

improving communications within their enterprise, even if this is greeted with less than enthusiasm by union officials. Too many employers only feel the need to communicate with their workers when they go on strike — which is a bit late.

Other significant barriers to better industrial relations include multiplicity of unions, their mostly craft nature, the existence of two-tier wage and conditions agreements and the loose cohesion of employers. These and other obstacles make for frustration, if not desperation, but they will not be changed overnight.

Our economy today is at a crisis point — it could be a turning point, or it could be the end of the road. Who knows? In the meantime let us avoid changes in the workplace which go too far in any one direction. If we are to retain any freedom of choice we must make haste slowly, remembering that a plural society is in the interests of us all. ©

VIEWPOINT

(3) WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE

* RUTH BUTTERWORTH

In this paper I set out to answer three questions:

1. Where are women, in the main, located in the workforce?
2. What are the salient characteristics of this segment of the workforce?
3. What special problems face the trade union movement in dealing with the situation of women workers?

1. Where?

A simple list of the industries where women wage workers are to be found and their occupations is sufficient in itself to define some basic problems:

- Clerical occupations.
- Retail trade.
- Garment manufacture.
- Light assembly and packaging.
- Food manufacture and processing.
- Hotel and catering trades.
- Fruit and vegetable picking.
- Hospitals and Rest Homes.

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Office cleaning and "other domestic" work.

2. What are the characteristics of (i) this work and (ii) women's involvement in it?

To answer (i) is literally to box the compass of all the most recalcitrant problems in the union official's little black book. I will simply recite the familiar litany: the work places are widely dispersed; the work is in small units of employment in many instances. It is subject to cyclical and seasonal fluctuations; it is generally low-skill to unskilled; it is to be found in the lowest paid sectors of what is, in any case, a low wage economy.

The sectors of industry involved are often vulnerable to foreign entry (assembly work) and competition (garment manufacture, textiles). The small-unit enterprises are under-capitalised, have perennial cash-flow problems which are nowadays acute. They are under-inspected, even unregistered and have managers or owner-managers who are, to put it delicately not "socialised," i.e. the employers' sector is under-organised, ineffective in bargaining and negotiation. In particular, the owner-operator who employs in single figures, is frequently ignorant, whether wilfully or not, of his obligations and all too often tyrannical and inconsistent in his behaviour towards women employees.

As to the characteristic employment pattern of women in this environment, again, theirs is a familiar litany of woes. I would define for particular attention three groups. First up we have what I will call "the young itinerant," who may or may not have some job skills, but who will shift jobs when conditions are unsatisfactory to her, when friends move, or when she is pushed out on reaching the adult wage rate age.

Secondly, there is "the family woman," i.e. a woman with young children, whether she is acting in a solo or a dual-parent relationship. She has a desperate need for a wage; she is limited in the hours she can work, in the extent of travelling to work she can undertake, and by the hazards of family illness and other domestic crises of which not the least is the school holidays.

Thirdly, and sharing all the problems of the first two groups with some of her own in addition, there is the Polynesian woman. Almost certainly the female Polynesian worker is not here in her own right, but as the spouse or daughter of the holder (or non-holder, as the case may be, of a work

permit. Her command of English will be low; her job may well have been passed on to her; she has negligible contact with any formal agency.

It is the family woman and the Polynesian woman who make up that unregistered and most exploited of all labour — the outworkers.

What all this adds up to is that women workers are vulnerable to the grossest exploitation — in particular as outworkers and domestics; they have the least capacity to respond; they are the least likely to be in contact with trade unions; and, where their union has become involved, they are too often unwilling to have their cases pursued.

3. What special problems face the trade unions in dealing with the situation of women workers?

Historically there has developed a tension between the male-dominated trade union, on the one hand, and women workers, on the other. There are reasons on both sides. The low-paid, part-time or basic-hours-only woman, who does not necessarily work throughout the year, can easily be used for dilution purposes. The young itinerant feeds the weakness of unions *vis-à-vis* the small unit of employment because she moves around a variety of unsatisfactory, non-complying jobs which are then difficult to "get at," or are never reported at all.

The family woman group presence weakens plant bargaining on benefits and margins. In recent years, the increased numbers of Polynesian women have provided unions with additional difficulties in continuity of contact, in the discovery of jobs and communication in general. Again, this is most particularly true of all the varieties of domestic/cleaning work.

It may be argued that during the post-war period and until recently the proportion of women in the workforce has militated against their problems having much attention. Certainly the figures seem to indicate this. It is more probable, in my view, that because much women's work was ignored by the unions and (therefore) not covered in legislation or regulation, large numbers of women who worked were not reported in the labour statistics. It follows that in the working lifetime of most of the women in the labour market today, the unions have been conspicuous by their absence and inaction.

We are all, of course, familiar with the argument that women as well as men benefit from the negotiation of national awards. Even after the implementation of equal pay, a glance at the male-female differential and, even more, the European : Maori female differential, however, is enough to show that this argument simply will not wash. The lower paid are not dragged up by concentration on pushing up rates by plant bargaining, nor by the device of increasing total take-home pay by way of overtime and shift allowances.

That fatal choice, made by the unions, as well as forced upon them by the circumstances of the state-evolved system, has produced a low wage economy with, as its concomitant, low management skills and rewards.

Such is the experience of many women in this workforce that one is tempted to turn round the heading of this section and ask "what problems face women in dealing with the unions?"

There are, as I have indicated, vast difficulties facing unions which have to deal with people in small and dispersed units. Moreover, there are, in the whole structure and system of industrial relations in this country aspects which are calculated to inhibit the establishment of sound unions with the capacity and will to assist the underpaid, exploited, "imposed upon" sectors of the workforce. Whatever the historical reasons and whatever the pros and cons, a system of general wage orders, national awards and post-entry closed shop procedures, added to small unions which are often geographically as well as functionally divided, is the worst possible environment for the assistance of those who work in small units on an irregular basis. The poverty-stricken condition of the labour movement — which, again, has its roots in government regulation — doesn't help either; particularly when such protective legislation as has been wrested from successive governments places emphasis and onus largely upon the individual and provides no legal status for the unions.

Having said that, however, it remains the case that the plight and the complaints of women workers have too often been ignored by male-dominated unions whose effective contact with their members is limited to an entry on their wage slip which is the employer's deduction of union subs made on behalf of the union, handed over to the

union with a list of names, given to a union representative who walks straight past his members into the manager's office.

What then is to be done? What are the characteristics of this segment of the workforce which need to be taken into consideration when discussing forms of organisation?

Under the head of "conditions," the most important group at present seems to me to be the family woman. Her financial needs are the most desperate, she is the most vulnerable because of the limitations on her hours of work and daily and job mobility. In the longer term, however, if the unions are to be able to assist women workers, then they must introduce themselves now to the young itinerant.

It has been said often enough recently that there is a widespread ignorance in the schools about work, labour history and the function of trade unions. Some effort in some places by some people is being made to redress the balance. I doubt, however, that this effort can do very much to help. Without a thoroughgoing reform of the education system, the counter-pressures are too great. Moreover, anyone with teenage kids will be all too familiar with that mulish, switched-off look which greets information that "is good for you."

What would help, however, is to identify what I would call "the points of sale" and what kind of people are involved with the young worker at these points. They are, it seems to me, Careers teachers, supervisors, the various formal and informal job agencies/agents and further education staffs.

Cast the net a little wider, to include Polynesian women, and the informal job agency network includes church and community leaders. It is these people who should — and do not — know about awards, regulations, rights and redress. They cannot, however, do the unions' job for them. And indeed, many of them are as confused as I am to learn, after being approached on a problem, having provided the address and telephone number of the appropriate union, that the complainant has received no overt assistance.

I readily concede that action may have been taken. But if the woman herself has not been approached, then the union's action is somewhat wasted and it is the absence of personal contact which will live and grow in the mythology.

I referred earlier to the difficulty of contact, particularly with the young itinerant. Today's economic conditions mean that women are being dismissed, laid-off or simply not being re-employed and this may not be a favourable time for positive action. On the other hand, it is equally the case that for the first time in a decade women who are in are staying put and they are in many instances so desperate for money that they are seeking information on their award, their rights and their available redress.

There can be no excuse for the lack of availability to large numbers of workers of this information, either through the Labour Department, some of whose staff appear to believe that copies of awards are to be issued only to employers; or, as ought to be the case, in simplified form appropriate to different categories of member from the unions. After all, and this is a frequent question on the lips of women workers, what do they spend my subs on?

It is a question which unions should take seriously. They are dealing with the nation's purse-holders and budgetmakers. And if it is good enough to take advertising space to put the case in a dispute — and that cannot be done too often — then it is also time to consider taking a leaf out of the companies' books and issuing (by advertisement) an annual report and balance sheet.

In an ideal world, I would suggest that much of what I have said points to the need for a deal more leg-work and, therefore, for additional union staff. Even in this less than ideal world of soaring costs and tight budgets, I would still suggest it. But there are other ways, also, of getting some of the leg-work, some of the investigation of conditions and some of the socialisation of women workers done.

Given that there are at present so many women unemployed, and given that there are about to be whole cohorts of unemployed young people, including graduates with a great deal of relevant job experience, now seems to be the best time to undertake union-based research — as opposed to that of the Society for Research on Women which has merely scratched a surface most of which reflects the middle class bias of its membership.

By and large, I would suggest, women can best be socialised by other women. So many of the problems of women in the workforce are not susceptible to traditional.

broad spectrum union activity and, whilst this is not the core of the average union official's work, it is how it is perceived by women. Their interrupted pattern of wage work, the fact that they do the shopping at lunch time and dash home at knocking off time means that they are immune to the influences which bear upon the socialisation of men in the work place. This means that the unions must not only identify the work place and acquire "agents" to act within and upon its women occupants; it means that they must sally forth into the marketplace. Which means, I would suggest

finally, what I would term "shop-front" action: a "presence" in Citizen's Advice Bureaux, in vacant shops (and there are likely to be a lot of those in the next few months) in neighbourhood law offices and in public libraries. Women will become involved in the labour movement if they are given a role within it and can see their sisters prominent in its activities. The route to this is an emphasis upon caring roles, which should not be too difficult for unions to produce, given that it is, public opinion and the Prime Minister to the contrary, their reason for existence. ☉

Impasse Procedures: THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

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INTRODUCTION

Recent American industrial relations have been characterized by experimentation with alternatives to the strike. Much of this experimentation is the result of public sector workers gaining access to collective bargaining while continuing to be denied access to the strike. In the United States, as in many countries, governments have taken the view that their employees should not strike. Considerations of public service, sovereignty and representative democracy, essentiality of government services and of the lack of some private sector restraints underlie this view.¹

The emergence of public sector unions and collective bargaining presented a dilemma. Either these unions would be relatively powerless or they would break the law. Procedures to promote genuine bargaining or, in the event of an impasse, to provide an acceptable settlement were seen as the way out of the dilemma. An examination of some of these procedures is the subject of this paper. Such an exam-

ination is particularly relevant to a country like New Zealand where most strikes in both private and public sectors are illegal.

MEDIATION

Sometimes an attempt is made to distinguish between conciliation and mediation. Conciliation is seen as the passive role of facilitating the procedure of bargaining and of attempting to keep the parties

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¹—An examination of these procedures lies outside the scope of this paper. For discussion of some of them see, for example, Jack Stieber, "A New Approach to Strikes in Public Employment," in Carl H. Madden (ed.), *Strikes and the Public* (Chamber of Commerce of the United States, Washington, D.C., 1970) pp. 20-28.