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# WOMEN WHO WORK

by  
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## PUBLISHERS' NOTE



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## WOMEN WHO WORK

BY GRACE HUTCHINS

An expectant mother lives in Hovertown, on the edge of the industrial section of Los Angeles, with no shelter except a piece of canvas stretched over the bed. She and her husband have been out of work for months. For food they eat the decaying vegetables given away by the wholesale markets as unfit for sale.—(Letter from a Los Angeles worker.)

Outside Philadelphia, on the city garbage dumps, live over 300 women, children and men. Every day they look through the garbage to get something to eat. They live in packing boxes to keep themselves warm.—(Letter from a World War Veteran, *Philadelphia Record*, Feb. 6, 1932.)

HUNDREDS of homeless unemployed women have spent night after night in the parks of Chicago, according to Mrs. Elizabeth A. Conkey, commissioner of public welfare. Many of these women have young children with them, but the majority are single women, penniless because they have had no jobs for months. The commissioner went on to reveal that recruiters for vice dens were soliciting the women in the parks—taking advantage of their hunger and persuading them to sell themselves for a meal.

A breadline for jobless women and their children is maintained in New York, richest city in the world. Women workers who have been unemployed for months walk several miles across town from the lower East side, in order to get the stew or the frankfurters and sauerkraut dished up by the Salvation Army at its Emergency Food Station for Women and Children. The station boasts of serving 1,300 meals a day, three shifts in the morning and three in the afternoon, while the women stand in line and wait for a 10-cent plate of food.

These examples of destitution among jobless women workers in the United States during the crisis years, 1929-32, give only one

side of the picture. For while millions are starving for want of a job, other millions in textile mills, canning plants and cotton fields are toiling from 11 to 12 hours at a stretch, at wages far too low to assure a decent living.

Such is the chaos of production under capitalism that thousands starve while more goods are produced than can be sold. Wheat rots in warehouses, while jobless workers ask for bread. "Surplus" coffee is destroyed in Brazil, while workers in the United States have not the necessary nickel to buy a cupful. So much cotton is produced that capitalists suggest ploughing under every third row to get rid of the "surplus" crop, while miners' children cannot go to school for lack of clothes. Workers who have created all the wealth have no money to buy back what they have made.

### *Capitalism Keeps Women Subordinate*

Capitalism aims to keep women subordinate. Especially is this true of women's labor power so widely used by the employing class to beat down the price of men's labor power. The process started with the introduction of machinery in England toward the end of the 18th century, when women and children were herded in to spin and doff in the textile mills. Now with the decline of capitalism, the employers use the same weapons to reduce the cost of labor and reap greater profits for themselves. The man on the semi-skilled job—and most jobs are semi-skilled today—is threatened with a wage cut. He knows that the boss can put a woman on the job at lower pay, to do his work. Just as Negro workers are played off against white workers in the employers' wage-cutting drive; just as foreign-born workers are played off against native-born; so women workers are played off against men. And the increasing army of women workers, forced to take work at any price in order to feed themselves and their children, is a factor to be reckoned with in reducing wage standards.

This is because women workers for the most part have not been organized to resist bidding down wages. Neglected by the American Federation of Labor officials during the half century of exclusive craft unionism, the woman worker has been left to shift

for herself, and has been forced into a position of inferiority based on the economic fact of cheaper labor power. This "inferior" position is to the interest of the employing class, which knows how to use the schools, the churches, the family, the movies, and the radio to keep women in this subordinate position. For the time being the employing class has succeeded in keeping the working class divided on this issue. Many men workers who should know that their strength lies only in the solidarity of the entire working class have been affected by the propaganda. As a result, the labor movement has been weakest on the very front where it should be especially strong, among the great masses of semi-skilled and unskilled women workers.

Yet when once aroused, women of the working class prove themselves among the best and most determined fighters in the workers' struggles. From that day in 1828, over a hundred years ago, when girls in the cotton mills of Dover, N. H., walked out on strike against a new system of fines, down to the days of 1932 when miners' wives walked with their men in the Kentucky strike, women have taken an active, vigorous part in countless strikes and demonstrations. Beaten into unconsciousness by police in Washington, D. C., in New York City, in Detroit, Chicago, Los Angeles and in other centers of American capitalism, women workers have yet gone back again with unbreakable spirit into the next Hunger March or the next picket line. Wage cuts have been withdrawn; evictions have been stopped; the price of bread has been reduced, and unemployment relief has been increased as a direct result of such militancy. Therefore, both for gaining immediate victories and for future help in the common struggle, it is of supreme importance to the workers' movement that all women workers should be aroused to resist wage cuts and to fight steadily and vigorously for the improvement of working and living conditions.

### *Numbers Increase*

A great increase in the use of young girls and women in industry is one of the marked tendencies of 20th century capitalism. Already in the United States, women workers form 22% or nearly

one quarter of the "gainfully occupied" over 10 years old. Two out of every nine persons on paid jobs in the United States are women. And two out of every nine women in the population now work for a living. In certain other capitalist countries—Germany, France, Great Britain—from 30% to 40% of all workers are women.

In the half century since 1880 this army of women workers in the United States has multiplied fourfold and in the 30 years since 1900 it has more than doubled. During the ten years from 1920 to 1930 the number of women on paid jobs grew from 8,500,000 to 10,750,000, or nearly eleven million. This means an increase of 26%, whereas the number of men increased by only 15% and the general population increased by 16%. From these figures it is apparent that women workers are to a certain extent displacing men. The chief reason for this tendency is the fact that under capitalism women's labor power sells at a lower price than men's.

Wage earners and professional workers make up the main divisions in this great army of women who work for a living. We may count out about 100,000 "gainfully occupied" women who are in managerial positions and therefore closely tied to the capitalist class. The great body of teachers, trained nurses and many others in "professional service" really rank as wage workers in capitalist society. In professional service, women now number about 1,500,000.

By far the largest number of women, 3,180,000 are employed in "domestic and personal service," showing an increase of a million above the 1920 figure, but these include workers in hotels, restaurants and laundries. Farm women on paid jobs—as distinct from farm house-wives who toil without any wages at all—number 909,000, a considerable *decrease* as compared with 1920, as farm families have been driven to seek jobs in the cities and have become part of the city proletariat. Women in stores and other kinds of trade add nearly a million workers, reaching a total of 960,000, while women clerical workers number 1,986,000.

Nearly two million—1,886,000—are in factories and are thus

engaged in direct production, in the war industries and in other basic industries.

A majority of the 23,000,000 housewives, listed in the 1930 census as not "gainfully occupied," are the wives of workers and thus belong to the working class. They are the mothers of working class children. Their days are filled with a great burden of work for which they receive no wages at all. In organizing the women of the working class these women must of course be included in the union auxiliaries, in mass organizations and in special women's councils.

### *Negro Women Who Work*

With about two million Negro women "gainfully occupied" in the United States, their position in industry is of particular importance to the entire working class. They are especially oppressed. They are exploited by the capitalist class more than any other group of workers. They do the dirtiest jobs at the lowest pay and are bargained off against white women workers in the general drive for the reduction of wages.

A greater proportion of Negro mothers must go out to work for a living, even while the children are still babies, because the husband's earnings are so small that they cannot possibly support the family. Thus in Philadelphia in a study of working mothers made by the U. S. Children's Bureau in 1928, it was found that among Negro women the necessity for working outside the home was far greater than among the whites. More than half the Negro mothers who were living with their husbands and four-fifths of the other Negro mothers were on paid jobs away from the home, while one-fifth of the white mothers went out to work.

Wages of Negro women are practically always lower than the wages of white women. In Virginia, for example, according to the state Department of Labor and Industry (1932) white women average 21 cents an hour and Negro women 16½ cents an hour in the food industries. In the textile industries of the same state white women average 27 cents an hour and Negro women 16 cents.

In special studies of women's earnings in 13 states, the U. S.

Women's Bureau found that Negro women earned from one-third to one-half less than white women. A year's earnings for Negro women allowed from \$5.06 to \$10.83 a week in manufacturing and from \$5.88 to \$10.58 a week in laundries. In four states, a majority of the Negro women earned less than \$300 a year—only \$5.77 a week. Yet these low earnings were for the years preceding the crisis; the averages in 1932 are of course lower. (Earnings of white women workers in these 13 states are summarized on page 19.)

Negro women have already proved themselves among the best fighters in the class struggle. In Chicago and Detroit, in 1931-32, during the demonstrations of unemployed workers against evictions and for immediate relief, Negro women workers were in the front ranks of the marchers. As one Negro woman, a stockyard worker from Chicago, expressed it: "I don't talk much, because when I get thinking about the oppression of my race I only want to fight. We're not only fighting for bread. We're fighting for social equality for all."

### *In War Industries*

Especially significant at present are the great numbers of women employed in industries that are of basic importance in wartime. It was proved during the last imperialist war that women could take the places of men in practically every occupation, so many that it took five and a half pages of small type in a government report just to list, in paragraphs, the jobs in which women were actually substitutes for men.

Over 180,000 women in the metal industries (including iron and steel), 50,000 in the making and repairing of automobiles, 35,000 in rubber factories, 82,000 in the making of electrical supplies, and 86,000 in the chemical industries show that women are used in the direct production of basic war materials.\* No less important in war are the food, clothing and textile industries, in which great numbers of women are employed. Rayon plants, with

\* These are preliminary figures from the 1930 census and include women of the office force employed in these industries.



women forming from 50% to 60% of the working force, can be converted overnight into the making of explosives.

With a new imperialist war already raging in the Far East and with the constant danger of war against the Soviet Union, the increasing numbers of women employed in the war industries mean that men workers can the more easily be released as cannon-fodder at the front. The ruling class counts upon using women workers in the factories, in the fields, on the railroads, in telegraph and telephone offices, and in every industry of basic importance for carrying on war.

Not only in war industries but in other war preparations women will be used by the employing class. Major General Ely of the U. S. Army, in April, 1931, made a frank statement on this point: "Women will play a greater part in future wars. Governments, including our own, have been studying the use of women in war. Woman power in many instances supplements and in other cases supplants man power in war. The utilization of women in war will grow out of a new conception of war-making, born during the last war." Already women fliers have formed the Betsy Ross Corps of women aviators with the expressed aim "to serve their country in national emergencies of peace or war."

In opposition to such war plans, working class women are coming together in unions, auxiliaries and mass organizations with the slogan, "Against imperialist war; for the defense of the Chinese people and of the Soviet Union."

### *"Old at 30"*

Great numbers of women workers are in reality young girls. Over 200,000 are little girls under 16, and over a million are 16 to 20. About one-sixth of all working women are girls under 20 years old. Four out of 10 are under 25 years old. In the munitions plants of Bridgeport, Conn., for example, it was found that more than half the girls were under 24.

Of all boys and girls under 20 in industry, about one-third are girls and two-thirds are boys. Agriculture still claims the largest number of these young workers under 20, but factories are a close second.

In capitalist economy the general tendency is to throw out the older workers and to use the fresher, younger, faster girls and boys. "Old at 30" is the amazing verdict of many masters and petty bosses who look over the crowd of women at the factory gate, reject the middle-aged women and hire the young girl. Where the man is now considered too old at 40 for a new job, the woman worker may be thrown aside at 30. This is the conclusion of the U. S. Women's Bureau in a report presented at the Social Workers' Conference in Boston, June, 1930.

"When you go looking for work, they all want kids," one woman worker of 29 commented bitterly.

A superintendent, in rejecting a woman of 38, pointed to a sign for help wanted, saying:

"It reads 'Girls Wanted', not old women."

Working women are on the whole younger than working men. The men are massed more generally in the older and the women more generally in the younger age groups, as 75% of the men are over 25, and only 58% of the women are over 25.

When we talk, then, of working "women", let us remember that about four out of ten of them are young workers under 25 and about one-sixth of them are girls under 20. Union organizers who try to use methods of organizing suitable only for middle-aged and older workers will find these methods largely unsuccessful with nearly half of the women in industry. These women are young and require different methods of unionization, adapted to younger workers.

What becomes of the older women thrown out on the industrial scrap heap, the capitalists do not care. There is no national law in the United States for old age pensions, and the so-called "pension" laws in 17 states take care of no one under 70. They are entirely inadequate, full of exceptions and loopholes. Lack of insurance against old age means that the worker is haunted always by the fear of growing old, while the speed-up on the job makes a woman old before she is yet middle-aged. (See *Social Insurance*, by Grace M. Burnham, International Pamphlets, No. 11.) The demand for a comprehensive system of social insurance must include an immediate demand for old age pensions.

## *Married Women Need Jobs*

In spite of the youth of so many working women, the numbers of married women in industry have greatly increased in recent years. In 40 years since 1890 the numbers of married women in industry have grown from only 515,000 to over 3,000,000. Forty years ago only one married woman in 20 was working on a paid job. Today at least one married woman in every nine works for a living.

Not only the general census for the whole country, but special studies of districts and groups show that the numbers of married women workers are increasing. In Philadelphia one-fifth of 12,000 mothers went out to work in 1928 as compared with one-seventh at the close of the war. This significant fact was revealed in a survey made by the U. S. Children's Bureau of mothers with children under 16 years old in 11 districts of the city. (U. S. Children's Bureau. *Children of Working Mothers in Phila.*, No. 204, 1931.)

In three southern states, over 20% of the married women are "gainfully occupied." (U. S. Census, 1930.)

The U. S. Women's Bureau in a number of studies states that working class mothers must earn what they can because the husband's wage is not enough to support the family. Countless women workers are supporting children or other dependents out of their small earnings, and the woman is often the sole support of the family. Yet as a "solution" of unemployment during the present crisis, capitalists are urging the dismissal of married women from their jobs! Women have as much of a right to work as men. But all special exploitation of women under capitalism must be abolished.

According to a survey of 1,500 cities made by the National Education Association in 1930-31, about 77% of the cities do not employ married women as new teachers and in more than half the cities, a woman teacher is dismissed as soon as she marries. Not only teachers but married women in civil service positions and in other kinds of work are losing their jobs in order, supposedly, to make way for the married men. The New England Telephone

and Telegraph Co. discharged married women workers in January, 1931. The Northern Pacific Railway fired from 300 to 400 married women in December, 1931, and the Norfolk and Western Railway Co. dismissed all married women workers on October 1, 1931.

Taking a job away from a woman who needs it and giving it to another worker, either man or woman, is typical of the so-called "solutions" of unemployment offered by capitalists during the crisis. Women workers are demanding the reinstatement of all married working women in their jobs, with the slogan "No discrimination against married women workers."

### *Hours of Work*

For the women workers on the job, long hours, night work and increasing speed-up destroy health and make the worker old before she is yet middle-aged. These conditions are no less bad for men workers, but the women, hypocritically referred to by capitalists as the "mothers of the race", are supposedly protected by special legislation. There is no Federal law in the United States for the protection of women who work, and the state regulations vary from an eight-hour law with a 48-hour week in some states to an unlimited working week in others. Even in the ten states, however, where there is a law limiting women's hours to eight a day, evasions of the law are so common that official government reports are forced to call attention to the violations. The laws never even pretend to cover workers in agriculture or in domestic service, while the canning industry is usually exempt from the law during the canning season.

Over half the working women studied by the U. S. Women's Bureau in recent years were working 50 or more hours a week, while over one-fifth worked 54 or more hours. In five states, Alabama, Florida, Indiana, Iowa and West Virginia, no hours law of any kind limits the hours of work for women, while in North Carolina the law allows a 55-hour week. In countless textile mills and tobacco plants, in clothing sweat-shops, in hotels and restaurants, in stores, in canning factories, in the sugar beet fields and in

the cotton fields, women are working 11 and 12 hours a day and even 72 hours a week.

Such state laws as there are have been passed only because of workers' activity in countless struggles during the past hundred years, since the beginning of the movement for the shorter working day. But employers have always found it easy to evade the laws and factory inspectors have connived with them in the violations. Now in 1932, while the crisis deepens, come reports from every state telling of increasing violations and of overtime work, while other workers walk the streets looking for jobs. A tremendous increase of illegal overtime work in New York state was admitted by Frances Perkins, state industrial commissioner, in May, 1931. Violations of the Massachusetts eight-hour law are officially reported from Fall River, from Haverhill and from Lawrence. Such overtime work is used in face of the stagger plan and the speed-up system, which have displaced thousands of working women and put others on part-time work for two or three days a week.

From Illinois, with a ten-hour law, comes the recent statement that girls in confectionery plants are working 11 hours, from 8 A.M. to 7.30 P.M. with 30 minutes for lunch and no overtime pay. In a Chicago radio plant girls are working 11 and even 12 hours a day. Employers evade the law by having the girls punch the time clock sometime after they actually start work or sometime before they quit. In some concerns the girls' time cards are punched by the boss. In other concerns inspectors are bribed to say nothing about violations.

Night work for women is legal in all but 16 states and has been especially widespread in southern textile states. In New Jersey night work was forbidden in 1923, but the law carried no penalties for violations. Passaic woolen manufacturers brought pressure on the State Attorney General to interpret the law in their interests and it has generally been regarded as dead. In southern textile mills, where the day shift is 11 hours, the night shift is usually 12 hours. Although many cotton mill companies, as a measure for curtailing production, to maintain prices, have recently cut out night work for women, there is no law on

the subject, and night work can be introduced again when the employers find it profitable to do so. Demand for the 7-hour day is one of the most important points in the immediate program of the working class. It can be gained only through the struggle of organized workers, and with this struggle for the shorter working day must go the demand for the abolition of all night work for women workers.

### *Speed-up Increases*

When a corporation shortens the working week to five days or the working day to six hours, it usually expects the workers to speed-up and do as much in the shorter week as they formerly did in the longer time. Thus, E. R. Squibb & Sons, chemical concern, employing large numbers of women workers, introduced the five-day week, and reported that it meant "added efficiency." The Kellogg Co., cereal manufacturers, after introducing the six-hour day, stated that it meant "increased daily production from the plant as an operating unit, and elimination of meal periods with their waste and the expense of a large cafeteria," with "increased profits for the company from the capital invested in plant and machinery."

Increased speeding-up of the workers is seen in all industries employing large numbers of women, especially in food factories and textile mills. The giant New York plant of the National Biscuit Co. is typical of the larger factories where the girls must keep up with the relentless speed of the moving belt and cannot even leave the machine to go to the toilet except at a stated period. In textile mills, workers have resisted the "stretch-out" system of speed-up in a number of recent militant strike struggles. (See *Labor and Textiles*, by R. W. Dunn and J. Hardy, International Publishers.)

### *Losing Health*

The strain of keeping up with a machine for 9, 10, or 11 hours a day, 50 or 60 hours a week, under capitalist exploitation, drains the life-blood of a worker, man or woman. Under the system of exploitation, the capitalist keeps the machine in good order,

since it is expensive, but he does not care how quickly the worker is used up, since he can get plenty of other workers in the line of jobless at the factory gate.

Not only the speed but the jarring of machinery is a very special hazard for women workers. The organs of reproduction are so delicately balanced that the vibration of a machine may cause serious displacements and it is especially bad for pregnant women. Continuous foot-peddalling on sewing machines in the needle trades is a form of vibration that often causes displacements of the internal organs. In the Soviet Union, women workers are especially protected from the danger of such injury.

Two occupational diseases that are especially dangerous for women workers are lead poisoning and benzol poisoning. A woman has less resistance to the action of lead and its compounds and is poisoned more rapidly than a man, in fact in about half the time, and the lead poisoning affects not only the woman herself but her children in the future. (Alice Hamilton, *Women Workers and Industrial Poisons*, U. S. Women's Bureau, No. 57.) Benzol poisoning is more dangerous for women than for men and especially harmful to young girls. The manufacture of rubber goods and of so-called "sanitary" cans are the two trades using benzol that employ the largest number of women workers. Serious hemorrhages and often death are the result for the workers who breathe benzol fumes.

In munitions plants women workers are more easily poisoned than men by the dinitrobenzene used in explosives. The disease is called "DNB" sickness. Also in making smokeless powder, sulphuric ether causes more suffering in women than in men.

Radium poisoning in recent years has killed 20 women who worked for the U. S. Radium Corp. in Newark, and 23 more are threatened with death. The twentieth victim died in 1931. They were told by the foreman to moisten the brush with their lips in painting watch dials, and death by inches over a period of years was the result. Their children are also affected by the radium poisoning.

Certain diseases such as tuberculosis and pellagra are directly traceable to the low wages paid to workers, especially to women

workers. Too little money to buy good food for a balanced diet results in undernourishment and lack of resistance to disease.

*“Every process that is injurious to the health of a woman is still more so for the expectant mother.”* (*Occupation and Health*, No. 152, 1929.) It has been proved repeatedly by medical authorities that the continuous standing or the continuous sitting at industrial work before childbirth may cause the death of the mother or the child. Freedom from worry and enough rest after confinement are essential to health. Yet no state offers maternity benefits that allow a woman to take leave of absence with pay before and after childbirth; and no state provides that a mother shall have her job again when she returns to work.

Instead of protecting mothers of the working class, federal and state laws make it illegal for women to obtain information on birth control. Only those who have money to pay for a private visit to a physician in his own office can safely secure the desired information. This means that the knowledge readily available to all women of the leisure class on the spacing of their children is not available for working mothers who need it most.

Of the 16,000 mothers who die in childbirth each year in the United States, physicians estimate that at least 10,000 could be saved with proper pre-natal care. The United States holds the record among all nations in which statistics are kept for the highest maternal mortality, and it has held this record for many years.

Workmen's compensation is supposedly paid to injured workers in all but five states. Employers, however, will fight for months in court to avoid paying the meager sums decreed as compensation to the worker for the loss of an arm or a leg.

Only 12 states include any industrial diseases in the compensation law and even in these states it is easy for the employer with a high-priced lawyer in a capitalist-controlled court to prove that the disease was not caused by the job in his plant. But for the worker, especially for the woman worker whose health is most easily affected, there is practically no protection at all under capitalism against the dangers of industrial disease. With no health insurance and no maternity benefits for mothers, the working



woman in the United States is left in constant fear that illness will take away her capacity to earn bread for herself and her children and for others dependent on her.

All workers, women and men together, should unite in determined struggle for a system of social insurance to be paid at the expense of the state and of the employers, to include insurance against all illness as well as against accidents, and to include maternity benefits for working class mothers.

### *Sex Basis of Payment*

Without the protection of any system of social insurance, women workers in the United States, richest of all nations, are entirely dependent on their earnings not only to meet the immediate expenses of food and shelter and clothing, but supposedly to provide savings against the inevitable days of illness, unemployment and old age. And not only for themselves. For at least three-fourths of the women workers, according to the U. S. Women's Bureau studies, are contributing some or all of their earnings to family support.

How impossible it is to save anything out of the wages paid to most men workers, and how far less possible out of women's wages, we workers know only too well. The employing class has promoted for years the idea that "women come cheaper" and it has become an established principle in capitalist society that a job is worth less because a woman does it.

Wages, therefore, are on a sex basis of payment. Women are paid from one-fourth to one-half less than men in most industries and even less than half in some industries. In the three states, Massachusetts, New York and Illinois, which keep official records of women's wages as distinct from men's, the pay for women runs from 75% down to less than 50% of men's pay. In the printing, bookmaking and paper goods industries, in textiles, in some of the food industries and in some of the chemical industries, New York and Illinois report women's earnings as less than half of men's.

## What Women Earn

How low women's earnings actually are may be seen in the following typical examples. General wage cutting in the past two years has brought the rates far below even the low averages of pre-crisis years.

In Massachusetts, boasting of "fair" labor conditions, the Minimum Wage Commission calls for a wage of 37 cents an hour for women workers but there is no provision for enforcement. Wages as low as five cents an hour were admitted in a report made public in April, 1932, by the state Minimum Wage Commission itself. 71% of the workers studied earned less than \$10 a week and 97% less than \$15 a week.

Wages as low as \$3 and \$4 a week for full-time work of women and girls were cited by the Massachusetts Department of Labor and Industries in May, 1931. Wages of \$5, \$6 and \$7 a week were common, this official report stated.

In Chicago, according to testimony at the Hearings before the Chicago Workers Committee on Unemployment, in January, 1932, a large food concern paid girls 23 cents an hour for night work on wrapping and packing pies, while for a 10-hour day in the assembly plant of an electrical concern, girls were able to earn only 75 cents for the whole day's work.

In Oregon, the Industrial Welfare Commission calls for a minimum hourly rate of 27½ cents an hour for women workers, but the cannery companies are fighting to reduce the rate to 25 cents an hour. (U. S. Women's Bureau, *Newsletter*, April, 1932.)

The Reynolds Tobacco Co., in North Carolina pays only 10 cents an hour to many of its women workers. This company is one of the corporations that *increased* profits during the crisis years, 1930 and 1931, and it is now estimated that \$274 invested in one share of R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Co. in 1913 has been swollen to \$4,100 in 1932, an increase of about 1,400%. Ten cents an hour for women workers; profits of 1,400% for tobacco capitalists.

In summing up the weekly earnings of women workers in 13 states, the U. S. Women's Bureau admitted that the highest

median was only \$16.36 in the state of Rhode Island, while the lowest was \$8.29 in Mississippi. (The "median" means that half the women earn more and half earn less than the stated amount, and is a kind of "average".) But these wage figures are for the years just preceding the present crisis, and the averages would be much lower in 1932. Three southern states, Alabama, South Carolina, and Mississippi, paid the lowest wages, the Bureau found, while the industries paying especially low wages were textiles and the 5- and 10-cent stores.

As for yearly earnings, the U. S. Women's Bureau found that the medians of white women's earnings ranged from \$400 to \$915 in 13 states, while in two of these—Alabama and Mississippi,—less than half the women earned as much as \$500. "A woman who receives only \$500 during the year must live on a little less than \$9.62 a week," the Bureau admitted, while reporting earnings below \$500 a year for great numbers of women in cotton goods manufacture, in hosiery and knitwear and in the cigar factories. In 5- and 10-cent stores, the year's earnings allowed from \$8.29 to \$12.83 a week.

### *Cannot Meet Living Costs*

Such wages, even those reported before the recent sweeping reductions, do not meet even the minimum cost of living for a single person, much less for a woman with dependents. The Colorado State Industrial Commission admits that a single woman needs at least \$17.20 a week, allowing only \$4 a week for rent and \$7.70 for food. For a family of five it is estimated that in 1932 at least \$40 a week is needed to provide a minimum so-called "health and decency" budget allowing nothing for savings and nothing for education.

Yet in no state of the United States do women workers average as much as \$17 a week.

The so-called minimum wage laws in ten states call for a state industrial commission to fix minimum wages for women and young workers, but as we have seen in Massachusetts the law is usually a farce. California, heralded as having the best law, sets the minimum at \$16 a week, but admits that over 13% of girls in 5- and

10-cent stores in 1930 earned less than \$16. No minimum wage law even pretends to establish for women a rate of pay equal to the rate for men.

A basic and immediate demand on which all workers, women and men together, must unite is the demand for *equal pay for men and women workers*. This principle should be included in all struggles against wage cuts, for the increase of wages, and for union rates of pay for all workers, to be established and enforced by militant unions.

### *The Double Burden*

To earn even the low wages now paid to women, as we have seen, the workers must labor nine, ten and eleven hours a day and often 12 hours at night. But that is only part of the story. The woman's work does not end when she leaves the factory at 6 o'clock in the evening, and her day's work begins long before she enters the factory gate in the morning; while Sunday, the day of "rest" is the only day she has for the week's cleaning and washing.

Working for a time in the cigar-rolling department of a large tobacco factory owned by the American Tobacco Co., the writer found that practically every one of the 200 women in the department had home responsibilities before and after the day's work, which began at 7.15 A.M. and ended at 5.45 P.M. It was winter, dark when we went into the factory in the morning and dark when we came out at night. The sun might as well never have shone for all we saw of it through the small dirty windows of the plant.

Yet many a woman worker had already done at least an hour's work, preparing the breakfast, getting the children up and ready for school or day nursery, and the beds made before she came to the factory. When she washed up, ready to leave the plant at night, the woman was planning what she would buy on the way home to cook for supper, and it would be 7 P.M. before she could have the food ready. If she had children it was late in the evening before she had finished the house-work.

Capitalism provides no free day nurseries or nursery schools, no rest periods for nursing the young babies, no factory kitchens, no

cooperative laundries, no rest houses and no vacations for the relief of working mothers who must put in not merely a 10 or 12-hour day's work but often a 16 and 17-hour day in all. Nursing mothers should have a special allowance during the nursing period of nine months following childbirth. Every nursing mother should have a half hour's leave every three hours for child feeding in nurseries which should be provided by employers at all working places. These demands should be included with the basic demand for shortening the working day.

### *Jobless and Starving*

While thousands of women are working overtime or putting in a long night shift, approximately  $2\frac{1}{2}$  million other women are estimated to be unemployed and in desperate need of work. Speed-up and the long work day are exhausting and ruinous to health; yet the workers dread far more the loss of a job and the weeks, months, even years without any wages, without any income except what charity may grudgingly bestow.

It is estimated that about one-fifth of all unemployed workers are women. In Chicago, a special unemployment census admits there are nearly 100,000 jobless women in the city and reveals that the proportion of women among the unemployed had increased from one in six in April, 1930, to one in five in January, 1932. (*Labor Bulletin*, Illinois Dept. of Labor, March, 1932.)

The Welfare Council of New York states that about one-sixth of New York's unemployed must be girls and unmarried women. How many more of the jobless women are married and have children, the Council does not try to estimate. But it warns all girls to stay away from the world's richest city if they have less than \$25 a week to live on!

Not only the present crisis of capitalism, but speed-up and rationalization over a long period of years has thrown countless women as well as men into the ranks of the jobless. For example, "12 girls formerly packed 17,000 boxes of cereal a day; a machine with five girls now turns out the same amount. In gathering pages for books 20 girls used to do by hand what six girls with the help of a machine produce today. In cigar-making a machine

with four operators takes the place of 15 hand workers. Three girls used to wrap by hand nine boxes of crackers a minute; a machine with two girls wraps 55." (U. S. Women's Bureau. *Newsletter*, Nov. 25, 1931.)

The working class is not against this introduction of improved machinery but it is against capitalist exploitation by which the owners of the machines profit while the workers suffer from wage cuts, speed-up and unemployment.

A jobless woman has one way of getting a meal which is not open to a jobless man; she can sell her body and live on the proceeds for at least a day. "Going on the street," the women call it, but as one jobless woman put it:

"Like every commodity now the body is difficult to sell and the girls say you're lucky if you get 50 cents."

Results of unemployment upon the health of girls and women are even more serious than upon the health of men. Evictions, loss of home and security come even harder on women than upon men. Pregnant women and nursing mothers especially must have good food, plenty of rest and a sense of security—impossible for most working class women under conditions of increasing unemployment. The National Organization for Public Health Nursing admits that "widespread undernourishment of children and young mothers has resulted from the last two years of financial depression and unemployment."

Charity, whether public or private, serves merely to bolster up the decaying system of capitalism. The federal government has granted no relief whatever, and local relief funds are giving out. From every section of the country come reports of bitter starvation among the unemployed.

Homes are broken up. In New York City, over 20,000 children have been taken from their mothers and placed in institutions. Every large city has its "Hovertown" or "Hooverville," the city dump renamed for the starvation president, where jobless workers are "living," feeding themselves on garbage. Capitalism offers no lodging, no protection for these evicted families who wander from place to place in search of shelter and food.

With a clear-cut demand for unemployment insurance the Un-

employed Councils have organized jobless workers, women as well as men, in a determined fight against starvation. In New York, the United Council of Working Class Women have joined with the Unemployed Councils in carrying on successful struggles against evictions and against the high price of food. By putting the furniture of an evicted worker back into the house, the organized workers have been able to stop further evictions. Strikes against the high cost of bread have brought reduction in prices.

Committees of the unemployed have gone with starving workers to secure food from relief agencies. And most significant of all, great Hunger Marches of the organized unemployed have forced local governments to grant more relief, and have voiced the demand for immediate unemployment insurance as part of a system of social insurance to be provided at the expense of the state and the employers.

### *In the Soviet Union*

In only one country in the world is there no unemployment. That country is the workers' republic, the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics, commonly called the Soviet Union. In this one country, unemployment has been abolished, production is increasing rapidly, wages are rising, the standard of living is going up, while in every capitalist country in the world there is a decline, shown in downward curves of production, decreased wages and lowered standard of living.

If there should at any time be unemployment in the Soviet Union, the workers, women as well as men, are fully covered against jobless days, weeks or months by a system of insurance which protects all workers against illness, accidents, old age or other disability. The expense of this social insurance is met by the industry, each plant paying into the State Insurance Fund a certain percentage of the payroll from its own funds.

For women the system of social insurance includes maternity benefits, two months' leave of absence before childbirth and two months afterward *with full pay*—more if the mother needs it. And every woman worker has the same right that every man worker has in the Soviet Union to free medical care. During the

nursing period the mother is given regular time for feeding her baby as well as an allowance for its support.

Only in the Soviet Union have women full equality with men. *Equal pay for equal work is a reality.* There is no difference in the wages for men and for women doing the same kind of work. There is no discrimination because of age, sex or nationality. The revolutionary significance of this principle is so great that women workers in the United States can hardly realize it; working women are so used to the sex basis of payment under capitalism that it is hard to imagine a society in which women's labor power is not bargained off against a man's in an effort to cut wage rates.

Only in this one country in the world are wages for all workers going up. While cut after cut reduces the pay of workers in every capitalist country, the Soviet Union increases wages year by year. Thus the wages of women workers have increased from 28% to 40% during the last three years, and the increase for the year, 1932, will be 11%.

But the amount in the pay envelope is only part of the story. Not only social insurance, but other benefits and privileges come to the worker as her right in the workers' republic. In capitalist United States these benefits are never provided for the workers and very few of the working class can ever afford to pay for them.

What woman wage earner in the United States can afford to take two weeks or a month's vacation each summer? In the Soviet republic, every wage earner has the right to at least two weeks' vacation with pay and to a longer vacation if her occupation is considered dangerous to her health. Thus women in the tobacco plants who are exposed to the strong fumes of the tobacco, are entitled to a month's paid vacation each year.

A day's work in the factory averages only seven hours, so that a woman who comes to work at 8 A.M. is through at 4, with an hour out for the lunch period. She is still fresh and able to take part in the activities of her union or to go with her children to one of the recreation centers.

When a woman can put her baby in a creche at the factory; when the older children get their midday meal provided at school;



when factory kitchens and cooperative restaurants provide the meals; when there is a laundry to which washing can be sent; when housework is reduced to a minimum; when these conditions exist, a woman has every incentive to take part in productive work, lead a fuller social life, free herself from dependence on another person's earnings, and live and work on absolutely equal terms with men.

Thus the policy of the workers' republic is to free women from the drudgery of individual house work and to enable them to take full part with men in the processes of social production, in education and in all forms of public and social life. This can be done with safety and health for the workers only if women are relieved from any double burden of work at home and also work in the world outside. By providing as rapidly as means will permit public dining rooms, kitchens and laundries, as well as creches and kindergartens for the children, the government has already, to a great extent, released women from the burden of work in the kitchen, "that little penitentiary." Thus, in 1932 heavy industry will spend 200,000,000 rubles for improving the living conditions of the workers, and women will benefit most of all. This sum is considerably greater than that spent for this purpose in 1931.

Over 6,000,000 women wage earners are now employed in various branches of the Soviet national economy. The recent increases in women's employment have occurred principally in those industries in which they were little represented before, for instance, in the machine building and metallurgical industries. Production plans for 1932 call for a still greater introduction of women into industry. It is expected that 1,500,000 more will step out of home drudgery into the work of social production. Village collectives are freeing women from the lonely monotony of isolated farm work, and making them able to take part in the building of industry.

In public life about 300,000 women are members of various Soviets and executive committees of the different Republics and areas. Over 500,000 women are active workers in departments, committees and organizations attached to Soviets. In the Soviet

Trade Unions, women numbered about 4,500,000 at the beginning of 1932. In the Communist Party of the U.S.S.R. there are 323,000 women members (1932) and in the Young Communist organizations 1,500,000 girls.

Women are taking the initiative in socialist competition and in the work of the shock brigades, and the proportion of women is greater than the proportion of men. In Moscow Province, for example, 64% of all women employed in industries are engaged in such activities, while the corresponding share of men is only 58%.

These Soviet women who have thrown off the slavery of capitalism and come out into the active building of socialism are the vanguard of a mighty army of other women who will follow their lead and rise to throw off the chains of the capitalist system. They are making world history, as Lenin stated, "heroically, self-sacrificingly, with initiative."

"Every cook should learn how to run the government," he said, and this aim is being realized in the Soviet Union.

### *On Strike*

The unbreakable spirit of these women building socialism in the Soviet Union is the same spirit that has brought countless women workers out on strike in the great struggles of American labor history. In the first factory strike at Paterson in 1828, (See *Labor and Silk*, by Grace Hutchins, International Publishers.) women took a leading part, as they did in most of the early textile strikes. Since a majority of cotton mill workers were women and children, it was natural that these textile strikes of a hundred years ago were led by girls. A particularly militant struggle was the one in Lowell, Mass., in 1834, against a 15% cut in wages, when about 2,000 girls walked out and marched to the Lowell Bank. One of the leaders mounted a pump and made a flaming speech against the capitalists. This stirred the workers to fight on. The strike was lost but the determined spirit of these workers has been an encouragement to thousands of other workers through a hundred years of the class struggle.

From that day down to the Lawrence strikes of 1931, women workers have been among the most fearless fighters in count-

less strikes. In the great strike of the 25,000 shirtwaist makers in New York in 1909 against the sweat shop system, women took the lead in the organization of a union in the garment industry. In the Gastonia strike and in other recent struggles of southern textile workers against the stretch-out system and wage cuts, women workers have been first on the picket line and last to give in to the power of the ruling class. Ella May Wiggins, 29-year-old singer of the strike songs that stirred the workers of the Loray mill at Gastonia in their great strike against the Manville-Jenckes Co., was brutally murdered, September 14, 1929, by an armed mob of company officials. She was on her way to a strike meeting in a truck with other strikers when she was shot dead by the mob. She left five little children.

In the work of organizing southern textile workers that has followed the strikes of 1929, other women have experienced the "southern chivalry" of mill officials toward women workers. Clara Holden, organizer of the National Textile Workers Union, was kidnapped by five men in Greenville, S. C., on the night of September 1, 1931, blindfolded and gagged, carried by automobile to a lonely spot in the country, and brutally flogged. Ann Burlak, also of the National Textile Workers Union, was one of six workers to be arrested in Atlanta, Ga., in 1930, for the "crime" of organizing a meeting of Negro and white workers together.

So also in the North, the employing class fights the organization of workers in any militant union. Ella Reeve ("Mother") Bloor has met the hostility of employers for 20 years in her work of organizing the miners and now the farmers of the Northwest. Edith Berkman, spirited young organizer of the textile union, was twice arrested during the Lawrence strikes of 1931 and is still held for deportation to Poland. The U. S. Department of Labor thus cooperates actively with the textile employers in their efforts to get rid of one who is militant in organizing the women workers of Lawrence to resist exploitation.

During the recent coal strikes against starvation in Pennsylvania, Ohio and Kentucky, (1931-32), miners' wives marched with their men on the picket lines and were organized in women's auxiliaries of the National Miners Union. Two women, Anna

and Stella Rasefske, were among the workers arrested for picketing and are serving sentences of a year and a half and two years for their activity in the strike. Six women, representatives of the Workers International Relief and of the International Labor Defense, were among those arrested in the Kentucky strike, in January, 1932, charged with criminal syndicalism and held in jail for four months. These women in the mine strikes are carrying on the militant tradition of Mother Jones, who worked for 50 years as an organizer of mine workers, and of Fannie Sellins, killed by steel trust gunmen at the Allegheny Coal and Coke Co. mine, West Natrona, Pa., on August 26, 1919, during the great steel strike.

Women farm workers in the Colorado beet fields, among them many Mexican women, fought heroically against starvation and against the terror of the operators during the beet workers' strike in the spring and early summer of 1932. In New York City and other centers during the crisis years, 1929-32, women workers have stood out against arrests, police clubbings, and tear gas bombs, in rent strikes for the reduction of rents and in bread strikes against the high cost of bread. Over 200 women were arrested in one bread strike, but in the end they were successful in reducing the price of bread. So in the Hunger Marches and in demonstrations of the unemployed, women have likewise taken an active part. In Detroit, in Los Angeles, in Pittsburgh and in a dozen other centers, night sticks, tear gas bombs and jail sentences met the demonstrations of jobless women asking for unemployment insurance and immediate relief.

These instances are typical of the violence used against the women of the working class by the rulers of the United States, who employ spies, police, gunmen, thugs and gangsters in their efforts to crush the workers' organizations. But not even the brutality of the employers can stop the onward march of the workers.

#### *A. F. of L. on Employers' Side*

On the employers' side in this class conflict stands the American Federation of Labor with its affiliated organization, the National Women's Trade Union League.

Hob-nobbing with governors' wives on their beautiful estates, officials of the Women's Trade Union League in annual conferences talk about "the poor working girls". The organization, supported by the Socialist Party, officially opposes strikes and usually confines its activity to "cultural and educational" classes for the girls, much like the classes conducted by the Young Women's Christian Association and with the same objective—to lead the working women away from the path of struggle. A number of benevolent ladies of the leisure class contribute their time and money to the Women's Trade Union League, confident that it will "uplift" the working girl by providing her with "culture," but will do nothing whatever to improve working conditions.

With this policy of class collaboration it is not surprising that the National Women's Trade Union League and the American Federation of Labor behind it have never organized more than 3½% of the women workers in the United States, and those mostly in the clothing industry. In its brightest days, (1920) the A. F. of L. boasted of 300,000 organized out of 8½ million women workers. But although "women membership is difficult to measure . . . such figures as there are indicate that most of the gains of the war have been lost and that there is substantial organization among women only in the clothing industry and among the railway clerks." (Leo Wolman, Chapt. on "Labor" in *Recent Economic Changes*, 1929.) Since 1929, losses have been even heavier than those admitted three years ago.

Most of the A. F. of L. unions carry special clauses discriminating against women members who are practically never accepted on an equal basis with men workers. Almost never are women workers included on the leading committees of A. F. of L. unions.

Likewise on the employers' side in the class struggle are the various women's organizations such as the Young Women's Christian Association, the Young Women's Hebrew Association, girls' clubs, pacifist societies, the League of Women Voters and the National Woman's party, all of which aim to bring the working women under bourgeois influence. The working women deluded by these organizations as well as by the Socialist Party, find

themselves cut off from the militant struggle of the workers' own movement and are expected to support the policies of capitalism.

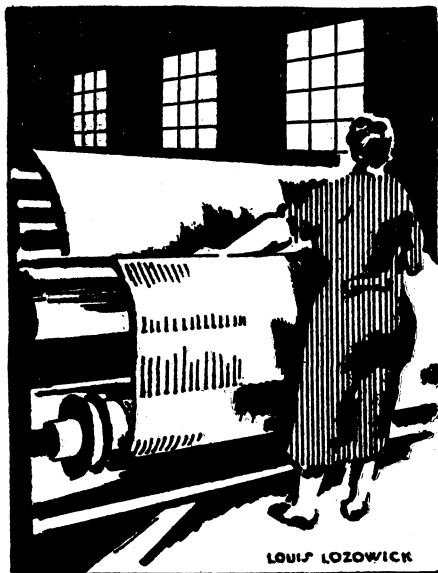
### *Organizing for Struggle*

In marked contrast to this method of "organizing" women workers are the methods of the Trade Union Unity League and its affiliated revolutionary unions. Women are on an absolutely equal basis with men in these industrial unions. Women workers are always included on the leading committees of the Left Wing union in a woman-employing industry, while in every strike conducted by the industrial unions women workers are on the central strike committee. Particular grievances of working women receive special consideration in these unions.

A grievance committee in a local shop or mill is the first step toward organizing under the Trade Union Unity League. One woman worker may start such a committee by inviting a few trusted workers to her home to talk over the special grievances in the department or plant. With immediate demands for the bettering of conditions on the job, the committee may then go to the boss and report back to the other workers the result of their action. As the grievance committee grows in numbers and strength, it becomes a shop local of the union in that industry and is affiliated with the Trade Union Unity League. Women have often taken the lead in organizing the grievance committee and the shop local. When women workers are thus brought forward and encouraged to take positions of leadership, they respond readily and prove themselves able and willing to take heavy responsibility in organization work.

In the Communist Party also women workers are expected to take responsibility on an equality with men and to prepare themselves for a full share in the work of the Party. *The Working Woman*, a monthly paper published by the Central Committee of the Communist Party, voices the demands of women workers and describes their struggles in the shops and mills. In all election campaigns, the Communist Party has brought forward women as candidates for positions in the national, state and local governments.

The Communist Party is the only Party that makes the demand for unemployment insurance and social insurance, at the expense of the state and the employers, the main issue in its campaigns. Organizing to fight for this basic demand and for the other demands put forward by the militant working class movement, working women in the United States, Negro and white, find themselves united with millions of other women workers all over the world in a vast, forward-moving army that fights against capitalism for the final freedom of the working class.



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