The problems faced on the job by women workers and the possibilities of organizing them into unions were arguably the most important issues at stake in the *Woman Worker*. Because of the Communist Party's attachment to Marxist-Leninism, the Party's Women's Department and paper editor Florence Custance saw the radicalization of women at the point of production as the most certain way of kindling their socialist consciousness. The incredible exploitation women faced as workers, all socialists and Communists of this era believed, would bring into sharp focus the oppressive nature of capitalism and lead women towards unions and political radicalism. Women, suffering the double exploitation of class and gender inequalities, faced job insecurity, lower pay than men, and humiliating harassment—conditions which Communists believed should stimulate their political awakening.

The mainstream labour movement had shown almost no interest in organizing women workers. The largest federation of trade unions, the Trades and Labour Congress (TLC), remained dominated by skilled workers whose craft unions by and large excluded women, with the notable exceptions of some garment workers' unions. Dedicated to the goal of securing for its members a "family wage"—a wage big enough for a male breadwinner to support his wife and children—the TLC worked primarily with an image of woman as helpmate and homemaker. As workers, women were seen as temporary, needing protection only while they laboured before marriage.

The Trades and Labour Congress was chastised in the *Woman Worker* for failing to organize women wage earners into unions, and
the wives of working-class men into union guilds or auxiliaries. WLLS, while irritated by the TLC's treatment of women as well as by its overall conservatism, were still unwilling to give up on it entirely and they continually tried to influence it. After all, the organization had important historic connections to sections of the working class, and this was highly useful to Communists' united front policy. The Federation of WLLs had appealed unsuccessfully to the TLC for affiliation in 1924, and when Custance took up the editorship of the *Woman Worker* in 1926, she was still smarting from the rebuff—motivated mainly by the TLC's well known anti-communism. There was more cooperation at the local level, especially in Toronto and Regina, although in Toronto, the relationship was cut off abruptly in 1927 when the local WLL was expelled from the Toronto District Labour Council.

Communists were certainly more attuned than most trade unionists to the exploitation of women as earners and to the necessity of unionizing all women workers, skilled and unskilled. Yet despite their public rhetoric, the Communist Party had little interest in actually doing the difficult work of organizing women.

Operating with scarce resources, Communists often directed their primary attention to areas of production such as mining and heavy industry, giving only cursory attention to sectors employing female labour, such as the seasonal food industry, boot and shoe making, small manufacturing, textiles, and of course, domestic work. Domestic service still engaged between a quarter and a third of all women wage earners in Canada, and it was an organizer's nightmare since most domestics laboured by themselves, isolated within a single household. Many domestics were also recent immigrants. As the *Woman Worker* pointed out, an oversupply of such workers, encouraged by immigration agents and employers, kept wages and conditions poor, and led to both the abuse of child labour and difficulties in organizing adult workers.

Communists realized that the task of organizing women workers was fraught with logistical, structural barriers that were hard to overcome. In the 1920s the number of women working for wages (as well as the number of professional women workers) increased steadily in Canada. The percentage of women in the workforce went from 15.5 to almost 17 per cent by early in the next decade. While the vast majority of female workers were unmarried (and mostly young), between 18 and 19 per cent were either married, widowed or divorced. Women were also moving gradually into new areas of work, such as clerical, white collar, and retail. Despite this appearance of progress, women's workplace realities were hardly liberating. During the
1920s many workers were facing the onslaught of new attempts to streamline, rationalize and "speed up" work processes. Moreover, women were more likely to be responsible for domestic tasks, whether they worked for wages or not, and they were often portrayed in the mass media as temporary workers concerned with shopping and beauty, and of course in hot pursuit of a husband. Not least because of this ideological construction, women remained ghettoized within the workforce in areas of work considered unskilled, "feminine" and "domestic." These jobs were undervalued and certainly underpaid: women made, on average, 54-60 per cent of male wages. Seasonal, intermittent and part-time work was also common for women. As one Woman Worker reader pointed out in his letter about waitresses, the fracturing of their work day—along with intense employer opposition—inhibited their organization.

The 1920s were not necessarily an easy time to organize any workers in Canada, men or women. Despite talk of prosperity in the financial press, evidenced by increased production of consumer goods and a healthy stock market, the economy was actually depressed for the first half of the decade, and there was little sign of labour feeling confident and flexing its muscles. Radicalism was in retreat, chased down by employer and state offensives in the aftermath of the general strikes of 1919. More subtle barriers also existed, both to unionization and socialist action. Companies were experimenting with welfare and paternalist programs to induce workers to remain loyal and quiet. Many reform, charitable and religious organizations geared towards women, such as the YWCA, offered housing and recreational programs designed to develop moral and industrious women workers who would not be inclined to rebel against working conditions. While many middle-class reformers now accepted the reality of women working for wages before marriage, they did not see unions as a necessity and chose to focus their efforts on "suitable" leisure pursuits and on preserving the sexual morals of working women. As Woman Worker excerpts reprinted in the "Feminism and Social Reform" section make clear, WLLers struggled with the reactionary nature of many of these charitable and religious efforts.

Despite Communist women's aversion to middle-class moralism, it is revealing that similar concerns with the protection of women's virtue and morality creep into articles in the Woman Worker. As the story "The Modern Virgin" seems to say (see the "Women and the Sex Trade" section), one of the most devastating results of low wages for women might be the possibility of sexual seduction, the loss of virtue, and a life in prostitution. Writers in the
Women, Wage Work and the Labour Movement

*Woman Worker* were also well aware of the temptations of mass culture and consumption in the 1920s: beauty contests and romantic fantasy, Custance worried, would certainly lure women away from socialism. There was some recognition that women’s socialization as “sweeties and homemakers” had to be countered to create more outspoken, public, political “companions of men.” Such language suggests that some WLL correspondents recognized the specific problems of women’s oppression, and saw the emancipation of women as an integral part of the advent of socialism. Other correspondents placed the blame for political inaction squarely on the shoulders of fellow workers, whom they claimed did not take their wage work and the need to organize seriously enough and thus remained “contented” wage slaves.

The *Woman Worker* was an educational and agitational paper. Its first purpose was therefore to raise and sustain working-class women’s anti-capitalist consciousness. At the most basic level, it did so by trying to explain, using Marxist analysis, the system of capitalist exploitation that workers faced, showing why “girls” were a source of extra profit to employers. Secondly, it pointed to the need to overcome divisions based on gender, ethnicity and race that served to separate workers from one another, limiting the possibilities for economic and political action. Gender and ethnicity were the most obvious barriers described and criticized, but occasionally the paper also protested the way in which racial divisions were manipulated by employers to prevent working-class solidarity. Articles like the one reprinted here on Asian labour (see “Foreign Powers and China,” June 1927), were unusual and courageous for the time: in the 1920s, Canadian trade unions were still almost uniformly opposed to Asian immigration and labour, their vociferous opposition shaped by racism and fear of cheap labour.

Perhaps one of the most difficult issues the paper had to tackle was the question of married women workers. Most articles in the paper stressed the fact that married women were forced into wage labour to support their families. Like all workers, they should be encouraged to unionize. Contributors enjoyed taking on the social democrat and “labourite” politician, Walter Rollo, when he attacked married women for their presence in the labour force. But the overall perspective of the paper was somewhat contradictory, for it was still assumed that once married, women’s work would be homemaking, not wage earning. A preference for the male breadwinner model of family life was clear, and the work of married women was always seen as an unfortunate burden, not a right.
Applauding women’s attempts to unionize and their protests against working conditions, the Woman Worker tried to inspire other women to take similar paths. In the last resort, unions were seen as the best way of maintaining lasting organizations dedicated both to the improvement of working women’s lives and to building a political critique of capitalism. The paper therefore advertised attempts to organize unions, and gave coverage to women’s sporadic workplace protests. The latter were more predominant than the former in the 1920s. Often, correspondence from workers describing their workplace, conditions and problems were printed. These letters—from silk workers, domestics and garment workers—provide valuable and rare glimpses into the lives of working-class women in an era when few mainstream papers, even trade union papers, took the time to consider them.

A clear gap always remained between the Communist Party’s rhetoric, calling for women’s organization, and the reality of its lack of attention to the task. But for Communist women like Florence Custance and those who wrote for the Woman Worker, solutions to women’s inequality were clearly important. Their intense condemnations of women’s oppression and the indignities of wage work, and their desire to see women’s lives improved, were real indeed. Moreover, given the barriers to organizing women into unions, the strategy of the paper, following that of the Communist Party, did make some sense.

First, the Woman Worker concentrated on reporting and correspondence from women in certain occupations and workplaces where they had at least a faint hope of attracting adherents. In the garment industry, for example, the presence of left-wing, Jewish workers provided some hope for future Communist organizing. The Communist Party’s overall united front approach at this time called for active, but critical participation of Communists in existing unions and working-class organizations as a means of winning the working class to socialism. Second, given their own lack of resources, they focused on a few key issues for women, such as the minimum wage (see “Protective Legislation” section). Here they hoped to aid rank-and-file women in their fight for a decent wage, while still exposing the inadequacies of such reforms and the need for revolution. Finally, because the paper recognized that many women workers became full-time homemakers after marriage, they concentrated not only on women as workers, but also on women as full-time homemakers.
Women, Wage Work and the Labour Movement

Further Reading:


WHAT WILL THE TRADES AND LABOR CONGRESS DO FOR WORKING WOMEN?

[Editorial]
September 1926, pp. 1-2.

THERE are 400,000 women in Canada compelled to work for wages, according to official figures. About 100,000 of these work in factories. Of the 300,000 remaining, the greatest number are employed in the occupation of cleaning and the like. These work mostly by the day, are occasional workers, and continually change employers.

If, to this number, there is added the number of women who are engaged in home occupations, such as plain sewing, dressmaking, fancy-work of various kinds, artificial flower-making, etc., it will be seen that there are very few working women outside the circle of direct wage-earners.

How is it that women have been forced into this position? First of all must be stated, that this is the day of machine production, and this is at the root of changed home life. The advent of the machine has forced women outside the home, not only to maintain themselves, but also to maintain the home. In one report given by the Ontario Minimum Wage Board it is stated that “over 50% of the women working in the factories are married women.” And those who work at home occupations and cleaning are either married women or widows.

The rapid entry of women into the field of wage-earning in Canada during recent years has left women at the mercy of their employers. Women are looked upon as “cheap labour.” Minimum Wage Boards have done something to prevent sweated labor being disgracefully underpaid. But sweated labor exists despite Minimum Wage Boards. Also, the Boards have not been able to cope with the cunning of an employer bent on underpaying his women workers, in order that his business shall be a profitable one.

Who alone can solve the difficult problem of preventing women wage-earners being at the mercy of employers who care only for the profits they can wring from the labor of those they employ?

Those who can and must solve this problem are the Trade Unions. Will the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada at its convention during the third week in September in the city of Montreal discuss this matter seriously, or will it be content to pass resolutions only? If the Congress fails to discuss the vexed question of organizing women workers into trade unions then it fails in its duty.

Then, again, while it is very necessary that women wage-earners shall be organized according to their occupation, it is also necessary that the wives of the workers, especially those of the trade unionists, shall be organized,
too. The work of the miners' wives on the picket line in Great Britain is something that should stir both men and women of the working class. Without such assistance and loyalty from their wives the men would have been forced back to work many weeks ago. It must be remembered that if the man earns the wage, it is the woman who has to eke it out for the family needs. Her efforts, her labors, are a necessary part of the process of production of to-day. Who has a right to say after witnessing what women can do, and the influence they can wield during a strike, that they should not be admitted into the Trade Union Movement? The organization of the wives of trade unionists into auxiliaries or guilds would be one of the simplest things the Trades and Labor Congress could undertake.

The only women's organizations that have taken up with real vigor the fight against low wages and unjust working conditions for women workers have been the Women's Labor Leagues throughout the country. In some cases their efforts have been recognized by certain Trades and Labor Councils, Toronto and Regina in particular. But, so far, they have for some reason or other, received rebuffs from the Trades and Labor Congress. And this despite the fact that they are doing splendid work under difficult conditions. The Labor Leagues have taken upon their shoulders the task of preparing the hard soil for trade unionism for working women in Canada. Will the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, the central power of Trade Unionism in Canada, lend its assistance in actually building trade unions of women workers? We say it must.

September 1926, p. 6.

Dear Editor:—

I am working in a non-union shop, and a little while ago we had to work overtime every night in succession for about two weeks, and after so many nights of hard work we were well nigh exhausted.

When we complained, the foreman boldly announced, "Everybody must work till 9 o'clock." One girl who was not well said, "I am very sick, I must go to see the doctor." And when he heard this he came rushing like a wild beast and said, "Those who refuse to work overtime will be fired in the morning."

But none of us really thought this threat would be put into effect, especially when one had to stop work on account of sickness.

However, the next morning to our great surprise it did so happen. When the bell rang, the girl who had refused to work overtime, because she was too sick, and although she was not feeling much better even then, was called before the foreman. The foreman immediately started to insult her with vulgar remarks, and told her to clear out.
Imagine in what terrible circumstances this girl found herself when she was fired. It is hard enough to get on while we are employed, it is especially hard when sick and out of work.

This is the treatment we get under this present system of exploitation. Is it a wonder that prostitution is prevalent? Is it a wonder that women are often compelled to make terrible sacrifices in order to be able to exist?

This is all due to the economic system under which we live.

We must find a way out, but not by such degrading means. No, the only way to solve this problem of rotten conditions is through organized demands.

Working girls enter the trade unions and become active and let us fight for better conditions.

B.S.
Montreal.

WOMEN AS CHEAP LABOR

[Editorial]
October 1926, pp. 1-2.

IN the United States women who work in industry receive little more than half the wages paid to men, according to government report. This state of affairs is not merely true of the United States, it prevails in every country in which the profit system, known as capitalism, exists.

Woman is supposed only to need enough to provide her with food, clothing and shelter. She is supposed to have no other responsibility. Even if she has it makes no difference as to her wages. A man is supposed to be the person upon whom rests the responsibility of raising a family. Therefore, a man’s wages are supposed to be not only for his own keep, but also for that of his family.

But the working-class housewife and mother knows how far her husband’s wages will go round for the family needs. In many cases it simply will not go round. Rather than face debt, she puts her children into a public nursery and goes into the factory, or, out to work, as she calls it, herself. In some industries more than half the number of women employed are young married women, many having children under five years of age.

The nature of production today takes women more and more from the homes. Much of the work women are engaged in does not require skill, it is just a matter of speed. The nature of their work causes them to drift from one occupation to another. They are open to the worst forms of robbery by those who employ them as cheap labor.
The greatest trouble in this connection is that women, whether single or married, look upon their wage-earning efforts as a temporary need. Therefore, they make no attempt to improve their conditions. If one job does not suit they go to another, but more often than not they submit to conditions.

Woman as cheap labor is the worse kind of slave. If she is married and is compelled to work, she is doubly enslaved. Speeded to the limit of her strength in the factory, she works at her household duties until bed-time. She has no minutes of leisure, as her husband has, even to read the newspaper. It cannot be wondered at that these women grow old and worn out before their years.

Some may urge that we take a stand against the employment of married women. In face of the knowledge of the struggle of working class families to live, we cannot do this. We must, instead, urge that women, as well as men, become members of trade unions. This alone will prevent women being used merely as “Cheap Labor,” and will aid in securing some measure of protection in this profit-getting age.

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TRADE UNIONS
(By a Supporter)

October 1926, pp. 11-12.

It is surprising that today there should be working women who know either little or nothing about Trade Unions, yet such is the case. Those who have but a little knowledge of trade unions look upon these organizations of the workers as evil things. They claim that the unions cause strikes, that they cause disturbances in the country, and that they take men from their homes at night, when they could be doing something better than attending meetings.

It is plain that these views are impressions gained from newspapers that are published in the interests of those who either employ cheap labor or would like to employ such labor.

It is hard to convince women who have such impressions that, had it not been for trade unions, the workers who are living in what are called civilized countries, would be as badly off as are the workers in India and China today.

Trade unions have helped the workers to obtain a standard of life above that of a mere bread existence. Trade unions have been a means of securing a shorter work day. Trade unions have secured compensation for injured workmen and many other benefits.

The reason trade unions are not popular is because they are organizations of workers only, and they fight profits. They are not popular organizations, even among workers, because they are organizations of resistance.
Many workers prefer to belong to fraternal societies and orders of various kinds, because these do not compel one to fight. Sometimes the union compels this when workers' wages and hours of labor are attacked by the masters.

The masters do not fear benefit societies. In fact, sometimes they get into these themselves in order to use them for political reasons. The masters do fear, and even hate, trade unions, because they know that these stand between them and big profits on the one hand, and the workers and low wages on the other.

When workers grumble because their wages are low they really have themselves to blame. They have not helped to make the unions strong.

Union labor is always better paid than non-union labor. This is very clearly seen in the case of the garment trades in this country. The masters do not give more than they are compelled, and it is the union that tries to set the rate of wage.

Working class housewives should insist upon their husbands joining a trade union, in order to get a bigger pay envelope. Working women who are wage earners should join a union to get higher wages and better working conditions. The masters have their unions to protect their interests, so must the workers have theirs.

Into the Unions.

AN APPEAL TO WOMEN WAGE EARNERS
By Trade Union Supporter.

January 1927, pp. 8-9.

Women workers in shop, factory, mill and office, have you ever stopped to consider why you are forced to work—why you get wages for your work—and why you get only a wage that just keeps life within your body?

Have you ever wondered how it is your masters live—how it is they live in mansions—and why they are able to enjoy the luxuries of life?

If you have never thought of these things, it is time you did.

Do you suppose your master employs you because he likes you? You know when you go for a position, or a job, as it is most often called, you have to be able to satisfy your master or his staff that you are able to do good work, and you know you are not paid what you would like but what the master says he pays his workers.

Then you know when you work that you are speeded up so that production can be increased each day. You know you leave your work dead tired, all your energy is exhausted. But you may not know that this means cheaper production and more profits for your master.
You will have learned, that when you work, you are no longer counted human beings. Instead you become help, only hands, and are known by numbers.

This condition has become so common, and working girls and women have become so used to this treatment that they look upon all these things as matters of course. Is it any wonder that working girls and women are treated with indifference?

**Girls Used for Profit.**

It is time women workers in shop, factory, mill and office knew that their power to work or labor is used by their employers only for the sake of PROFITS, and that these employers can only live at their expense.

It must be clear to you that employers do not invest money in buildings, machinery, and materials, in order to give work to the poor. No, indeed, they invest their money so that it shall bring them profits.

But this is the method of production to-day. All the things we need are not made first because people need them, but instead because they are a good means of investment, because they bring profits.

It is time women wage earners learned that production depends upon the labor energy of the workers; when this energy is withheld, then see how the masters are fixed.

**Wages for the Workers—but Profits for the Boss.**

So we see that while production depends upon the workers, the workers get out of their labors a portion called wages, while the masters get the cream, called profits.

Workers' wages just mean poor clothing, poor food, poor shelter.

Masters' profits bring them the best of food, beautiful clothing, splendid mansions, and luxuries of every kind.

The masters love their portion. This is why they keep the workers down. This is why they cut wages. They always want more and more profits.

The masters do not care what becomes of working women and girls so long as they can get the means to provide their own women and children with wealth and luxury.

Want and hunger do not stare the women of the master class in the face, as it does the women of the working class.

It becomes necessary for working women to look after themselves, to talk about their lives, the conditions of work, and the problem of how to live.

Married or not, it makes no difference, women of the working class will have to be toilers. So it is time to lose indifference and to study and talk over your conditions of life.

Organize at once your study groups, talk about your workshop conditions, talk about your home conditions, talk about the conditions under
which your husbands, or your fathers, or your brothers, work. These discussions will help you to understand why it is necessary to organize and struggle against the evil conditions forced upon the workers by the masters.

THE REAL BUILDERS—ARE THEY TREATED AS SUCH?
February 1927, p. 5.

Dr. Young, of the United Church of Canada, commenting on Canada’s non-Anglo-Saxon population, tells us that:

“In this task (of developing our national resources) the non-Anglo-Saxon has had a worthy party. He has shouldered the burden as the Canadian man-of-all-work. He is doing seven-tenths of all the coal mining and 78 per cent. of all the work in the woollen mills. Eighty-five per cent. of all labor in slaughter-houses and meat-packing industries is non-British. He makes about nineteen-twentieths of all clothing, and four-fifths of all furniture. He turns out 80 per cent. of all its leather and one-half of the gloves, and refines almost all the sugar. Wherever he is, he is the backbone of industry. He engages in all the dangerous occupations, and he takes on the hard, unpleasant jobs which the Canadian workman is glad to relinquish. Without the contribution of the new Canadian in toil of brain and body the record of Canadian progress would have been impossible.”

In spite of this, and it is a well-known fact, that many of these nation-builders have either the greatest difficulty in procuring citizenship rights, or are refused them, if it is found they have radical views. Who said Democracy?

THE JUNGLE
A Story of a Winnipeg Working Girl Lost in the Jungle of Master Class Duplicity.

Alice is a pale-faced girl of twenty years of age who is working at a mangle in a laundry, doing the small articles as follows, handkerchiefs, towels and toilet covers, for which she receives the munificent sum of nine dollars per week (or, rather, did). The other day, being pay day, the boss, when paying her, gave her eight dollars and seventy-five cents. When Alice protested he calmly told her in a sarcastic manner that she had been receiving good pay; she should only receive eight dollars and twenty-five cents, seeing that she does not commence working until Monday noon. Wonderful minimum wage for working girls and women in Manitoba! Is it not?
Alice, like many other young girls, is being paid rotten wages because there is no one who bothers their heads about how working girls exist, or, for that matter, how the other fellow lives that has to work for lower wages, whether it be girl or boy, man or woman. As I write, my attention is being drawn to the "Coolie Wages in B.C." Lumber barons are offering twenty cents per hour for "husky young men." The struggle for the workers is so severe that most of them have no time to think of the other fellow.

Alice pours her story into the sympathetic ears of a fellow slave during the dinner hour. "Oh, what shall I do?" is her heart cry. "I've no father or mother, I have to pay six dollars per week for my board and room, and now I shall only have two dollars and twenty-five cents to dress on. I cannot do it. I have tried so hard, because since I left school I have believed that if we work hard and serve our employers well that we should be sure to rise higher, make our way in the world. I've been working hard for eight years and kept myself respectable." (By the way, Alice is clothed in the very poorest clothes that can be purchased, rotten, shoddy material that brings great profits.) "It seems endless. I wish I was dead. Is there no help for a poor working girl?"

Such is the cry in the dark of thousands of poor lost working girls, lost in the jungle of master-class hypocrisy and duplicity. Speed the day when all working girls and women will realize the lies that are being taught our children (our class) through the pulpit, the school and the press, as well as the mass of lying propaganda the masters and their henchmen are flooding the country with to fool the workers at every turn.

Yours for the Day of Freedom for the working class,
EDITH E. HANCOX,
Winnipeg.

WHAT A SALES GIRL WRITES

April 1927, p. 16.

Dear Comrade:

I am enclosing with this some writings of my experiences as a worker. It has been these experiences that have made me an agitator, and not as our rulers say, "the result of radical and Bolshevik propaganda." I had become this before I ever heard of such things.

You will not be surprised when I tell you I have become a little bitter towards my fellow workers. As the years pass on one becomes very weary waiting for them to advance.

The workers in the departmental stores are a breed all their own. Wherever I have been I have found myself isolated and alone. They have allowed me to put my hands in the fire and then take the benefits themselves. I am valued as a worker, but am turned down because I think and reason. So what
with this and the depression in business through economic causes I am on the downhill grade financially. But I shall survive it somehow.

In spite of the fact that I have both a trade and a profession it is hard to make a living. Prices on labor here in Vancouver have been cut down by the large stores to such an extent that one cannot make a living.

Within the last few months I have known workers in my trade to be cut from $19.00 to $15.00 per week. One, a married woman, is supporting herself and a boy of six years on $15.00. She had one other child, which she was forced to give away; her husband had left her.

Seven years ago I was paid 50 cents per hour, working a 44-hour week. This was in the house furnishing trade. And now it is hard to make $15.00 a week.

In none of the stores are the workers allowed to organize. An “Association” is arranged for them by the heads of the firms, and the benefits derived from this are sports and a doctor if one happens to get sick. To most this means a deduction in pay. So the above mentioned woman really gets only $14.50 per week by the time fees of one kind and another are paid.

The women sales clerks are paid $12.75 per week. Anything more than this is an exception. And married men in the same line of work are supporting families on $15.00 per week. But they appear to be satisfied working till nine and ten o’clock at night without one cent for overtime.

I shall certainly attend the meetings of the League that has been organized here with a view to membership.

Comradely yours,
Shopgirl.

DOMESTIC WORKERS ORGANIZE

[Editorial]
May 1927, pp. 1-2.

AGAIN an attempt is being made to organize the domestic workers. The number of times this has been attempted in this country would be difficult to record. If the new organization lasts it will be a great achievement.

The Home Service Association, as the new organization is called, was launched a few weeks ago in Vancouver. The object of the Association is—to assist its members in their calling, to seek redress of grievances, to improve conditions of labor, hours, wages, weekly and yearly holidays; to keep a free registry to enable members to obtain positions; to obtain legislation to establish a minimum wage; to open a Hostel and a Training School. Sick benefits are another feature of the organization. The membership is open to men as well as women.

Taking the object altogether it is easy to see that there were some who helped in its preparation who were well aware of the difficulties of organiz-
ing working girls. The Hostel, Training School, Free Registry and Sick Benefits are, seemingly, attractions which must at the present time be used to induce working girls to organize for higher wages and better working conditions.

Up to the present time all such attractions have been entirely in the hands of the Y.W.C.A., church and religious societies. They are financed by governing bodies and the employing class. And this has not been without some purpose. These institutions have aided in supplying the employing class with wage workers who despise the labor movement and what that movement stands for. In other words, they have been the means of preventing working girls helping themselves by becoming members of trade unions. They have made the girls docile, patient, contented, cheap workers.

Why cannot Labor enter into competition with such organizations? Why should not Labor exercise its influence over working girls? Why should not Labor copy some of the methods of control used by the employing class?

The organization of working girls presents tremendous problems. But difficulties can be overcome. Workers want to see some benefits which organization will give them. The object of the Home Service Association offers something real to working girls.

The Association will do its members good service if it can procure redress of grievances, for these are many in domestic service. It should make an attempt to bring into its ranks the many hundreds of married women who work part time, and are a source of cheap labor.

At the present time domestic help does not come within the protection of the law. Yet fully 300,000 women in Canada are earning a living by working in domestic service in the cities and rural districts, that is, if we count in such help as office cleaning. Domestic workers are among the worst paid and worst treated workers in this country.

The Home Service Association appears to be an attempt to get these workers to help themselves. More of such efforts are wanted.

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Foreign Powers and China,
No. 2


[...]

The Yellow Peril.

The Yellow Peril bogey was a deliberate attempt to foster hatred against the Chinese. The Chinese were pictured as ignorant, dirty, opium-loving, cheap, pig-tailed people.
But to the workers of the western countries the Yellow Peril took the form of the fear of want. They became possessed of the idea that the Chinese would be able to put them all out of work, because Chinese Labor was so cheap they could not compete with it.

It did not occur to these workers to look a little deeper into the question. Had they done so they would have discovered that their own masters and the governments of their countries were growing rich at the expense of the Chinese as well as themselves.

Only of recent months, only since the Chinese workers proved by their strikes they would not be the cheap, underpaid tools of imperialist exploiters, have the workers of the western countries become convinced that there is not a YELLOW PERIL, but instead they have discovered a gigantic power of co-operation, a new force added to the brotherhood of workers, and one which is now in struggle assisting the emancipation of the workers of the world from capitalist slavery. [...]
It also happens that, in Toronto, the greater number of small clothing manufacturers are Jewish. So here we have a condition of affairs in which Jewish employers are fighting Jewish workers by employing English-speaking Gentile women, and paying them very much lower wages than they paid their Jewish workers.

A great number of these English-speaking women are new arrivals from Great Britain—Scotch and English girls who do not understand working conditions in the country to which they have just come. Others are the usual strike-breakers who allow themselves to be used because they dislike the foreigner.

In this way the employers are dividing the workers, in order to smash the unions so that they can bring down wages.

The bosses are organized. They do not question each other’s nationality. The Canadian Manufacturers’ Association is the bosses’ organization.

On the other hand, the unions for the workers in the clothing industry are the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers’ Union, the Fur Workers’ Union, and the Hat, Cap and Millinery Workers’ Union.

These unions are open to all workers in the needle trades. They are the workers’ means of protection against low wages and unfair working conditions.

English-speaking girls should refuse to be used to smash unions that have cost so much to build. They should join the union and so help to keep up the wages that the unions have obtained for their members.

It is in the best interests of the employers to keep the workers divided. This helps to keep wages down.

All workers have one interest in common, that is, to get the most they can for the energy they expend in their employer’s industry. The union protects this interest. Working women—into the union.

HELP WANTED—FEMALE

July/August 1927, pp. 6-7.

Women have been advised, admonished, and instructed as to their conduct, their costumes, and their consciences—that is—after we were granted a conscience—for, lo, these many years. And one is tempted to believe in the idea of a “special providence” though it’s against all reason or justice—when one sees how unharmed we have been by all these attentions.

The fact that we have survived is because we’ve adapted ourselves; that is why anything survives.
We were just "sweeties" and "house-keepers" for ages—these are modern terms for toys and slaves of late; a few of us are learning to be companions. There is a growing demand among more civilized males for what they call "intelligent companionship." So here we are!

And this is not the last demand upon us—I am speaking now of the working woman—the parasite person has no social value. The world is now facing the possibility of another great war, in spite of the promises made us in 1914 that if we gave up our children then the world would be safe forever.

Enough has happened since then to prove that the "masters in all lands" have simply tricked the workers again—the horrors of poverty, because of low wages and unemployment, have increased mightily, and now looms this new misery—another and more hideous war.

Women have been called conservative, and it is partly true. Working men are still conservative, and the reasons are very clear if one takes the trouble to notice the daily workings of three very powerful forces—the press, the school, and the church. And all three are owned and operated by "the Boss Class," the small class in control—and naturally, through these channels we are taught to think and act, much as trained animals are taught, so that those who own us may make profit out of us.

We are taught to sit up and beg!

It is not entirely the fault of working women if we have been slow in taking our places beside our intelligent menfolk—our opportunities to learn truth as to conditions have been fewer than theirs—even the Trade Unions were not always hospitable to us.

But now our menfolks have been forced to the wall and are now calling for help. And just as we have answered the other calls and adapted ourselves to all the other needs, just so will we not fail our own class at this critical time.

We must organize as workers—we must protect our homes by refusing to help in any imperialist war—because we should have the understanding by this time that all such wars mean nothing to the workers but more poverty and greater degradation.

Surely the daily struggle for a chance to live decently for our share of the wealth which we alone produce, surely this is fight enough for us!

And we are in this struggle—we did not make it. But just as the workers have always had to fight wars with which they had nothing to do but lose their lives, so we working women must also wage this war—with this difference—it is our war, it does concern the safety of our children—it determines whether they shall have to sink to the black, hopeless poverty that is the lot of millions of little ones in the older lands at this moment, or whether they shall be saved from such a fate.
Let us not deceive ourselves, they cannot escape unless working women as well as working men have an understanding of the world process—unless we know what is happening to us—and why.

Some of the old Scots used to pray regularly this petition: “Oh, Lord, gie us a guid conceit o’ oorsels.” And never was there a more useful thing to desire and use at any time than a healthy sense of our own value.

Women who have been able to survive centuries of slavery, superstition, and many kinds of subjection ought to have sufficient “conceit” in themselves to realize their power, and sufficiently loyal to themselves to begin right now to use this power.

And a good way to begin is to read “The Woman Worker” and get someone else to read it—it helps us to understand things, and this will help to unite us for this greatest work of all—the gaining of freedom—not only for ourselves, but for workers all over the earth.

—H.D.P.

THE IMMIGRANT GIRL

[Editorial]
October 1927, pp. 1-2.

IMMIGRANT girls are working girls. Their voyage over the ocean to this country is not for sight-seeing, but for work.

Many of these girls are forced to be immigrants, either because they were inmates of what are known as “charitable homes or institutions” and the home would no longer support them, or because they were ambitious enough to want a better and more secure means of living than that which faced them in the “homeland.”

And to these facts must be added the fact of inducements. Among these can be mentioned the assurances of employment and the possibilities of marriage and a home of their own.

The actual experiences of the immigrant girl often work out quite differently. The unfortunate “institution girl” may find herself bound hand and foot to the home where she is sent. She is the slave, the lackey, of the household, she has no rights. She mustn’t complain, she becomes afraid to complain. A survey of the reformatories, houses of correction, and the like, could tell a sorry story of the experiences of these girls, that is, if they would.

The so-called “free immigrant girl,” she who comes to this country on the assisted passages schemes, does not find herself in a very enviable position. Until she has met her obligation to the concern who “aided” her, her labor is nothing short of contract labor. Should she break contract because of dis-
agreeable conditions of work as a domestic, she is hounded and rounded until she meets her debt and finishes her contract period. Should she refuse to go back to this she is deported. If the immigration department would, it, too, could tell a tale about this side of the troubles of the immigrant girl.

It is gratifying to find that the organized working women of Great Britain are taking up the question of “emigration” and talking over it very seriously.

We, on this side of the Atlantic, must do likewise.

Immigration agents and agencies, their method of work, and what they get out of the business of bringing working girls to this country must be exposed. The immigrant girl must be protected.

Married Women as Wage Earners

October 1927, pp. 7-8.

Often one hears when the Unemployment Question is being discussed that married women should not be allowed to work. But married women, working-class women, are forced to work, often out of sheer necessity, and not from choice! It cannot be for the fun of the thing that married women sit for hours in an employment bureau waiting for work, or make the round of visitation to factories day after day, or roam the streets looking for houses to clean.

It is reported that 50% of the women working in the factories of Ontario are married women, and we feel sure that all these have very sound reasons for becoming wage-earners.

Even the “golden west” is not so golden that the wives of working men can stay home, resting content that their husbands’ wages will suffice for their families’ needs.

The Labour Gazette for September gives some figures concerning conditions in British Columbia. On page 950, paragraph “Marital Status,” the report reads:—

“The payroll returns of 1926 provided columns in which the employer recorded whether the employee was married, widowed, or single. In the fruit and vegetable industry the married women comprise a large proportion of the workers, due perhaps to the fact that the product they work in is very perishable and at the peak of the season all available help is pressed into service. In the laundry industry about 25 per cent. of the women recorded are married. Public housekeeping has a percentage of about 28.5 married women in its ranks. In the fishing industry, out of 26 reported, 16 are married or widowed. The telephone and telegraph occupation has the lowest percentage of married workers, namely, 4.7. In comparison with other oc-
ocupations there are relatively few married women in office positions. Out of 3,756 employees reported in clerical work only 432 are classified as married."

It is certainly up to the Labour Movement to recognize that married women in industry—married women as wage earners—are a factor that has come to stay and must be dealt with accordingly.

Our demand is "ORGANIZE THEM." The fact that they are in some cases only part-time workers or seasonal workers should make no difference.

If the organized labour movement cannot adapt itself to new conditions as they arise, if it fails to contend with the organizational forms of industry, then it becomes like a stagnant pool, a breeding ground of dissension and dissatisfaction. The Labour Movement must be a FORWARD-LOOKING MOVEMENT.

Wage Slaves in Hotels

November 1927, pp. 8-9.

The railway companies of Canada reap such huge profits from their operations that they more than repay the shareholders for the risks they run in investing their capital in them. So, besides being transportation companies, they take their surplus investments into the hotel business.

The Canadian Pacific Railway is going to erect a huge, up-to-date hotel on the site of the old Queen’s Hotel, just opposite Toronto’s new Union Station.

If, when the hotel starts operating, it copies the plan prevailing in its Banff Hotel, for sure trouble will be in the brewing. Conditions are so bad in the Banff Hotel that even The Bisector, the organ of the Ku Klux Klan, cannot refrain from comment. The Bisector writes in its September (1927) issue: "Banff is a beautiful spot away in the heart of the Rocky Mountains. The hotel is a palatial building with home comforts, exquisite cuisine, and delightful entertainment, surrounded by gorgeous scenery, with facilities for all kinds of outdoor sport. Judging from the C.P.R. advertisements and the descriptions of tourists who are interested only in selfish enjoyment, it appears to be next door to heaven. But for those who are lured into that outlandish spot in a servile capacity, as the menials and slaves of the C.P.R. and the pleasure-seekers, it is only one short remove from the infernal regions.

"So much we glean from letters which some of these poor drudges have been writing to their friends in Vancouver. The work is real slavery; there can be no question of that. Few of the negroes in the cotton fields were driven so ceaselessly or so mercilessly. The girls have to be on duty daily at
6 a.m., and are on the run till 7, 8, or even 10 p.m. Taking one sample week recently, the hours worked were: Tuesday, 16 hours; Wednesday, 13; Thursday, 15; Friday, 11; Saturday, 14; Sunday, 14. In addition to this, the girls have to clean out their own rooms and do their own laundry. Though wearied out in body, they are wrung up to such a pitch of nervous tension that very often when most tired they cannot sleep at night, the inevitable result being physical collapse. Quite recently a girl in the dining-room with a tray in her hand, dropped from sheer exhaustion, and was in hospital for two weeks. There were at that time nineteen girls off sick owing to the working conditions. The distance from the top table in the dining-room to the cold meat and salad service in the kitchen is 637 feet, and the girls have to rush back and forth that distance in order to serve a guest.

“The feeding is on a par with the working conditions. The girls get a cup of tea at 6 a.m., and on that they have to labor for five hours, till 11 o’clock, which is the hour at which they get their breakfast. Their food is served in the scullery, and is such that they can take it or leave it—any of them, hungry as they are, preferring often to leave it. They ‘pinch’ the scraps of food left on the plates of guests, to eke out their scanty rations, and those of them who have friends in Vancouver get an occasional parcel of food sent to them, like the prisoners of war in Germany, to save them from starvation.

“And the wages—well, they are just of a piece with the rest. A cheque sent down recently by one girl to her family in Vancouver, for half a month’s pay, was drawn out for the magnificent sum of twelve dollars and nine cents, showing that the company which can roll out the millions of dollars to its shareholders, can also reckon with its employees in such miserly fashion as to get back the odd cent of the odd dime. Yet, the girls do get tips, but there are a number of ‘captains’ in the dining-room, each in charge of so many tables, and every girl has to give her ‘captain’ half of all the tips she earns.

“Other and less creditable means of providing for themselves with money would appear also to be resorted to by some of the girls. It is against the rule to have men about their rooms, and there are detectives whose duty it is to see that the rules are observed; but men are to be found around at all hours, and the detectives appear either to wink at the practice, or to be powerless to put a stop to it. The girls are required to make themselves attractive looking, and with the thermometer in the kitchen, as it was on a day recently, registering 114 degrees, the traces of fatigue can only be hidden by a liberal use of powder and rouge. Unless a girl is painted up like Jezebel, she will be sent away to make herself presentable.

“Such a life does not tend to produce a high standard of ethics, and the only vent which the employees seem to find for their feelings is in a plentiful use of profane language. Any girl who cannot swear like a trooper finds herself very much out of place in these surroundings. This is perhaps scarcely to be wondered at in the circumstances.”
We are compelled to ask, "What is organized labor doing?" "Is the Union asleep?" Things are coming to a sorry pass when the Ku Klux Klan has to come out in defense of working girls because organized labor is indifferent.

DO YOU WANT A 100 PER CENT. RAISE?

[Editorial]
January 1928, pp. 2-3.

DO you want a 100 per cent. raise? If you do, you women and girls who work in factories and stores, then you should know that there is only one way to get it, and this is by ORGANIZING.

If you do not believe us, then surely you will the government. We have before us the Labor Gazette, a monthly report issued by the Dominion Department of Labor, Ottawa. In this January’s issue is a section dealing with the wages of male and female workers in New York. The following facts are given:

"Women's average wage, by industries, ranged in 1924-5 from $12.50 a week in the canneries to $24 in women's clothing.

"The averages for men started at about almost $26, in candy factories, and went up to $44.50 in women's clothing.

"Earnings as high as $40 or $45 a week for women were found in a few industries with strong organizations."

So the secret is out. Workers who build strong organizations can command HIGH WAGES. And this is the main reason why the bosses do all they can to smash the unions.

We have urged time and time again that women workers should organize. Only through organization, by means of a union, can you make your wage demands effective. So organize, then present your wage demands to your employer.

Another thing you will notice, and this is, how cheap women's labor is when compared with that of the men. The men's wages shown above are 100 per cent. higher than those of the women in similar industries. This is not because men are better producers, but it is because women are content to work for what the employers care to pay. Again we say, Organize. Then through your union demand—Equal pay for equal work. Don't be cheap labor to the boss.
CONDITIONS IN A SILK FACTORY IN ONTARIO

April 1928, pp. 5-6.

The hours of work in this Silk Factory in Southern Ontario are from 7.30 a.m. to 5 p.m. The girls do not work Saturday afternoon, but must work FIFTY-FOUR hours per week or they are not allowed a full week’s pay. It is customary to work two or three nights a week overtime, but the girls are being paid only straight time for anything over 50 hours per week.

The nights worked are until 10 o’clock in the evening, and the girls say the work is tedious and under the conditions consider overtime an injury.

Some of the girls of necessity carry dinner, and there is no place to eat except right in the shop. Also the wash room is very unsanitary. When an inspector is known to be in town several girls are immediately put to cleaning up the wash room.

The company gets a permit to work the girls overtime for a period of three months, and after the permit expires the sweeper punches the girls’ cards at six o’clock and the rest of the time is written on the back of the cards and eventually rubbed off to permit no detection, or violation of the permit.

Isn’t it possible to get some of these conditions rectified?

Correspondent.

FIGHT THE SPEED-UP SYSTEM.

[Editorial]

June 1928, pp. 1-3.

EVERY girl who works in a factory knows that the “speed-up system” is the thing she is beginning to fear the most. This fear is expressed in the words of one girl who reported to us that “The speed-up system in our factory is getting terrible; we just have to work like slaves.”

Only a short time ago we received word that working girls were not at all anxious that the Minimum Wage Rate should be increased, because it would mean more work for them, and it was felt that the factories already demanded from them all the energy they had to give from day to day.

Yet the general boast of the bosses is that the workers to-day are getting higher wages, and these for a shorter work-day. However, under the “speed-up system” these things mean nothing. To-day after a girl has worked eight hours at tip-top speed, she leaves work utterly exhausted. As a result the doctor and the hospital reap whatever benefit could be derived from better pay. But more often than not the girl neglects herself and has to pay for this neglect in after years.
To-day, the "speed-up system" and "piece-work" are the order in factory life. And in these we discover a most cruel practice. In order to get the most out of the energy of a working girl a standard weekly rate of wage is fixed, so also are piece-work rates, but the latter are fixed so low that a girl has to work at tip-top speed to make the weekly standard rate.

And a girl actually does put out her full energy to do this because she fears to be looked upon as a slow worker, for a slow worker is eventually fired.

Many girls admit that the standard weekly wage is gradually dropping. They are quite sure that the bosses are going to adopt the Minimum Wage as the Standard Wage. In one factory in Toronto the Standard Wage has dropped gradually from $22 to $19, to $16, to $14 per week. This condition prevails in many factories. So we can see that girls have good reason for making their assertions about the intentions of the bosses.

The "speed-up system" is the new process of "sweating labor." At one time the sweating process meant long hours and small pay. Now the sweating process means USING UP THE ENERGY OF A WORKER IN A SHORT PERIOD OF TIME so as to reduce the running expenses of a firm. Of course, this means factory efficiency and more profits for the boss.

It is useless for working girls to pine for a return of the old days when they could break from their work for a few moments to make a cup of tea, or to slacken up when the work was slack. It is foolish of them to think that the Minimum Wage is the cause of all their ills. They must know that the boss is in business not for the purpose of providing them with work so that they can live, but he is in business for himself so that he can live by means of profits, and profits are made out of the labor of those he employs.

So working girls must face the fact that the "speed-up system" is here as a result of competition between the bosses and as a means of bringing greater profits to them. Greater production is cheaper production. The energy of the worker, the health of the worker, the strength of the worker, matters not. To an employer of labor—business must pay, and no sentiment must enter into this process.

Instead of being indifferent to the indignities imposed upon them by the bosses, working girls must take heed of these things. To ignore the methods used by the bosses to wring profits out of their energy, working girls are ignoring the well-being of their very lives.

Working girls must have protection, they must fight for protection. And the means—well—first of all they must band themselves together in the factory itself. The workers of each floor or department of a factory should organize themselves as a factory committee, and as such take up grievances immediately. They must demand "rights," for these will never be given them.
In order to strengthen their cause they must belong to the broader movement which stands as a protector of the workers; this is the Union of their industry.

The solution of the difficulties of working girls lies in organization. So—organize factory committees—and join the Union.

OUR LETTER TO DOMESTIC SERVANTS.

[Editorial]
September 1928, pp. 2-3.

YOU know, sisters, that poor wages, an unlimited-hour work day, and often a seven-day week, are the usual things facing domestic servants. And added to these are sometimes other hateful conditions connected with domestic employment, a nagging-never-satisfied mistress, poor food, miserable sleeping quarters, and offensive behavior on the part of the men folk of the house.

You are well aware of the fact that, when you apply for a position as maid, you have to go well supplied with references that will satisfy the mistress of the house that you are a good worker; that you are honest, clean, and of general good behavior. But you know that you dare not ask for a guarantee for good treatment from her; if you did she would look at you in astonishment and would consider you had lost your reason.

Of all the wage-earning occupations domestic service is the most humiliating. What makes the condition of work worse is the fact that there is not a single remedy for any of the ills a domestic worker has to suffer.

There can be [no] disputing the fact that it is the non-English-speaking immigrant girl who comes to this country as a domestic worker who is treated the worst, she is almost entirely at the mercy of her mistress.

A letter The Woman Worker received recently from a domestic worker gives one a little idea of the conditions existing in the towns of Northern Ontario. The letter states: "The wages we receive are very poor, some of us getting only fifteen and twenty dollars a month and yet have to pay for our room. These are mostly those who cannot speak the English language. The usual wages are twenty-five to thirty dollars a month, only a few get thirty-five.

"The people we work for are not millionaires, but just those who call themselves 'the upper class.'

"Some of the maids get one afternoon off each week and every other Sunday, but quite a number get only one afternoon off, and there are those who don't get any."
“Then there is the staying in at nights. Some maids get out every night, but quite a number have to stay in two and three nights a week and then go home alone late at night.

“Nearly all are working eleven and twelve hours a day. The maids of this northern part don’t get much sunshine for they have to stay in all day, they only just know the sunshine is there, the moon only is left for them to look at.”

This letter speaks for itself. Practically the same conditions exist for maids in every other place.

Then what is to be done? Can you hope to get better treatment by begging this from the mistress who employs you? You know she will offer you a hundred reasons why she cannot give you the small things for which you ask. And always she will tell you that “her advice is for your good.”

Yet what you want can be obtained. But you must go after it yourself. This must be done by putting up a fight for what you want. And how can this be done? The first step is TO ORGANIZE.

If you really want sunshine, and you should have this as well as your mistress, you must put out your organized demand, “A REGULAR WEEKLY AFTERNOON OFF, AND ONE DAY’S REST IN SEVEN.” This is considered necessary and has been made the law for the benefit of factory workers, and the same should apply for domestic workers also.

Organization is not an easy thing we know, but we are ready to help you. Our Labor League Movement is organized for that purpose and you must come to us and use our organization for your protection. Get in touch with our local League women, they will assist you, they will tell you what to do. Until you have the strength to organize entirely on your own come into the Labor League Movement by joining our WAGE-EARNERS’ SECTION.

ORGANIZE AND FIGHT FOR YOUR RIGHT TO GET SUNSHINE.

Send to us for advice, we will help you all we can.

THE WOMAN WORKER.

Dear Comrade Editor:

October 1928, p. 5.

I have just received the only magazine in Canada that takes an interest in the women of the working class, “The Woman Worker.” Just a few lines on the task of organizing the women who work in hotels, restaurants and cafeterias. They are amongst the most exploited of women workers, working in unsanitary kitchens. The smell of cooking, steam and heat alone is enough to make anyone not working amongst it wonder how they stand it. Then there are the long hours on their feet, rushing here and there, putting up with abuse from the “guests” or customers.
Speaking recently to a girl waitress in a basement cafeteria of a big departmental store in Toronto, she told me her feet and ankles were swollen and ached so much after her day's work that it was agony to get home.

These are the trying conditions under which waitresses work. At this point it would be well to mention for the benefit of our readers not acquainted with this class of work that there are two kinds of waitresses—the steady waitress who does her job twelve months in the year for a living; the summer season waitress only does this for a change, also to make some extra money while on her holidays, away from her own job, such as high school students, domestic servants and school teachers. This helps to keep down wages of regular waitresses. They are expected to supplement their earnings of $20 to $25 per month with a bonus of $5 if they stay the season by gratuities from the guests for good service. This also helps to keep down wages, so away with the tipping system.

We should try whenever possible that when we have to eat or stay away from home to patronize only the best employers of women labor, thereby helping our movement to better the conditions and raise the wages of women workers in the catering business.

Yours fraternally,
(Mrs.) A.J.H.

THE CLOTHING WORKERS ORGANIZE

[Editorial]
December 1928, pp. 6-8.

THE establishment of the Industrial Union of Needle Trades Workers of Canada has provided already convincing evidence of the wonderful possibilities for organization work of a Trade Union nature among the thousands of workers employed in the clothing trades industry in Canada. In Montreal, Toronto and Winnipeg new local unions affiliated to the parent national organization have come into being and are growing rapidly. Perhaps the most gratifying feature of the work that is being done is the fact that practically all of the work is being carried on by very youthful workers, a majority of whom are young woman workers.

The reason for this, of course, is to be found in the conditions existing within the industry itself. Nationalization of production which has proceeded in practically all the industries of Canada and the U.S. during the past few years has been carried on in the clothing industry in a most ruthless way. Greater and greater sectionalization of the work, revolutionary improvements in machinery, and the collaboration of the trade union bureaucracy in the two largest centers of the industry (Toronto and Montreal) have combined to produce a tremendous increase in production
per worker, at the same time making possible the introduction of an ever-increasing percentage of youthful and inexperienced workers into the shops.

**Changing Conditions**

While the production per worker has increased very rapidly the total increase in production has been so great that in spite of the more intense exploitation of workers the total number of workers employed in the industry has increased steadily during the past four or five years, and there are to-day approximately 30,000 workers directly employed in producing clothes.

While the industry has expanded, however, and the number of workers have increased the status of the workers as a group (which in the clothing trades was comparatively high), has degenerated terribly, as have also wages and working conditions. The chief reasons for this development are to be found in (1) a movement of the clothing manufacturers out of Toronto and Montreal to smaller towns, and (2) the deliberate refusal of the officialdom of the International Unions either to extend their organization along with the industry, or to put up serious resistance to the continual offensive of the bosses to reduce the wages and standard of living of the workers in the large centers to the same level that they are able to impose upon the raw, inexperienced workers who are drawn into their factories in the small towns to which the industry is expanding.

**Demoralized Organizations**

The natural result of the general situation in the industry which is briefly outlined above has been to produce a situation where, due to the drift of the industry "out of town," the center of gravity of the industry has shifted. Toronto and Montreal at one time embraced more than 85 per cent. of the factory-made clothing industry. To-day these two towns combined embrace only approximately 50 per cent. of the industry, while the rest is diffused through dozens of towns in Quebec and Ontario, extending right through Western Canada to the Pacific Coast. The effect upon the unions in Toronto and Montreal has been disastrous. Loss of conditions in shops and control of jobs has been met by the International officialdom with servile attempts to make the organizations valuable—not to the workers—but to the bosses, as thinly disguised efficiency departments. The stock argument that the officialdom of all these organizations depend upon when meeting employers to-day is that through their "standards of production" and similar schemes they can assure the employers of equally cheap production as can be secured by moving out of town. In other words, instead of fighting to organize the workers in new centers and raise their wages and standard of living, their policy is to make their unions acceptable to the bosses by mak-
ing them the instruments through which the wages of the organized workers may be brought DOWN.

**Organize the Organized**

This, then, was the situation that confronted the thinking workers employed in the Needle Trades. Thirty thousand workers employed and the number growing year by year, less than five thousand organized and the number getting continually smaller. The industry spreading all over Canada, organization becoming more and more restricted to a few high-speed shops, where organization exists on the basis of agreement between the bureaucracy and the boss.

Clearly the only solution of the clothing workers' problem was in extension of organization "out of town." And because of the fact that the number of workers employed in the smaller centers is too small to allow of the maintenance of separate trade union apparatus in each of the sections of the industry, the only method of organization that offered any hope of success was organization by industry with the local unions of various sections of the industry (Cloakmakers, Capmakers, Furriers, Men's Clothing Workers etc.) all organized around one central body.

The bureaucracies of the International Unions would never permit such organizations, even if they were willing to attempt organization of the unorganized workers. In addition, of course, there existed the more fundamental reason for establishment of a Canadian Industrial Union, i.e., the fact that the bureaucracy of the A.F of L. is to-day openly an agent of American Imperialism, and is perverting the labor movement (at least that section of it under its control) into an instrument for capitalist exploitation of the working class. With these things in view the delegates from local unions who gathered together in a preliminary National Conference in August decided that the time had come for the establishment of an Industrial Union, open to every worker employed in the clothing industry, and organized on the basis of direct and complete control by the clothing trades workers of Canada.

**The Union Grows**

Thriving local unions and a steadily expanding membership show the correctness of their decision. The Dressmakers' Local of Toronto, for example, an organization already embracing three hundred young workers, mostly girls, is an inspiration. Very few of these workers have ever been members of a union before, but their enthusiasm and fighting spirit is convincing evidence of the rightness of these workers for organization; and their enthusiasm is contagious. Out of the enthusiasm of the Dressmakers there was generated an equally active interest among Raincoat and Waterproof workers which led to the rapid building of an active local union in this
branch of the industry which also had never previously been organized. In
Winnipeg and Montreal the same experiences have been the case.

The local organization in Toronto is now engaged in a bitter strike against
the Durable Waterproof Company for recognition of the union. The boys
and girls engaged in this fight are now, without exception, getting their first
taste of trade union struggle. And to attend one of their strike meetings, to
catch the spirit of lively, youthful enthusiasm, is certainly well worth while.
It is more—it is a sign of the awakening consciousness of the masses of
young boys and girls employed in this industry, and a beginning of a realiza­
tion on their part of the need for organization and determined struggle. It is
in this consciousness and the fact that it is fighting a militant struggle in the
interests of the clothing workers of Canada as a whole that there lies the
guarantee of success for the Industrial Union of Needle Trades Workers of
Canada.

T.B.

WORKING CLASS MOTHERS CRITICIZED

[Editorial]
January 1929, pp. 5-6.

MR. W.R. ROLLO, former Minister of Labor under the Drury Govern­
ment (Province of Ontario), now school attendance officer in Hamilton,
Ontario, recently criticized working class mothers for being wage-earners.
Mr. Rollo claimed that there was a tendency on the part of such mothers to
shirk their maternal duties; that while such mothers could not be accused of
starving their children, they did leave them to their own devices. He
claimed, further, that there was no need for these women to go to work, be­
cause, in the majority of cases, the wages of the husband were sufficient to
maintain the home. The fault lay with the workers. It was their craving for
luxuries that compelled the women to go out to work to earn money to sup­
ply these.

The remedy, by the way, was supplied by Mr. Rollo. It was that a law
should be made to prevent the employment of married women with small
children.

Mr. Rollo, we believe, was at one time a working man, and as such was
elected a member of the Provincial Parliament during the term of the Drury
Government. Surely, he has forgotten the days he, too, worked for wages
and faced the struggle of making both ends meet, otherwise he would argue
differently.

The complaint of Mr. Rollo is as old as the wages system itself, and his
remedy is just as old.
Always it has been claimed that when working class mothers worked it was because the family wanted luxuries. But who is to determine what are "luxuries," so far as the workers are concerned?

We are living in a period known as "civilization." It is "the machine age," and under this, life's necessities are not simple things—mere food, clothing and shelter. Cultural requirements and new standards make themselves felt and become parts of life's necessities.

If this is not seen, and Mr. Rollo evidently does not see it, then it is asylums and reformatories that should be advocated to cure the workers of their madness for luxuries.

But, let us come down to facts. In doing so, we are going to contradict Mr. Rollo. We know working class mothers do not wilfully neglect their children for the purpose of going to work to buy luxuries. When they become wage-earners it is because of necessity, and more often than not, for the purpose of buying the first necessities of life—food, clothing and shelter. Why this is necessary is clear to any who give it thought. It is because of the insufficiency of the husband's wages.

It is useless for people to moralize as Mr. Rollo has. It must be understood that the wages system and the purpose of production today lie at the root of the whole question. From this point only can we start, if we would get the proper viewpoint, and seek the right solution.

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**CHILD SLAVERY IN CANADA**

March 1929, p. 7.

Ivy was a Home girl from London, England. She was brought to Canada by the Salvation Army and was given employment in a business gentleman's home. I would like to impress upon you, reader, that no employment agency would send a maid to this home on account of the lady of the house.

When I first met Ivy she was a nice, bright, red-cheeked girl, with fair hair, and she was fourteen years old.

Gradually I was able to learn from her what her duties were. Yes, she was a full-fledged housemaid at fourteen. She had to clean and look after five bedrooms, two bathrooms, sunroom, upstairs hall, and the stairs. Of course, Madam, the lady of the house was very particular, even to the way the corners of the sheets were folded on the bed, and often if these were not to her liking she would strip everything off the bed and make the little fourteen-year-old housemaid do it all over again, and in addition she would have to listen to a stern lecture about her behaviour.

Nor was the bedroom work her only work. She had to wait table four times a day, and when she should have had an hour's rest, as is usual for
maids, she was asked to take the lady's three children out for fresh air. This was to give the nurse freedom to do dress-making for the family.

According to the terms of agreement, Ivy was to be paid $8.00 a month, and the lady was to supply her with the necessary clothes. But did it work out that way? For her clothes she was compelled to wear the left-off clothing of her mistress and she was given 50 cents now and then for pocket money, and was told the balance of her wages were being banked for her until she was sixteen years old, so that when she faced the world she would have a few dollars to her credit. I must mention, though, that the cast-off clothing provided her was placed against her wages.

Being sorry for the poor girl, I did all I could to persuade her to ask for a change of place. A great change had come over her, all her brightness was gone, and often she threw herself on her bed at night and cried from sheer exhaustion. So one day she consented to my proposal. She reported the conditions she was compelled to work under, and the officer promised to investigate, which he did. Thinking that it would help the girl, I called at the Army Lodge myself and explained what I knew about the case. At once they decided to take the girl away. This was done. Ivy is now Mother's Help in another situation. This has proved more satisfactory than the last.

I can only say that it is up to the girls working as domestic servants to organize for protection. So forward THE UNION FOR DOMESTIC SERVANTS!

Mrs. A.W.

ATTENTION WAITRESSES

March 1929, pp. 9-10.

From time to time efforts have been made to form a Waitresses' organization or union. Each attempt has so far failed miserably.

Possibly if we look the situation well over, study the conditions under which these girls work, and learn their outlook, we will be better able in further attempts to meet with success.

The first difficulty arises from the fact that this is unskilled labor—a job that almost anyone can do, provided they are quick enough in their movements.

Another obstacle is that a large percentage of the women thus employed are married women, who are working for extra money to eke out a husband’s small wage, help educate the family beyond public school, get a few comforts for the home or perhaps to obtain a few of the good things of life for themselves.

These married women do what is termed extra work, (noon hour or banquets, etc.) The rates for this work are unbelievably small. For instance: The
midday meal, luncheon, is paid at the rate of one dollar—never more. Banquet work: The call may be given for girls to be on the job at 5.30. They set up the tables and await the coming of the guests, very often hanging around an hour and a half to two hours before their arrival. They serve a meal of a few courses, each girl having around sixteen guests to wait on. Afterwards the tables have to be cleared of everything excepting table linen. Thus, four or more hours are put in for the princely sum of $1.25 or $1.50, according to the price per plate charged. Sometimes the girls are called for 10 p.m. or 11 p.m. to serve late dance supper. They finish up in the early hours of the morning, have to wait around for street cars for the rate of $1.50.

In one of the largest hotels in this city, Toronto, there is no possibility of getting anything to eat unless by stealth. An efficiency expert is on the job, to take care of this, although the food thrown out from each meal would feed dozens of families.

The bosses have these workers scared stiff by telling them that no union will be recognized. Most are afraid that if they attempted to organize their jobs would be lost and the extra money gone. Some take no account of the long hours put in for the small money, so long as they can figure on a few extra dollars a week. This is taken advantage of to the limit by the boss. Still the more intelligent and rebellious elements are disgruntled and dissatisfied and ready for organization and with them the weaker ones will come along.

Herein lies our task. We must make an effort to get these women together. Individual approach should be made to the most reliable girls and a group gathered around them first, so that a basis may be laid for the organization and a sentiment created inside for organization. Over and over again, calling public meetings has been tried, with little success. Most of the girls are really afraid to venture to these meetings before they feel they have some backing. The fear of the spotter and the loss of the job is sufficient to keep them away. There are the permanent girls, of course, and they must not be overlooked, but the majority are part or spare time workers.

Our Women's Labor League has been always ready and willing to assist and advise in any way possible. The task is difficult and much depends on the girls themselves. Avenues of approach must be discovered. Once the girls feel they are not alone, and through sympathetic contact, begin to appreciate the needs of the situation, there is no reason to believe the task or organization is much harder here than elsewhere. At least, it is worth while exerting effort in this direction.

B.S.
A WORD TO WAGE SLAVES

April 1929, p. 5.

A word to all you driven slaves,
Whose very souls are owned by knaves,
To you whose lives are nought but dread,
One ceaseless toil and fight for bread—
You mothers! whose hearts are torn to bleed
As you watch each day your children’s need,
With faces wan and eyes that stare—
You scan the shelves of cupboards bare!

This is too oft the workers’ lot
For wealth and power their masters got—
And we the slaves are gagged and bound
And left to grovel on the ground,
While robbers steal the wealth we make
And give us crusts for Jesus’ sake—
They prate and chew about the pie
The crown and mansions in the sky.

And still another yarn you know
Is that we reap just what we sow—
The “Talent” story comes in sight
To prove to us that we’ve no right
To luxuries that they enjoy.
Perhaps we’ll get some bye and bye!
And so you see with yarns galore
They have a salve for every sore!

Right now we know just where we stand
We wealth producers of the land.
Just all our wants we need but take
E’en though we know what is at stake.
So fall in line, for now’s the time—
We need your help, then o’er the line—
A Life worth living for workers all—
United we’re strong—divided we fall!

By A.C.