

Women's Work:

Women's Health

Want to learn more about the important questions raised in this issue of Union Woman?

Organized Working Women and the Humber College Centre for Labor Studies, in cooperation with the OFL, are sponsoring a

Conference on Women's Work: Women's Health
Date: December 1-3
Place: 252 Bloor St. W. (at St. George Subway)

Registration forms available from OWW, 15 Gervais Drive, Suite 301, Don Mills.

Day Care available.

Three women on executive of the Union of Injured Workers tell of difficulties

By BONNIE ALTER

Santina was lifting up a bolster of material at the factory where she worked when suddenly she couldn't stand up. Nancy sprained her ankle on the job and could no longer stay on her feet for the long hours her work demanded. Liberata picked up a pail of glue at her factory job and heard her back go out. Three of the women on the executive of the Union of Injured Workers: their stories are representative of the more than 4,000 women members across Ontario.

Their injuries are common to women factory workers: slipped discs, bad backs, leg and spinal problems and hands rendered useless by piecework. Unfortunately their experiences with the Workmen's Compensation Board, job-hunting and loss of personal and family morale are also too common.

When she was injured, Santina was afraid to go to the hospital because her children would be left alone. She took a few weeks off to recuperate and was finally let go from work. Her money from the Workmen's Compensation Board was stopped after 7 months; she then

received a small monthly pension. Board counsellors dropped-in unannounced 2 and 3 times a week to check up on her and accuse her of not looking hard enough for work. Each person on compensation must send in lists of names and address of factories where they have applied: lists often signed with "no vacancy". "Have you ever been on Workmen's Compensation?" is the crucial question. Once an applicant admits that she has, suddenly available jobs disappear.

Nancy was sent to a psychiatrist by the Board (for a sprained ankle). She says "They treat you like animals — you work and enjoy life — this way the worry makes you crazy". Liberata was sent to rehabilitation — found the exercises too painful — and was sent home with a pension cut.

All of the women mentioned the strain on their family life. "You can't afford anything and you lose your spirit". Adults quarrel, children suffer, and even the amount of housework one can do is limited.

Men and women are treated alike by the Boards: payments are

Continued on page 3



UNION WOMAN

PUBLISHED BY ORGANIZED WORKING WOMEN (TORONTO AREA)

VOL 1, NO. 4 - V. 2 #1



SEPTEMBER, 1978

Shift work affects health, strains family life

By PAT TAIT

Shift work affects the physical health of women and is unbelievably hard on them. It puts a terrible strain on marriages, relationships and home life in general. These women undergo physical and social hardships and must adapt psychologically and physiologically to changing work patterns.

The inability to adjust her time-oriented body functions causes difficulties in sleeping, eating and elimination patterns leading to fatigue, poor appetite and headaches. The reversal of normal sleep patterns results in insomnia caused by daylight, noise and the ungodly telephone.

Rotation of shifts does not help. When a person regularly switches shifts, there is an adaption period of several days which produces feelings of fatigue and annoyance similar to when one has to 'break-in' a new pair of shoes.

Nervous disorders result

Because of problems adapting to changes in eating times, many suffer attacks of indigestion which often result in taking some form of patent medicine to allay the disturbance. Apart from the irregular mealtimes, their diet is unbalanced and often in need of some sort of adjustment.

Nervous disorders, peptic ulcers and gastric disorders are prevalent in shift workers. A nervous disequilibrium results from the many changes in timetables.

Perhaps it can be argued that no occupational disease arises directly as a consequence of shift work, but the problems encountered can and do lead to a multitude of disorders. By not obtaining full rest or meals, these women lower their resistance thus making them easy victims to a variety of diseases.

Physiological disturbances are, however, not the only adverse ef-

fects of shift work, they are matched or exceeded by psychological stresses caused by the disruption of social and family life (not to mention Christmas Day, New Years Eve, Holiday Weekends). Even more serious are the mental and emotional conflicts which weaken the solidarity and happiness of the marriage.

Family problems caused

Often mentioned difficulties in the wife-husband relationship concern the absences of the worker in the evening, disrupted sexual relations and difficulties encountered in carrying out household duties. Shift work causes friction and frustration among other family members including the children. They are restricted in their movements and activities for fear of waking her. At other times she is at work when they are at home and at home when they are in school. While on the evening shift, she can go several days without even seeing her children. They are left alone to fend for themselves. If she's a single parent and if the children are pre-schoolers, the problems are multiplied. Day Care Centres do not operate to facilitate mothers on Shift Work.

The opportunity for a variety of social and recreational activities is greatly impaired. If she joins an organization, she is less likely to hold an executive position as her schedule makes it very difficult to accept the responsibility attached to these roles. It is the loss of evening freedom that is most generally disliked. She misses her favourite TV program; her relationship with friends and relatives is affected. They experience difficulty in including her in their plans — she feels socially dead.

Returning to school or obtaining a degree at night is extremely difficult and lessens her chances

Continued on page 3

Steelworker uses Right to Refuse Unsafe Work

By JENNIFER PENNEY

The right to refuse unsafe work has been invoked by few workers in any industry. And yet this right has been guaranteed to workers in most Ontario industries, construction trades, and mines since the passage of Bill 139, "An Act respecting Employees' Health and Safety" in 1976.

Most workers in non-union shops probably don't know about the law, and their bosses are not usually in a rush to let them know.

Union Woman was excited to hear that a woman in Local 6500 of the Steelworkers was the first worker at Inco to successfully use the right to refuse.

Cathy Duhaime is one of about thirty women (out of approximately 11,000 workers) who are still working in the Inco smelters and refineries in the Sudbury area after the winter layoffs. She has been working in an Inco copper refinery for four years. Jennifer Penney interviewed Cathy for Union Woman this summer.

What jobs have you done since you were hired by Inco?

I worked in the "anode" for the first three years. That's the worst part of the plant. Molten copper comes in from the smelter, is emptied into furnaces where it is kept hot, and is poured into moulds to cool and harden. Later, I worked in the fine casting area, that's casting pure copper. In the last few months I've been working in the wire bar area. Basically, that's shipping, strapping bars of copper (in bundles of fifteen bars, each weighing about 250 to 300 pounds) for transport.

Was there a work order made up for the job you refused to do?

Oh yes. There's a job called



Steelworker Cathy Duhaime (right) is shown with Shirley Hawes (left) and Rachel Barriault (centre), who also work at INCO.

"doors". It's on an old casting system, number two, which isn't used very often, maybe every three or four months or so. These moulds come around overhead and molten copper is poured into them. The worker has to close doors at the bottom of the mould. You usually do it with your feet. It's hard to explain to somebody who hasn't seen it.

There was a pole which was tied to an aluminum chair with some wires, and the chair was lifted off the ground so that you would be lying on your back like in a dentist's chair. So your feet would be pointed upwards. But after you would close the door the wires would twist and you would often fall off the chair and everything would be going by you. If you miss a door, don't close it properly, the hot metal they pour into these moulds is going to get on you. That's the danger of the job. You have to get the doors closed properly.

So I brought it to their attention that I was too short and that I wasn't the only one. They decided that a proper chair would be put in that could be adjusted for both tall and short people, and would move up and down in position so that everyone could close

the doors easier. You have to get up after you close the doors and bang these pins in with hammers. It's a very hard job, and it's hot. It's a ridiculous job.

That kind of thing is automated in other parts of the plant?

Yes, they keep saying they're going to get rid of it, they're going to get rid of it. Anyway, the committee wrote a work order to fix the chair along with all the other things that had to be fixed as a result of the safety inspection.

Later on, in March, I looked on the board and it said that I'm going to work graveyards on doors, which was strange because I wasn't even in that department anymore. I had been transferred into another department, into the wire bar. So I went into the office and asked them "What's going on here? Why am I on doors?" They told me "You have to do it. You're the only one qualified." I said "But I'm not qualified." They said "Well, you're half qualified."

I came in on Friday. It was all arranged. They knew I was going to say something. I mean two months is a long time to wait for a chair to get fixed.

Continued on page 3

UNION WOMAN

OWW Newspaper Committee:

Barbara Cameron, Tina Cartwright, Phil Hargreaves, Holly Kirkconnell, Mary Ellen Marus, Marg Moores, Val Pakota, Marg Smith, Marilyn Spink, Pat Tait.

Union Woman is published once every two months by Organized Working Women. The Editorial Board of the newspaper is the Executive Council of OWW.

Union Woman is free to members of OWW and is available for distribution to union locals on request.

Letters to the editor, opinion pieces and news stories should be sent to:
Union Woman, 15 Gervais Dr., Suite 301, Don Mills, Ont. 447-7462.

Hospital unhealthy workplace

By IRENE KUUSELA

Hospitals as workplaces are areas of sickness and infection. Communicable diseases are serious health hazards for hospital workers. One such disease is tuberculosis.

In Canada 1.6 million people are infected with tuberculosis. These people should be treated but they don't know they are infected until they develop symptoms. Hospital workers and workers in homes for the aged can have close contact with untreated tuberculosis patients.

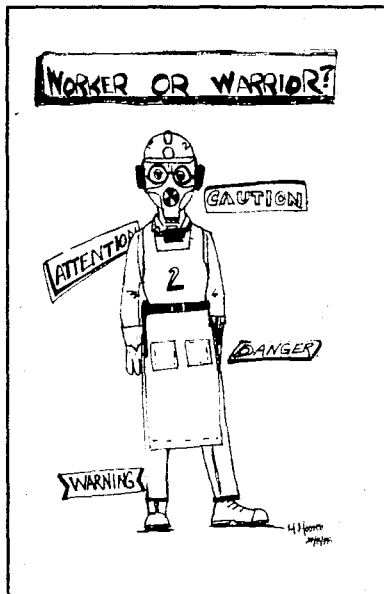
How could this happen? Elderly people, workers, years ago were not given adequate treatment. The gold miner with silicosis developed tuberculosis as well. Today, cut-backs in government spending result in patients not having early screening tests and diagnostic services. Workers as a result are exposed to these germs.

At Greenacres, a Metro Home for the Aged, workers recently were exposed to an elderly patient who had active tuberculosis and had been admitted to their care. The Home did not have an X-ray machine for admission screening. These workers, as a result of their exposure, developed active tuberculosis and complications, which they must prove are the result of their contact with the patient. These workers' families suffer stress and anxiety because they are indirectly exposed to the disease.

Hospital workers must have the protection of not having to care for undiagnosed cases of infectious diseases. Workers must all have tuberculin tests, and incoming patients should be tested.



Irene Kuusela is a public health nurse. She is a member of CUPE 79.



How safe is your office?

By HOLLY KIRKCONNELL

I've heard many an office worker at the end of the day complain of backaches, headaches and general exhaustion. These are not just the feelings of tiredness from having put in your eight hours — there are actually forces at play in the office environment which directly cause these maladies.

Office work has long been considered one of the so-called "safe" occupations, free of industrial disease and accidents. Recent studies have contradicted this belief and have pointed to a number of office-related hazards which can be irritating and, in the long run, harmful.

The physical nature of the job in itself produces ill effects. Constant sitting in improperly designed chairs can lead to backstrain, hemorrhoids, varicose veins and other conditions relating to the circulation of the blood. Similar effects come from standing most of the day, as file clerks do.

The small muscles in the hand that are used for writing are delicate and easily fatigued. Overuse of these can result in "writer's cramp". Typists can develop a condition called tenosynovitis which is the inflammation of the tendons of the wrist when these tendons are overexerted.

Insufficient or improperly placed lighting results in eyestrain which can cause headaches in the short term and eye damage in the long term. Work with the new television-like computer outlets has been found to be especially fatiguing to the eyes.

Recirculated air in an office can be a source of disease. Poorly maintained air conditioning systems will breed spores and fungi which are circulated through the air and can cause cold-like irritations and allergies.

Noise from typewriters, telephones and other office machines interferes with speech, is a source of stress, and can, if over 85 decibels, in the long term cause

Double burden causes stress

Organized Working Women is sponsoring a special conference on women's occupational health. Though both men and women have a right to the same, safe work environment, there are good reasons for looking at the situation of women workers separately.

One reason is that we know little about the health of women on the job. Occupational health research has generally focussed on industrial work, where predominately men are employed. But many non-industrial jobs which employ mainly women are hazardous. Service and clerical kinds of work are supposed to be clean and safe, but women in these jobs are exposed to an alarming number of hazards.

A second reason is that the majority of women in the workplace are in their childbearing years. Though toxic substances can distort the genes carried by both men and women, it is the woman whose health immediately affects the well-being of her unborn child.

A third reason for looking at women workers separately is because of the persistent kinds of stress which women workers must face. Psychological stresses have an immense impact upon our bodies. The body's response is to increase the production of adrenalin. Blood vessels constrict. Blood pressure rises. Cholesterol levels rise. The stomach secretes gastric acid. Hypertension, ulcers, asthma, and migraine are all associated with stress. Stress leads to increased vulnerability to disease.

Both men and women face stress at work. Most working women have a job at home as well. Our double day of work creates additional problems which affect us physically.

Effects of double burden

"Taking care of the house" is not one task, but dozens. It requires lots of time, hard physical work, and plenty of organization. It's doing the floors, the vacuuming, the laundry, the ironing, the mending; shopping for food, preparing meals, packing lunches, stopping at the hardware store, remembering you're out of milk.

Moreover, the role of women in the home has changed from that of producer (canned goods, cloth, preserves, clothing) to that of a consumer of goods, and housework itself is no longer very satisfying. It's monotonous. For the most part, women do it. In the Western world, socialist and capitalist alike, women

permanent, noise-induced hearing loss.

Office machinery also emits several irritating substances. Ozone is generated from electric stencil machines, many copying machines and some switchboards. Methanol and ammonia are used in many duplicating machine solvents. All of the above substances can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat. Ozone can severely damage the lungs as well, and there is evidence that it is related to cancer. The light source of dry copiers emits ultra-violet radiation, excessive exposure to which is known to lead to the formation of cataracts.

The physical stress from these factors combined with the mental stress from doing repetitive work

which requires a good degree of concentration all add up to general fatigue which can in turn make workers more susceptible to accidents and disease.

Merely adding a few exotic plants to the office — as is so popular today — does not solve these problems. Proper seating, lighting, noise control and ventilation will go a long way towards improving the working conditions of the office worker.

Ask yourself the following questions. Does your chair give firm support to your lower back and slope slightly forward? Is there enough light provided for any given task while at the same time not producing a glare? Are fluorescent fixtures placed to the side of, never immediately in front of or above, your desk? Is noise-absorbent material used

spend an average of 80 hours a week working at their jobs and in their homes. Their husbands average 50 hours of work.

A large number of women who work have children at home. For them, there's the added physical work, and more significantly, the added responsibility.

Caring for children means trying to get a dentist's appointment for your child at a time you don't have to be at work; it means remembering the last polio shot, finding new boots that fit, mending broken zips, helping with homework, finding the patience to listen carefully and the time for a cuddle. It means figuring out what to do between after school and when you get home from work, arranging what kids do during vacations, and, most difficult of all, figuring out what to do when a child is sick, suddenly.

Though men may be helping more today than before, most women carry the burden of responsibility for child care and for housework; for managing it as well as actually doing it.

It is not just that we carry what's on our minds about our families along with us to work, a series of thoughts in our heads. What's on our minds brings with it tension that manifests itself in specific physical terms. Under stress, our bodies gradually become less resistant to the physical and chemical assaults of the work environment. In addition, hard work in the home is tiring, and fatigue makes workers more likely to slip, to strain a back, to catch a hand or finger in a machine.

Solutions

What can we do? Union men and women can join others in the community who are working for better day care and for good after school programs. At the same time our unions can make efforts to relieve some of the stresses which child care adds to our day.

Bargaining unit meetings can be held at lunch time, or, better, during the paid work day. Unions can bargain for increased maternity leave and benefits. Unions can arrange for good day-care at meetings of locals and at week-end conferences. Unions can set as a priority in bargaining a parent's right to use sick-leave to care for a sick child: A father's right, not just a mother's right.

These would be significant gains and would help relieve the double-stresses of our double-days. We'd have more time and energy for work with our unions, too.

under and around your office machinery? Is the air able to circulate freely while not producing a draft? Is it neither too cold nor too warm in the office? Are ventilation out-take units placed directly beside office machinery which emits chemicals?

If you answered "no" to any of the above questions, it's time for some changes in your workplace.

Recent government statistics show that over one-third of all working women are employed in clerical work and that women make up 72.9 percent of all clerical workers. In other words, one out of every three of our sisters is working in an office. Occupational health and safety should be a concern of office workers and their unions. Make it a priority in negotiations!

Commentary

Commentary is a forum for debate and discussion on issues of interest to trade union women. Opinions expressed are not necessarily those of Organized Working Women.

Protective legislation

By MARGARET SMITH

Protective Legislation for women workers is a prickly issue. It has divided organized men and women; it has also divided feminists inside the labour movement from those without. The struggle for women's right to protection on the job and the struggle for equality with men are not antagonistic, but the conflicts persist. It is time to expose the myths.

Women pioneered the movement for protective legislation which began with and includes prohibition of child labour, regulation of the working day and of health and safety standards. They pressured for the 10 hour day, won it, and saw it extended to male workers.

Organized men supported this struggle because they gained by it. But they also lobbied for "protective" legislation restricting the employment of women in many sectors such as mining and typesetting. Men secured these occupations for themselves, but at great cost. Energies which could have been used to pressure industry into providing safe workplaces were instead diverted into a struggle for privilege by male workers over female.

Working women resented this lack of solidarity. Many feminists focused on it and have opposed all protective legislation for women on the grounds that it limits our job opportunities.

Despite these conflicts, organized women persisted; they lobbied for protection on the job and for special protection to counteract their unequal social position. Companies were required by law to provide free cab fare for female employees working between midnight and six a.m. Companies were forced to do so, until the Ontario government, aided by a feminist lobby, removed this protective clause from the Employment Standards Act in 1974.

Legislation which compensated women in part for a social inequality has been revoked, but conditions have not improved. As we know, the majority of rapes and assaults occur at night and the incidence of both has steadily increased

since 1974. Unions now have to bargain company by company for protection once guaranteed.

Work and Protection are Basic

In this tangle of short-term interest, gain and loss, what is basic? Men and women have a right to work and a right to protection on the job. Further, as Jeanne Stellman says in her book *Women's Work, Women's Health*, "we have the right to earn a living and still retain our capacity to bear healthy children; we need a job safe enough for a fetus — and safe enough for its parents."

In 1975 General Motors of Canada eliminated women of childbearing age from employment in the battery shop where there is exposure to lead. All women were removed unless they could prove sterility to the satisfaction of the company. One woman underwent sterilization. Another, with the assistance of the UAW, is challenging the company's decision.

Lead enters the male and female body in the same way; it causes the same damage. In men it may cause atrophy of the testes, reduced fertility and abnormal sperm. In women, it may be passed through the placenta to the fetus during pregnancy and to a baby through breast milk.

As in the cases of mining and typesetting, the hazards at GMC remain in the workplace. The exclusion of women is discriminatory. It is not even protective: a woman may still bear a damaged child fathered by a man working at the job she has been denied. We would welcome efforts by feminists outside the labour movement to expose this kind of sham protective policy.

As working women and feminists we should present clearly within the trade union movement our demand for the removal of hazards from the job and for workplace protection for both men and women. If we can get our unions, and the men within them, to adopt this position, we will be closer to a real, not just a legislated, equality. Margaret Smith is a member of CUPE 2189.

the company for not using the Bill. And he said, "Well, I didn't know the rules of the Bill." Now if I was to say that to a policeman on the highway when I was driving 10 miles over the speed limit, what would he do, eh?

So this case didn't go to arbitration?

No. And the Ministry wouldn't lay charges against the foreman. The government inspector who checked the case said he would have to look at the job description. If the two men on the doors are supposed to alternate, he said, then I will have to rule in favour of the employee (which is me). If each man stays on the job for eight hours, he says he will have to rule in favour of the company. And he checked it, and we were supposed to alternate, and they still dropped the case.

So they weren't considering the problem with the chair as part of the unsafe work which you were refusing?

No. The government inspector considered the chair safe. But I know it's not safe.

Bill 139." He says "Go f_ the Bill." I thought "Okay, he wants to talk to me like that...? Fine. "I want to see the safety engineer." He says "No. You're not seeing anybody." I said "Okay, call a mining inspector." I was going right through proper procedures. He said "No."

I went to talk to the chairman of the health and safety committee and he told me that I should grab my lunch bag and go home.

You know, I didn't even have to grieve to get my money for the shift. The company paid me. They knew I was in the right.

I went to the union hall and I told them what had happened. They said I should press charges. It's a criminal offence for the foreman to refuse to investigate the area in dispute, to refuse to notify a health and safety representative or committee member, or to refuse to notify a government inspector.

So the foreman apologized to

The Ontario Federation of Labour meets each year to decide the priorities for the Ontario labour movement. Women can help determine these priorities. Resolutions passed by your Local go to the OFL for consideration by the Convention.

Attend meetings of your Local. Make sure resolutions are submitted to the OFL on issues of concern to you. Help elect delegates who understand the special problems faced by women workers. Better still, run as a delegate yourself.

Deadline for resolutions is October 13.

Last year women made their voices heard and won an OFL Women's Committee. This year, on Tuesday November 14, a women's conference will be held as part of the OFL Convention agenda.

Come to the OFL Convention. OWW will be there!

Tension and fatigue results from job

By EVELYN ARMSTRONG

Almost half the women in Ontario are working outside the home and a large number work in the industrial sector. They are exposed to all of the hazards that male workers encounter but because of the nature of the work women do, they are faced with additional problems.

In most factories it is the women who work on the mass production lines, where the line is moving and they must keep up to the pace. Many work on machine-timed operations and thus must keep up with the speed of the machine.

Because of the speed, repetition, monotony and the deafening noise in which our sisters have to work, day in and day out they experience many problems up till now not recognized as an occupational illness. Tension, mental and physical fatigue are a direct result of the nature of their job. To claim compensation for these problems is almost impossible, because there was no accident. The use of tranquilizers is a common solution used by many women.

While most management offices are air conditioned and the surroundings are pleasant, the same cannot be said of the average factory. In summer the heat becomes unbearable. Good ventilation is rare and as a result the air is usually stale and the fumes and smoke from the various processes in the plant makes the environment uncomfortable and unhealthy to work in.

For example, in the electrical industry, the manufacturing of the flip flash and magic cubes you use with your camera causes a safety hazard peculiar to this product.

In the winter months, when artificial heat is high, the department gets hot, with very little fresh air coming in. This builds up



static in the air which sometimes causes the flash cubes to explode. This may only happen in one tray, or it could set off a chain reaction. As a result the workers in this department, the majority of whom are women, suffer burns which are in some cases quite severe as the hot molten glass splatters around. As yet the management have not come up with a solution to this problem.

Very little is known about the effects of the many materials and chemicals used in industry today although more is being done about them now. While they are a hazard to all workers, in many cases they can cause additional problems for women who are in the child bearing years.

The above problems are in addition to the physical hazards which workers face day to day on the job — strained muscles, cuts, loss of fingers, burns and all the many accidents which happen while working on and around machinery.

We in the trade union movement must intensify our struggle to make the work place a safe and healthy place to be. Women must play a significant role, individually and collectively in this fight. We spend a good part of our lives at work. We must become more aware of the hazards on our jobs, and how they are affecting our health, both mentally and physically.

Become involved, it's your life that is at stake. Together we can change our work environment.

Evelyn Armstrong worked at General Electric for many years and is now on staff with the United Electrical Workers. Evelyn was president of OWW during our first two years.

Union of Injured Workers

Continued from page 1

(maximum) 75% of one's salary, although in many cases the women earn a lower salary than the men and therefore receive lower payments.

These 3 women found out about the Union of Injured Workers through friends, a CHIN radio interview and a community service group. The Union has locals across Ontario and women have always been active at all levels; in London the president is a woman. Meetings are held in 3 languages to discuss problems and issues and at this point men and women work together towards the goals of the 4-point programme of the Union: (1) job security or compensation; (2) cost of living increases every 3 months; (3) abolition of Board doctors; (4) enforcement of existing safety laws and enactment of better safety laws.

As Santina says: "I work here because now I want to change things for others".

Bonnie Alter is a member of CUPE Local 79.

Shift work

Continued from page 1

for career development. Traveling in the dark is often very disturbing or parking her car in unlit areas make her very nervous and down right scared. At one time employers were responsible for getting women to and from work after hours, but ever since we asked for equal rights, this is one area where employers were quick to comply.

As Dr. S. Whyatt in the *British Journal of Industrial Medicine* points out "There is not the least doubt that shift work is unpopular and in the long run is very detrimental to health, efficiency and the enjoyment of life."



Pat Tait works for the Government of Canada, Dept. of Fisheries and Environment. She is Area Vice-President of PSAC Local No. 709 Environment Component & PSAC Rep. on the OFL Women's Committee. She's a Single Parent with two children and has worked Shift Work for 18 years.

OFL Convention

November 13-16

Ads blame The worker

By **BONNIE BENEDIK**

We are carefully educated to believe the myth that accidents are caused by the carelessness of workers. This message is being expressed in the television commercials on construction safety put out by the Construction Safety Association of Ontario and the Workmen's Compensation Board.

The ads are on every night. They show workers maiming themselves and fellow workers on construction sites by dropping bricks and planks on each other's heads, stepping on nails, walking into moving trucks, not using safety equipment and not cleaning up the work site properly.

The ads are keeping the myth alive that the stupidity and accident proneness of the individual is where responsibility for accidents lies. In other words, it just takes a little common sense to prevent accidents. However, this theory is untrue. It has been proven in scientific studies that unsafe workplace and working conditions are the root cause of accidents. Accidents are primarily the result of employers refusing to put out the money to make working conditions safe.

The cost to workers has been great. In a synopsis of work injuries in Canada done in a recent study by Paul Rohan, the study found that in 1976 one work injury happened every 7 seconds, one disabling injury happened every 16 seconds, and one fatal accident happened every 128.8 min. or approximately every two hours.

Some workers do have more accidents than others but rather than point a finger and say 'accident prone' a study in Britain dug deeper and found the following made up the majority with more than one accident: new workers doing a job without sufficient training, workers performing extremely repetitive tasks, people working overtime, and those compelled to do a job faster than it

could safely be done. Also, our resistance to accidents is lowered by factors such as noise, vibrations, high or low temperatures, shift work, speed up, stress, fatigue and chemical fumes. Even though accidents rates are on the increase, and we know the actual cause of accidents, we still see the Construction Safety Association and the Workmen's Compensation Board continually claiming that the individual is to blame for work site accidents.

Why do they persist in promoting these ads? It seems to me it is in management's interest to try to keep the accident rate down without doing anything about the root cause.

The ads blame the worker and avoid the real issue — management's violation and short cuts around safety legislation. Often workers are victimized who complain about safety. It is less costly and less time consuming to ignore safety legislation and try to get away with poor, unsafe working conditions.

As most people associate industrial accidents with dangerous "men's" work such as construction or mining, the media do not include women in their ads nor do most studies on job injuries. Yet large numbers of women also work at jobs that present many serious health hazards.

It is interesting that the television commercials are silent about the best weapon that construction workers have, that is, the right to refuse unsafe or unhealthy work. Holding out for protective legislation is not good enough. We need union safety committees that are prepared to see that these measures are enforced. We need an aggressive accident prevention program and obviously the Construction Safety Association and the Workman's Compensation Board are not providing that. Therefore it is up to us workers: What are we going to do?

Bonnie Benedik, Local 115, Ontario Nurses' Association.

Fleck victory!

By **DEIDRE GALLAGHER**

Finally, a victory for women workers. A defeat for union-busting companies like Fleck Manufacturing. The five-month long

strike came to a settlement when the workers ratified a contract which guaranteed union security. This had been the main issue in the strike.



Holly Kirtcneil

Members of OWW show their solidarity with the Fleck strikers during a women's day of support on the picket line.

You & the Law

"Workers should push Bill 139 to limit"

By **MARY MORISON**

More people lose time from work in Ontario because of industrial accidents and diseases than from strikes and lock-outs. In 1976 in Ontario, six and one-half million days were lost because of industrial accidents, diseases and deaths — that's the equivalent of more than 26,000 full-time jobs.

In that same year, Workmen's Compensation paid a total of \$359 million for accidents, diseases and deaths. Even these figures probably underestimate the real toll of occupational diseases by a factor of up to seven. Despite the obvious costs in human lives and suffering, lost production and costs to the government, nothing was done.

Following the revelations of the effects of radiation at Elliot Lake, and of asbestos at Johns-Manville and the Reeves Mine, extreme political pressure was applied by workers. As a result, the Ham Commission was set up to investigate safety in the mines. The Commission was so devastating in its critique that the Government was forced to introduce health and safety legislation to deal with the crisis.

And so, the Employees' Health and Safety Bill, better known as Bill 139, was passed in December of 1976 as an "interim" bill. It is still in force.

The Right to Refuse

Bill 139 applies to workers in Ontario covered by the Industrial Safety Act, the Construction Safety Act, and the Mining Act, Part IX. It does not apply to hospital workers, municipal workers, farm workers, school board workers and many civil servants, among others.

The Bill gives a worker who "has reasonable cause to believe" that a machine, or a device, or the workplace is unsafe to herself or another worker the right to refuse that work. However, the Bill does not give workers the right to refuse work which might be dangerous to a passer-by, a fetus or a baby being breast-fed. Furthermore, this right to refuse is only an individual right — collective action can only be taken if each worker individually makes the decision to refuse.

For the first time, a worker has the right to be represented at each stage of the investigation of the refusal. If the worker still believes that the work is unsafe after the supervisor has investigated, a Ministry of Labour inspector must be called. In theory, the worker cannot be penalized for refusing unsafe work. Unfortunately, the definition of penalty is unclear, and postponed penalty, such as not being promoted, may be difficult to prove.

When the Bill was introduced there was an outcry from employers who claimed that the right to refuse would be used frivolously by workers. To date the Ministry has not found a single case where a worker has abused the right to refuse.

Health & Safety Committees

Bill 139 gives both joint labour-management health & safety committees and worker health & safety representatives legal power to identify hazards and to recommend action. Worker committee members and representatives are to be chosen by the workers or their unions, and are to be paid for time spent on their duties.

Health & safety committees

and representatives look good on paper, however they can only be given legal status at the direction of the Minister. So far, none have. Joint committees and health & safety representatives established under a collective agreement do not have legal status under the Bill.

Bill 70 — the "omnibus" bill promised when Bill 139 was introduced — makes some improvements. It will cover all workers and will require joint committees in all workplaces with twenty or more employees. But the fate of Bill 70 is entirely in the Government's hands. It is unlikely to become law in its present form.

Legislation is only the beginning. For any law to be effective it must be used and tested. Workers should push Bill 139 to its limits. More importantly, we must continue to fight for safe and healthy workplaces. After all, any law represents only the minimum acceptable to society.

Just as workers organized and won wages and working conditions far superior to those provided for under the Employment Standards Act, workers should not be satisfied with their rights under Bill 139.

It is important to remember that worker representatives on any joint committee will only be effective if they have the support of all workers. Joint committees have a place, but workers are the experts in their own health and safety, and only workers acting together can bring about needed changes.

Use the rights workers have won in Bill 139, but don't settle for them.

Mary Morison is a member of OPEIU 343 and is a researcher for the NDP caucus at Queen's Park.

Join OWW!



Membership in OWW is open to all women in the Toronto area who are members of bona fide collective bargaining units. Membership is \$10.00 per year.

To join OWW, send in this application form with proof of union membership to the OWW office, address below.

Name

Address

Telephone

Union Local

**Organized Working Women,
15 Gervais Drive, Suite 301,
Don Mills, Ont. M3C 1YB.**

It was an important test of strength for the labour movement in this province. The women workers at Fleck were pitted against the combined forces of the Ontario Provincial Police, the Tory government and the business community. But they were not easily intimidated. The UAW organized picket line solidarity. Thousands of workers from southern Ontario rallied behind their sisters in an impressive and militant show of strength. It was exciting to see our union brothers rally to the support of women workers fighting for their rights.

OWW and other women's groups organized a women's day of solidarity on the picket line. Hundreds of women left Toronto in the middle of the night. We were greeted enthusiastically by our sisters on the Fleck picket line. We demonstrated that women's right to belong to a union is a concern of vital importance for the whole women's movement. And our sisters of the UAW, Local 1620 showed us that women can fight and win. The labour movement is made stronger by their victory. We welcome them to our ranks and we look forward to winning many other battles together.

Deidre Gallagher is the staff person for OWW.