. That is, I received an official piece of paper, signed by the office controller. It said:

Miss.....

Office Controller

P&S Dept.

Mascot

Dear Miss.....

I would like to acknowledge receipt of your letter of the 9th Feb. on the question of your salary.

The matter has been passed to our staff department and I will advise you further.

That's all. That's all he ever did write. As days and weeks passed, I thought 'to hell with him'.

### Parliament and the Union

I sat down and wrote to Eddie Ward (then in opposition in the Federal Parliament) asking him what he thought and asking him to ask the Minister of Air what he thought. I told him what I thought. Then I wrote to the union.

These last two letters I expanded from a personal request to a demand on behalf of all the women, insisting that we were all being discriminated against. The reply from Mr. Ward was fairly prompt, accompanied by a long load of guff from the Minister of Air. I think one of the requirements needed to take a position of power is to be able to fill a foolscap page with cliches written with a pen dipped in bullshit, adding up to the waste product of an empty mind. But tidy. Whatever could be made out in the letter, one thing was sure — there was not the slightest concern for an obvious injustice.

My first and personal request was made in February. Between then and the 31st of August, when I was asked to visit the office of the Federal Secretary of the Printing Union (who was also the court advocate) letters went back and forth, from me to the union, from the union to me and from the union to Qantas and from Qantas to the union.

### Boys and Girls United!?

Meanwhile various union representatives visited the printing department — from both unions. At that time (since then they have amalgamated) there were two printing unions, leaning in different directions, as it were — to the left and to the right (so they tell me). The one I contacted (because it was bigger) was the one leaning to the right, as I later discovered. Which had nothing to do with what followed. I had arranged with all the women to join the union and by August all the women were members of the P.I.E.U. of Australia. They had by this become somewhat aggressive in their attitude to the men who had begun reacting to the disturbance the women had caused, by calling us various unprintable names and telling us that everything had been fine until we started upsetting things. I asked the women to hold their horses — told them it would be better if we could make the men see reason and help us. I did not directly approach them on this basis because their antagonism to us was strong and unreasonable. I did suggest to them that the worst that

that could happen among workers was division. I said to them that small groups, antagonistic to each other were far easier to control and threaten than a solid impenetrable block. I finally put it to them that the *men* in the engineering Union (very militant) and the Transport Union, often required support and help and that this could be given more surely by other Union members and that individuals belonging to no Union were unable to offer this help. Didn't they sympathise with these *men*? What did they think the engineers and drivers would think of them, taking all the benefits and offering none of the effort? To make a long story short, the men went to the bother of finding out which Union the women had joined — and they joined the other one! (So egos were restored, independence maintained, they were not being directed by women. God forbid such humiliation!) What the hell. Who cared. They were in.

### The mighty meet

Then came the meeting of the peacocks. You will find, time and time again, that above principle, above ideal, above and beyond justice, the position a man holds, the title surrounding him like a golden aureole, is what he prizes above all. He basks in it. By about October, and after I had seen him, the Federal Secretary of the Printing Industry Employee's Union of Australia (and a grander title than that is hard to find) made it known that he would be arriving on the 'playing field'. In his mind's eye there surely was a fanfare of trumpets, but regrettably no Hollywood angels oo-ooing in the background. But the Qantas red carpet went down. The reigning monarchs, though enemies on the battlefields, go through much proper ceremony and courtesy upon parlying with one another. We waited on the sidelines while the union peacock strutted upon the red carpet and the Qantas peacock made welcoming noises of flattery at dealing with none but the highest in the ranks of the enemy.

And the women waited. And waited. Until May, the following year, before enough rust had fallen from the wheels of conciliation and arbitration for them to start grinding slowly into any sort of action.

Meanwhile, I had met two or three times with the Federal Secretary with whom I went over precisely what duties were performed by the women. (It was during these sessions I learned that the first vari-typer to come onto the market had been pooh-poohed by the men as offering no threat to the linotype machine and they had consequently done nothing about it ten or twenty years before. Now it was actually nudging the bigger and heavier machines aside. By 1960, it had been used in America to sterilise a strike by linotype operators on a New York newspaper, where they moved in vari-typers manned by women and, to my knowledge, are still so manned to this day.)

### Some slight concern

As well as meetings with the Federal Secretary, I was also taken to talk with the Union Barrister. I can't remember why, except to go over all I had previously told the Federal Secretary. What I do remember of this time and those meetings is my asking, when I was informed that I would be called as a witness to the hearings, that they fill me in on what questions I might expect from the employers' advocate. I was told not to worry about it. I repeated my request several times. I was worried. I kept coming back to it. I asked, "What sort of questions can I expect from the employers?" Again I was told not to worry about it. I asked "But is there theoretical knowledge that as a compositor I should know which in fact I may not know? I can do the work — but what about the theory?" I never got a reply. It continued to worry me a great deal. I knew the advocate was busy. I knew he had a lot to do towards the hearing but it seemed very important to me to be prepared for whatever questions might be fired at me. I think now that I should have been suspicious at this point. But I was not. Just worried. I suggested to myself that it was just nerves, a psychological sort of thing which the advocate couldn't be expected to understand. But I gave a lot of information to help them prepare their case. I felt the least they could do was to help me help them.

### Males and Females

Coming down in the lift from the Barrister's Office — the Union Advocate/Federal Secretary, the Barrister and myself — we confronted each other. These two men and myself a woman confronted each other across the gulf between us. They stood together in their maleness and looked at me, smiling.

"Really," said the Barrister, "these women cause a lot of trouble with little to complain of, don't they, Col?". He was smiling at me. He winked. There it was — the sex thing between us. Enemies at heart? And I didn't recognize it. As ignorant as I was brought up to be of hidden intent behind a smile.

"Yes," said Col, he also smiling, "a man to keep them and provide for them and they're still not satisfied. In my day a woman was satisfied to stay in the home and didn't start competing with her husband." I said not all the women had husbands. But their smiling confused me. Friendly, gentle, sighing, suffering smiles. I smiled back. I wondered why men should presume a job was theirs by right and a woman's by grace. A little more awareness and I could then have felt the blade between my shoulders. I didn't. That was my failing. Full awareness was to hit me at the worst possible moment.

### Qantas Policy?

At Qantas it was and probably still is company policy not to conciliate. Whenever Qantas representatives sat down to table

with Union representatives it was for one of two reasons. One was to get the Union to climb down (sometimes possible). The other was to repeat ad infinitum "Go to arbitration". This goes on parrot fashion for a few non-productive and useless weeks until the arbitration wheel starts turning of its own accord.

The Printing Unions went through all this farce with Qantas. With two more women to be called as witnesses, I went over likely questions as best I could. None of us had ever been involved in any way like this before and were totally ignorant of the process.

### The Big Day

The day finally arrived. Having gone over all that we could imagine, we three women could do no more than learn from experience. We did. It was wholesale slaughter. No beef cattle could have felt more helpless as they were prodded towards the spike, than we did that day.

There were three commissioners — all men of course. The court was filled with men, apart from we three and a shorthand clerk to the employers' advocate. I met her later in the wash room. She washed her hands beside me, and as she opened the door to leave, she looked back at me, "They're a pack of bastards, aren't they?" she said and left.

I had been first in the box. Oh they were courteous. I was a woman, after all! They were gentle. And they were poisonous. The questions came thick and fast. All questions which I knew, as I stood in that box, should have and could have been anticipated by the Union advocate; which I could not possibly have known. I looked across at him. He looked down. Several times I waited for him to intervene. He didn't. I was shaking with frustration and anger. This then was the moment of betrayal, the Judas act. I knew then how Joan must have felt when the church fathers turned their backs on her. I at last felt that knife in my back. They could have warned me. They had not. They could have given us ammunition. They had not. This mighty advocate about whom I had heard such praise, whose court experience was so vast, whose knowledge was so profound. Either men are easily fooled by titles and his reputation had been falsely earned. Or else he was a bastard who had fed us to the enemy and to his own ends. Had his unspoken aim been to show that women did not have the knowledge for the job and that it should be in the hands of men? It seemed then so patently clear to me, that I was ashamed of myself. I felt I had been used, had lent myself to be used — to strike my own sex. I know as I left the box that it was a case of men against women. And I had not been prepared.

### Defeat

As it turned out, the Union had cut off its nose to spite its face. We were not replaced by men. As they should have realized a new

award was brought in. We did receive a \$2 increase. The men on the multiliths received an increase also. Although like the women they had done no apprenticeship, they were brought to par with other men within the printing industry. They were, after all, men. The differential in fact was widened. And in principle, the women were worse off than before. . . . apart from the actual experience we had been through. That had been of value in itself. At least it showed that, always, we had to probe behind the smile on the face of a man -- always to look for intent; we had learned that women were not seriously considered in a fight for justice. To stretch justice ourselves, maybe the intent was unconscious -- but the result was the same.

We did think, after this, of forming our own union for women. But as our work was already covered by the two large unions, they would have opposed our application and obviously won. We did not leave the union, though there were some who suggested this.

Instead, when the Engineers went out on strike a few months after the hearings, I rang the Engineers shop steward and asked if they needed support. He replied that they would welcome solidarity. So, we women walked out. It threw the printing department into sudden chaos because the men, not knowing what was going on and seeing us walk out, walked out after us. When we were all outside, the men asked us what it was all about. I told them we were supporting the engineers in their demands, what were they out for? Being out, they had to be out for something, so they too were out to support the engineers. We attended the mass meeting with the engineers. It was Qantas personnel office which informed the Union office of "our" Union; we didn't bother. Our Union rep came racing out to find out what was going on; I told him the engineers needed support (we were to support the engineers again and again). Our Union rep explained to us that the Engineer's complaint had nothing to do with us and advised us to return to work and to contact them in future if we contemplated action. We didn't -- we were just 'dumb women'! It was up to the Union to keep its ear to the ground. It was not long before all the shop stewards at Qantas were being accused of bypassing their Union; thus forcing Union reps. to work for their money — *to get with it, or get out!*

M.L. Kelly, Sept. 1970  
Glebe Group, Sydney.

## THE SPY

Bitter deep and in every cell  
I do not blame you vipers  
For what you have done  
For you too are victims  
    of systems  
But your refusal to acknowledge  
    Existence  
Your self-forgiveness  
    Self-indulgence  
your blaming the victim for the crime  
    Or pitying  
  
I know why Dylan Thomas  
    Died in your presence  
  
You are insufferable, unbearable  
I could line you up and be done with you  
And feel not even good riddance  
You are already dead  
  
You discuss the characteristics  
    Of Colored people, of Indians  
    Culture  
    Some are more emotional than others  
    Some come on too strong  
    The quiet ones are very nice.  
You are a giant blonde monster  
With the enemy inside you  
  
You have no private hell  
Your mind has never once left  
Your blonde body-without-a-soul.  
There is no humility  
I despise you  
I have identified my enemies  
You are one  
  
You are the women of the Masters.

Roxanne Dunbar

## FACTORY WORK

This article deals with my personal experiences in three factories in the outer Western Suburbs of Sydney. In this area there is an enormous demand for female labour from the large textile, food processing, cosmetic, pharmaceutical and clothing factories like Helena Rubenstein, Revlon, Davis Coop, Woollen Mills, Country Club, Lovable, E.M.I., G.E.C., Rothmans, etc. The type of work involves processing and packing, covering terms for all labour done in the factories, largely unskilled with no real experience required. The wage level for senior women is around \$34 since the 3% increase, with the opportunity for overtime, worthless after about 2 hours.

I worked in three factories over a period of 4 years, for 9 months—A food-processing factory, tinning abalone; Revlon, packing God's great gift to women, and a Pharmaceutical factory, specializing in contraceptives, suppositories, and all kinds of bum treatment.

I'll start with the abalone factory, because it was my favorite. The Health Department or Department of Labour and Industry obviously never went near this place. The working conditions were deplorable and the stink unbearable. On my first day there I recall asking "Does it always smell like this?" Everyone laughed and one woman said "This is good, Love--wait till the rotten ones come in." It was an old factory with little ventilation, and a floor always covered with an inch of water. You spent your day jumping from board to board, wet through. The job consisted of slicing the backside off the abalone, packing them in tins, putting on lids, cooking in huge cookers, labelling and boxing. You couldn't sit down while working, and the one room where everyone ate, smoked and collapsed had no windows. Every day 30 women, all over forty except me, were packed in here.

The one release of frustration was to tell dirty jokes. These women were experts, different from the average process worker in the cleaner make-up and chemical factories. These women were completely uninhibited in female company, really on the shit end of the system - on widows pensions, not allowed to work more than a few hours a week but risking it anyway. About half were

migrants. I was accepted because I was young with the privilege of being stupid and because they seemed to feel I wasn't too proud to do dirty work. The process of accepting an outsider was important to them because they were conscious that people outside the factory looked down on what they did.

The Revlon women behaved differently. The first day I went there, as I was squeezed into a nook along a conveyor belt, the woman next to me looked both ways suspiciously, pointed to the supervisor of our belt and whispered, "Watch her, she's a bitch." And she was. Who knew what this woman was like after hours, married with kids. But in her relations with the women under her (who got about a dollar a week less than her) there was no room for any kind of human contact. From the start, the barricades were drawn up, not against the management but within the ranks, women against women. Admittedly, these women didn't come to work because they craved human contact (although they needed it) —but there was no chance for friendship or feelings of a common lot.

The Pharmaceutical factory was like Revlon, but with one difference—there were no men around—and that made all the difference at Revlon. The presence of men in factories is significant. Revlon was the more revolting because of the viciousness, gossip, flirting and general scoring of points off other women. Many factories are like this — in that they have a small group of male fitters and turners to muck around with the antiquarian machines, but who seem to just stand around eyeing off the women. Every week at Revlon, I watched the conscious picking of victims to be destroyed — and there was no chance of women brushing this off. Everyone played the game. To be ostracized even from this tribal rite was an even worse fate.

The mental habits of competing against one another were so set it was hard to see how they could be broken. In the other two factories, where men weren't there to remind the women of their combat roles, the bitchiness was less—or it took other forms. At least some women did admit they could relax without worrying so much about their appearance and behavior as women.

### Other effects on personality

As an extreme example of what hot-house work conditions do to some people's behaviour and of the incidence of a hierarchy within the factory, I want to talk about a woman in the abalone factory. She was a huge strong woman, nominally in charge, who worked three times as hard as everyone else, was exploited for her strength, and persecuted by the management to keep up output. She defended us in the workroom, but in our windowless sanctuary she turned into the most fanatical nationalist. Among other Australians this wasn't such a problem. But here, as in the other factories, about half the women were migrants. Polish,

Bulgarian, Latvian, and Lithuanian women were subjected to a constant eulogy of Australia as the greatest country in the world. Because she was boss woman and worked harder than anyone else, she seemed to expect that the least everyone could do was to agree with her. But they had to do it loudly and often. This was her form of terror, or at least affirmation of her own beliefs in front of aliens. These East European women, who had all suffered a past not only of hunger, fear of death, family dissolution, subjection to foreign domination, but abandonment of their own countries and any equivalent nationalist feelings, now had to grovel before yet another form of rejection in Australia. They had to say: Yes this is the greatest country in the world, we are parasites, we did make a mistake being born in Eastern Europe, we do owe everything to Australia, we ought to be more grateful, we do feel humble -- all to the total self-efacement of their own lives; victims of an age-old Australian nationalist labour mentality.

It was true most of them did want to forget the war, but not in those terms. I often sensed their pity (but never anger) for this woman who lacked any understanding of their former lives, nor did they think to question her behaviour. When she screamed at them and called them stupid because their English wasn't so good, or they couldn't speak English at all, or because they didn't work as well as she could with the crazy machines, they took it calmly out of fear and superhuman patience. They had the kind of historical background that couldn't be got at any more by bombastic individuals.

About this woman there's little I could understand, except that the factory environment encouraged the extremes of her nature. When this happened to each woman under stress, the in-fight was on.

Generalising from the three factories, and others of which I have second hand experience: the factory situation blows up personality differences by testing them to their limit in a totally alienating environment. Some women vegetate and never speak but make the relevant signs of agreement with whomever wants it at the time. Some become clown figures acting all the time, making all the jokes. Others come to rely on them for relief. Some go through a period of bitterness and vindictiveness for god knows how many reasons based on why they have to work at all and their resentment of this. Their bitterness is only too readily responded to by others. It's simpler to react to the easily recognizable emotion than to anything more subtle. And every factory has its resident bitch, made to order. Some women try to cope, try to be flexible, to fit in, to please everyone. Often women over 40, only forced to work late in their life, can't understand the emotional ruptures of the factory, or ever see beyond them. Trying to cope becomes a 24-hour a day occupation—and finally they break.

## Woman's Relation to the Monotonous Rapid Demanding Parasitic Woman-eating Processing Machine

Many of the jobs done by women in factories could be done much more efficiently and with less soul destroying by modern machines. But no. Either hand labour alone does the job because that labour is cheaper, and is a good exercise for new chums (to kill them mentally in their first few days) -- or else, machines are used which have to be seen to be believed—1930 vintage. They're like babies with diarrhoea. You have to be there waiting, or feeding, or scrubbing, or shaking or kicking, at 3-second intervals every minute of the day. Panic isn't the word for the conveyor belt experience. Standing on the end (where there's the possibility they'll fall off) while 4 million boxes full of hair dye and gadgets and instructions, come straight for you, and you have to shut the lid of every one—is mind-blowing. Standing under the spout of a machine that spurts Kaomagma at 3 second intervals, and having to fill a bottle every 3 seconds, put it down and pick up another one without spilling any - for even one hour will send you off your head. This form of labour straps you to a demanding totalitarian routine.

There are other forms of slavery -- where you sit and screw on lids at your own pace (not really your own pace since if you had the choice, you wouldn't do it). And how do you choose your rate? Do you go fast when you know you'll never reach the end anyway -- or do you go slow and pass away altogether into oblivion?

The feeling of suicide when I suddenly thought, while cutting abalone bums one day, I have to do this for the rest of my life, was sickening. How do these women prevent such thoughts, or for those who do feel it (since some must) how do they cope with it? Why do they never think beyond the level of personal defeat towards a social criticism of their misuse? The mental blocks seem insurmountable for most women without help --or a real crisis.

This prostration of your entire self to machines, is unremitting. From the time you get off the bus, or walk from your house around the corner, you are battery operated. Bells tell you when to start, stop, eat, drink, smoke, shit and escape. Every human function is taken out of your control and only a few find a way to get back at the monster in their life. Most take it home in their bags and flog it to death, awake and asleep. Nightmares of your work routine are not uncommon.

There are a few accepted ways to remain human—one is theft. But so many women have working class inhibitions about breaking the law, and are tyrannized into looking guilty as they pass through the daily security check at Revlon, that they can't take the first step. But they admire those who do.

The other form is small-scale sabotage. This is good fun. Putting a few extra pills in the box, or ½ lb. more abalone to be sent to Red China, or 13 suppositories instead of 12 or rejecting all the good pills, or busting a machine. . . it makes work worthwhile, but few women can do it.

## Relations with the Management

At the abalone factory, small enough for women to know who was in control, there was real hatred, and only fear and confusion and economic servility held it back. But at Revlon and the Pharmaceutical factory, the labour relations with the management were far too distanced. Women were so alienated from the top, and their relations with power reached them way down the line, at the floor lady stage, that any kind of identification between their mindless condition and the overall controller or even a hierarchy was impossible for most to make. I even heard women say that they owed the factory owner gratitude for employing them.

## The sense of Unionism — and Migrants

I worked in a few factories before I attempted in any systematic way to do a bit of stirring. Of course, I had criticized conditions, management, wages, in a general way just as a few others did -- but never with a view to mobilizing opinion or testing the strength of dissatisfaction. This was not the way to be accepted by the female factory coterie. And that was always the first step for me. There is always plenty of time to talk to people in factories. Either you talk trivia, which is never hard when you're tired, or you win enough of their confidence to be allowed to ask questions about the lives of some of your fellow workers. As a history student, I always felt a special interest in the East European women. In fact, I concentrated more on finding out what had happened to them twenty-five years ago, than really trying to integrate this into their present living patterns. I often feel now that I must have tested the patience and friendship of some of these women, probing with self-important disregard for what I now see must have been sheer hell for them to live through. The Latvian woman in the abalone factory who told me about the night she was coming home from a dance in a bus, when she was 16, and saw truck-loads of Latvians being carted off to Russia as part of the Soviet take-over--then of her mother sending her off to Germany to live during the war, then Paris after the war, the disappearance of her family without trace. . .for me this was like a film—for her something not to be freely exhibited. I know I was often told what I wanted to hear. But about Russia there was never a chance of misunderstanding. In fact, the anti-soviet theme on which all the East European women seemed to agree and share with their Australian fellows, is an important aspect of the level of political awareness in female factories. I believe now that many women who dwelt upon the bad comparison of soviet and german prison camps for my benefit,

did so because they saw in me the typical student infatuation with the Russian Revolution. They shared with one another, with me, and with the other Australian women the experience of a war involving so many political overtones and subtleties that there could be no real contact between my life and ideas and theirs. Their judgement of "communism" and even of trade union activity, was in terms of depression and war, refugees, displacement, starvation, labour camps, national hatred. In that they had survived, and emigrated, they also repudiated political commitment to any of the ideals hopelessly swamped under the 2nd World War.

Trade Unionism in Australia, in general, and the problem of the conditions under which they are employed, in particular, are non-issues for them. In the experiences they share with working class Australian women, they reinforce an anti-communist and often anti-Labour attitude, and in their own presence form an anti-complaint bloc in the factory, which cuts across any embryonic feelings of solidarity or a common lot. In Europe, many of these women before the war, were reasonably well-to-do middle class, well-educated, and certainly never worked in factories. I rarely sensed any feeling of resentment towards their economic position here, but certainly they worked hard for the education and cultural improvement of their children. They say--No matter how bad things are here, they could never be as bad as their former deprivations. They won't be deprived again, or risk now what they've earned. (A variety of our own depression mentality.) Further, after the pain of family dissolution in the war, they have become strong bulwarks of the family structure here and no doubt influence Australian women.

Last year in the Pharmaceutical factory, I decided to talk theoretically to women about the possibilities of workers control. What a flop. I reached the point where I couldn't see the possibilities myself. The whole function of production involved in the factory (American owned and controlled) was too complex and specialized for such an answer. You had to ask, rather, whether it should exist at all. Any anyway, ideas like workers control go too far beyond the conscious reasons why these women work. The last thing they seemed to want was any involvement in or responsibility for their output. That's easy to understand when you pack suppositories.

I'll never forget the day the Union man visited our factory--the only time I ever saw one. It was pure farce, and made painfully obvious the failure of the trade unions to relate in any way to women. For about three minutes the old man from the union skipped up and down the conveyor lines, singing joyfully, "Everything's fine, isn't it girls?" He then disappeared, leaving us with mounds open, into the glories of coffee and bickies with the boss for an hour. On his way out he was cornered by our table crew who had a complaint to make. Their complaint--: Union fees had gone up again!

I decided on a new approach after this. We began to talk about our factory, the management, the kinds of pressure they put on the women, their method of splitting up feelings of solidarity by creating small scale floor ladies with \$1 a week more, for which they had to ride on the backs of their fellow workers. Our section of the factory was controlled from a distance by a woman who at one time had worked as a chemist, but now seemed to do virtually nothing except push work ahead as quickly as possible, and discipline the women by standing next to them, staring without speaking. Talking in this factory was a problem, though it had no effects upon standards. Because I talked quite a lot, I was soon spotted and moved around. This was perfect, because I came into contact with many more people. The woman in charge seemed to rely quite successfully upon her presence from time to time at each table, to stop people talking. As she appeared, someone would whisper "Shh--here she comes" --and all heads would be lowered in silence. I couldn't stand it. I began a campaign of announcing her arrival with "Here comes the old hovercraft again", and staring at her, while continuing the conversation. Soon everyone else turned and looked her in the eye whenever she appeared. This unsettled her. The women began to look upon her no longer as some symbolic threat to them, but as the pompous unproductive ass she was. Her visits soon stopped and she busied herself elsewhere, though not before taking care to dismiss me.

### Fear

Fear -- the unspoken, unchallenged, unreal, mystical tension and threat which forms the psychological basis of power relationships in women's factories--this must be shattered collectively before any other form of resistance can be contemplated. Many women workers who suffer nervous breakdowns can point to their susceptibility to factory tensions as an aggravating cause, particularly older women who go to work in factories only after their children have grown. The new environment, the wish to be accepted, to do their jobs well, to please their overseers and fellow workers at the same time, added to the new sensation of having to react for 8½ hours a day to bells -- all combine to unsettle the older thinking habits.

A woman well-known to me outside the job has worked as a machinist for 40 years, since she was 14. Five years ago she had a nervous breakdown. She hasn't ever recovered properly. It took the form of thinking someone from her factory was coming to shoot her in the back. She had moved around from place to place many times because she was the kind of hard worker (god knows why, except because she felt tested by the job) who irritated other women. Now, when she could leave and should, since she's 54, she can't face being at home either. That's the kind of vice working class women have managed to be sandwiched

between - no escape they can visualize -- with every economic, social, political, cultural, personal influence in their life combining to defeat their minds working together for a way out.

Try to see what we, at this point in the development of our Women's Movement, might face if we tried to go to these people-- the sheer negativism of the factory. There's practically no will to resist, because there's no real understanding of what's happening within the factory, or the factory's relation to the capitalist system. The slave mentality of most working class women is no better instanced than through the arse-licking Uncle Tomism of female factories.

Something has to be done, and there are ways, but they don't just involve fly by night literature raids or one discussion. They really involve being there and being subjected to the environment, to build up your sisters' confidence in you, because you're treading the razor's edge with lives built on nothing, but needing it to survive. Its the old problem of women being told their problems are ones of personal maladjustment, not social or political - and of them believing and trying to adjust to the treadmill--and that's only half their life-death. Then they go home to the other side.

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