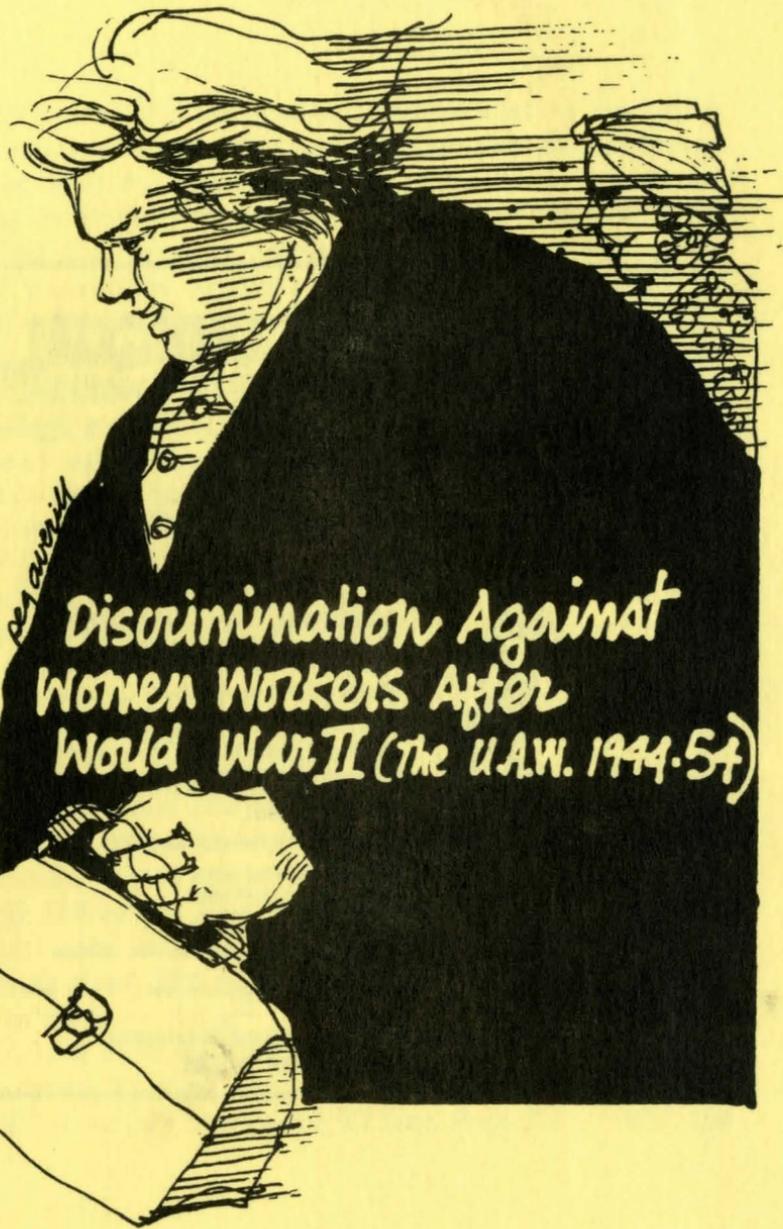


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# Separated & Unequal



Benjamin

Discrimination Against  
Women Workers After  
World War II (The U.A.W. 1944-54)

# SEPARATED & UNEQUAL

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN WORKERS  
AFTER WORLD WAR II (THE U.A.W. 1944- 1954)

by  
The Women's Work Project

written by Lyn Goldfarb with  
assistance from Julie Boddy  
and Nancy Wiegiersma

Photo Research by  
Lorraine W. Grey and Julie Boddy  
at the Library of Congress for  
the Women's Labor History  
Film Project

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THE  
WOMEN'S  
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PROJECT



A Union for Radical Political Economics  
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# Introduction

The 1940s was a decade of change and contrast for the American woman. Her prescribed role as homemaker was challenged by the need for womanpower to maintain the homefront during the military mobilization of World War II. The needs of a wartime economy dictated a change in public policy which encouraged women to work outside the home in the spirit of patriotism and the preservation of democracy.

The governmental and corporate sanctioned move from the private sphere of the home to the public sphere of the workplace provided the framework for a social acceptance of women's right to work. But this realistic appraisal of women's place in the industrial labor force survived only the immediate war years. Although women have always participated in the labor force, women workers were perceived to be a wartime phenomenon. This idea persisted despite the fact that women as well as men worked out of economic necessity. Most people failed to realize that women and children were the first industrial workers in the United States. The number and percentage of women in the total labor force increased steadily from 1790 to 1940. Between 1820 and 1840, women were employed in at least 100 different occupations.<sup>1</sup> In 1880 16% of women of working age were employed;<sup>2</sup> by 1910, 25% of the female population of working age were employed, composing 21% of the work force. In 1930, 24% of working age women were wage earners, representing 22% of the work force. In 1940, 25% of working age women worked, forming 24% of the labor force.<sup>3</sup>

By April 1945 (one month before the victory on the European front, VE Day, May 8, 1945, and five months before the Allies' victory over Japan, VJ Day, August 15, 1945), the

number of women in the labor force had reached its peak. Over 19.5 million women were employed, representing 36% of the labor force.<sup>4</sup>

Even more Black women than white women worked in the labor force. By 1945, 13% of employed women were Black while Black women were 10% of the female population. More than two million Black women worked, an increase of one half million since 1940.<sup>5</sup>

When one realizes that the percentage of women in the labor force increased from 25% in 1940 (this is a pre-war figure, prior to Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941) to 36% in 1945,<sup>6</sup> it becomes clear that paid labor was not a new experience for the majority of female war workers. However, popular opinion regarding women's continuing role and responsibilities reflected an almost universal blindness to the realities of her daily life.

In an economic system which maintained sex role differentiation and a sex-based division of labor, salaried employment was considered a man's responsibility and household work a women's sphere. Men were to be the producers; they earned an income which supported a family, paid the rent, purchased the food, clothing and other commodities. In order for men to fulfill their role, they needed the unpaid labor of women to perform the domestic services which transformed men's earnings into useful commodities necessary to maintain and perpetuate the family unit. Therefore women's primary role was centered around the home and family.

This economic polarization reinforced the concept that woman's work in the labor force was temporary, expendable and marginal both to the labor force and to her individual and family survival. This imagery was part myth and was predominantly the result of the manipulation of people to meet the needs of a capitalist economic system. It perpetuated a sex-based division of labor. This division, evident in the production relationships within the home and at the workplace, allowed the value of women's work to be misunderstood, misrepresented and underrated. A mythology was developed which mystified the realities of women's lives and obscured the rationale and forces behind discrimination and exploitation. Moreover, these myths provided the base for employ-

ment discrimination and encouraged unfounded prejudices against women workers.

These traditional conceptions about women's place were temporarily set aside when the pressures of a wartime economy demanded the incorporation of a part of the reserve of labor into the workforce. The reserve army of labor is primarily comprised of women, migrants and third world people, who, out of necessity, work for low wages in low status jobs and provide an expendable and temporary source of labor to be utilized in emergency situations such as strikes and labor shortages. A reserve army of labor, or an (unemployed) surplus labor force, is indispensable under capitalism to keep wages low through competition among workers for an inadequate number of jobs.<sup>7</sup> Because men went off to war, women were acknowledged as workers and were allowed short term participation in the mainstream of industrial development. Later, when the inflated wartime labor force returned to its peacetime norm of inadequate employment and men returned to the civilian labor force, women workers were expected to leave the workforce and return to their stereotyped pre-war roles. Women, who were universally perceived as housewives and supplementary to the labor force, threatened the jobs of men whose economic and social positions meant that they had primary responsibility for supporting the family. Moreover, the United States economy depended on the continuance of women's availability as surplus labor in the reserve army of labor. Women could then be called back into the labor force sporadically as the needs of industry dictated.

Because of the public focus on women workers through the media, by government and in the unions, a picture of the needs and problems of the workingwoman emerged. Some agencies were particularly perceptive and realized that the situation of the woman worker was a complex affair. More generally, however, and symptomatic of the capitalist system's treatment of women, was the almost universal neglect of the implications of women's dual responsibilities and a failure to develop concrete programs to meet these needs. The needs were two-fold and required an in-depth examination of the relationship between women's lives and responsibilities at home

and those in the work place. Women's workplace demands of equality on the job, in hiring, wages, seniority and occupational mobility addressed only one part of the problem. Women's family responsibilities and community service needs had to be recognized and considered within the realm of workplace concerns in contract provisions and organizational issues rather than set aside and ignored as "women's issues". The division of women's home and work needs into separate categories was detrimental to the survival of women in the workplace.

The issues women faced in the forties and fifties are still relevant. Discrimination at the work place and within the unions; sex-based seniority, promotion, job classification and tracking; unequal wages; dual responsibilities of home and work; lack of community food, day care and laundry facilities; and safety for women on route to and at the work place; are still critical issues confronting today's working woman. These issues must be addressed and incorporated into workplace demands for all workingpeople. A failure to do so today, will prevent any real integration of women into the labor force, as happened in the postwar years, and thus force women to remain in dead-end, low-paying, low-status jobs or force women out of the labor force altogether. The attempts and failures of the postwar years can serve as guidelines for contemporary demands and actions.

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# The U.A.W.

This pamphlet is a study of discrimination against women workers in the post war era. It begins with a discussion of the mythology surrounding the woman worker, and how these misinterpretations cloud the realities of who the female war worker was, why she worked, and her stake in the labor force. The issue of post-war employment for women is examined from the viewpoint of government, women's organizations and labor leadership. Within this context, we will focus on the United Auto Workers (United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America), its ideas and programs concerning women workers, and the failure to combat discrimination at the workplace and within the union. This pamphlet is the study of this one union; its evaluation of the rights and needs of its women members, the response to the massive post war layoffs, and the U.A.W.'s inability to adequately uphold the union rights of its female membership. 5

The U.A.W., representing workers in the auto and aircraft plants, was an important union for women during the war years. Its membership of between 300,000 and 400,000 women represented approximately one third of the total U.A.W. membership during World War II, and the U.A.W. rivaled the United Electrical Workers as the union with the greatest female membership.<sup>8</sup> It was affiliated with the Congress of Industrial Organizations, the progressive offshoot of the American Federation of Labor, formed to unionize the mass of unorganized workers through industrial organization. With its heritage of socialist and communist influence, militant organizing campaigns and strikes exemplified in the sitdown strikes in 1936-1938, and a strong sense of union spirit and solidarity, the U.A.W. showed some awareness of the implications of sex and race discrimination. However, like the rest of the labor movement, the U.A.W. failed in its commitment towards women workers and allowed discriminatory practices to drive women out of the labor force back into the marginal labor force. By illustrating the persistence of discrimination through the example of one of the most progressive unions, we wish to demonstrate that discrimination was not the fault of a few "uneducated" unions, but was universal, deep-rooted, accepted and, at times, encouraged throughout the labor movement.

The response of the U.A.W. to women workers serves as a microcosm from which to view the labor movement at large. We chose to illustrate the persistence of discrimination by studying one union in detail. This allows a more thorough understanding of the nature and implications of discrimination and provides the concrete facts and statistics to argue the case effectively. With case studies and an understanding of material conditions in the 1940's and 1950's we begin to develop the analysis to critique the workingwoman's place in the capitalist system.

References are made to the situation of women workers in the Detroit-Willow Run area. The Detroit area was selected because of the large concentration of war industries, and therefore, the large number of women during the war years.

6 Willow Run, on the outskirts of Detroit, was one of the largest

war industry plants employing "...not...more than 32,000".<sup>9</sup> The Detroit-Willow Run area was emphasized in U.A.W. records at the U.A.W. Archives at the Archives of Labor History and Urban Affairs at Wayne State University, and was also a subject for the United States Department of Labor Women's Bureau bulletin, *Women Workers in Ten War Production Areas and Their Postwar Employment Plans*. The accessibility of this information greatly facilitated the difficult task of compiling primary source material on post-war women workers, and researching the response of unions to the discrimination of female employees.

Discrimination weakened the union struggle. Employers were able to take advantage of the societal view of women's place in order to lay off large numbers of workers without fear of union reprisal. Sex differences are a convenient way of segmenting groups of employees and weakening the solidarity of workers in fighting layoffs and other forms of exploitation.

Although this pamphlet is a critical assessment of the policies and practices of the U.A.W., it is not an indictment of trade unionism. The power of organization is a necessary defense of the worker against the exploitation of her/his labor. Trade unions can provide that structure. However, many unions are male-dominated, male-oriented and indifferent to the demands and needs of women workers. Many view solidarity and organization in terms of male workers, and do not recognize women's integral place in the labor force. We investigate the relationship of unions and women workers in order to understand the labor movement's perpetuation of sexism. With this understanding, we can begin to make the fundamental changes which would make unions more responsive to women and minorities.



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Clovis, New Mexico, March, 1943. Jack Delano

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# The Woman Worker:

## Who was she ?

Women employed during the war years faced a paradox resulting from only a partial fulfillment of feminist expectations of equality. Economic independence was considered to be "... a more accurate measure of female freedom"<sup>10</sup> than the attainment of the right to vote. The increased economic participation of women in the work force, dramatically illustrated during World War II, was perceived to be a major step towards the realization of an egalitarian society. However, this material basis for economic independence developed within a hierarchical society which had been nurtured on women's social, political and economic dependence.

Women workers were victimized by myths concerning women's nature, and were subjected to standards which promoted inequality in wages, promotions, job classifications, and opportunities for upward mobility. The reluctant acceptance of women's right to work aborted the efforts to integrate women into the work force.

By 1944, married women comprised almost half of the female labor force, and that proportion has been rising since then.<sup>11</sup> Despite this increase, few accommodations were made for women's dual responsibilities in the home and at the workplace. Child care was minimal. At its peak in 1945, the Lanham Act, which allowed federal funds to be used for the construction and operation of day care centers, provided care for only 100,000 children (a mere 10% of those needing day care).<sup>12</sup> Although the number of working women with children was steadily increasing, federal funding for child care was terminated on March 1, 1946, because, according to the Federal Works Administration, the war emergency had ended.<sup>13</sup> Needless to say, this declaration did not change the double 9

load of the working wife or the woman who was head of the household. During the war, 12% of single women, 11% of married women, and 34% of women widowed or divorced were the sole wage earners in their family groups.<sup>14</sup> Little effort was exerted during the war to improve public transportation, or to keep the stores and laundries open after working hours. After the war, less consideration was given to the needs of working wives or women who were heads of households.

Although women's sphere was expanding, traditional attitudes about social, economic and sexual roles failed to change correspondingly. This prevented women's economic contribution from resulting in many tangible or long term changes in the lives of working women. In the eyes of government, labor, business and the media, the woman worker was perceived to be marginal to the labor force, and was considered merely a temporary solution created to meet the needs of a wartime economy.

Her image as Rosie the Riveter helped validate this assumption. The female laborer was considered primarily as a woman uprooted from her home and family and placed in the unfamiliar environment of the workplace. Yet for the duration of the war, Rosie was lauded for her patriotic commitment to her war job. In her coveralls, with her head protected by a bandana, she became the symbol of true womanhood. Her new status resulted from a temporary response to the war emergency. When the war ended, Rosie lost her calling, her name lost its ring, and she was forced to revert unobtrusively to her pre-war status.

However, her pre-war status was not what it was assumed to be. The newly-employed women who were expected to rivet while the war raged and then acquiescingly return to their womanly role of homemaker actually composed less than one fourth of the female labor force. The scope of Rosie's domain was clearly exaggerated.

Even Frances Perkins, Secretary of Labor during the (Franklin D.) Roosevelt Administration reinforced the myth. In 1944, she anticipated that, ". . . many women now at work will leave their jobs to retire, to go back to school, or  
10 return to the homes they left for patriotic reasons."<sup>15</sup> How-

ever, hers was not the only view. As early as 1943, there was a growing realization that the actual number of women who would leave the work force was a mere fraction of what had been expected. The situation became complex. How would a peacetime economy employ sixty million people, an increase of fifteen million workers from the 1939 total of 44.7 million?<sup>16</sup>

The woman worker as depicted by Frances Perkins was likely to be a "middle class" woman who possessed the economic status to allow her the option of working. She entered the work force in response to a national emergency, and although many intended to remain employed, she could afford the discomfort if she was separated from her war job after VJ Day.

Her economic contribution was helpful, but not essential to the family's survival. She was a manifestation of the myth, but did not represent a true cross section of the female working population. Statistics reveal that 84% of American workingwomen in 1944 and 1945 were employed because of economic necessity and were self-supporting and/or financially responsible for other members of their family. The other 16% were more typical of the "middle class" woman's position: 8% worked for special reasons such as uplifting their standard of living, assisting with their children's education, or contributing to the purchase of a new home. The remaining 8%, according to a Women's Bureau survey, wished to remain in the labor force because they liked working, or appreciated bringing in their own income.<sup>17</sup>

The brutal paradox of the Rosie The Riveter myth, however, is seen in the statistics concerning women who did not fit the societal image of the patriotic wife who had an automatic livelihood when her man came home: 96% of all single women, 98% of women widowed or divorced, and 57% of married women seriously needed their pre-war, war and post war jobs.<sup>18</sup>

The majority of employed women accepted work as a normal part of their everyday existence. Their entrance into the munitions industries composed only one stage of their working lives and was precipitated by war-encouraged changes in 11

women's employment. A 1945 Women's Bureau survey of ten selected war manufacturing towns indicated that 29% of women working in 1944 were employed between five and ten years.<sup>19</sup> Of the 19.5 million women gainfully employed in 1945, 15.9 million were working before the war mobilization.<sup>20</sup> It is clear that the influx of women into the war industries was largely the transfer of positions rather than the entrance of a new female labor supply.

Female service, sales and manufacturing jobs were abandoned in large numbers as women rushed to fill the wartime labor shortage resulting from job vacancies created by men entering the armed forces, and an expansion of armament manufacturing. This need for women workers was unprecedented. According to Mary Anderson, Director of the Women's Bureau, in a speech presented in 1942, "Almost overnight, women were reclassified by industrialists from marginal to a basic labor supply for munitions making."<sup>21</sup>

From 1940 to 1944, the employment of women in manufacturing increased over 140%.<sup>22</sup> The war allowed Black women an entrance into manufacturing, and the number of Black female industrial workers increased from 6.5% in 1940 to 18% in 1944. However, this was not the only war-precipitated change in the occupational mobility of Black women. In 1940, 70% of Black women in the labor force were employed in the service industries, the majority domestics. In 1944, 62.5% of Black women were service employees. Although this represented only a 7.8% decrease, the change was significant. There was a 15.3% decrease in the concentration of Black women in domestic work while, on the other hand, the percentage of Black females in personal service jobs, such as waitresses or beauticians, climbed in 7.5%: in 1940, 10.4% of Black women workers were employed in personal service jobs: in 1944, the amount increased to 17.9%. The number of Black women farm workers also declined during these years: in 1940, 16% were farm workers and in 1944, employment had decreased to 8.1%.<sup>23</sup> However, this did not mean that racial prejudice and discrimination had subsided, or that Black women made permanent inroads into higher-paying, higher-status jobs.

12 As expected, most of the occupational changes were tem-

porary, and the majority of Black women were separated from their employment during the reconversion to the levels of peacetime production. These women out of “. . . economic need were forced back into domestic and other service jobs.”<sup>24</sup>

Although wartime patriotism may have been a factor, the predominant reason why women, Black and white, entered war industries, was economic. War-related employment paid better than their pre-war “female” employment.

Just as the myth misrepresented women’s position in the labor force, so too did it cloud the issue of employment for women following the war. Recognizing the real economic needs and responsibilities of women working during the war, it should also come as no surprise that although 2.25 million women left work and one million were laid off between September 1945 and November 1964, only 600,000 women actually left the work force. The remaining 2.75 million women were re-employed in lower paid, lower status jobs during that same year.<sup>25</sup> Women may have left their jobs following the war, but they did not leave the labor force for long. Most eventually were re-employed in the service and clerical sectors.

## FULL EMPLOYMENT

Women’s need to remain employed was supported by a number of public figures including Mary Anderson of the Women’s Bureau. In an article published as part of the Newsweek Club Bureau’s 1944 issue, *American Women in the Post War World*, she wrote,

*Those post war planners who casually dismiss the problems of women workers on the basis that “they will return to the home” after the war, show a deplorable lack of realism . . . Certainly no one believes that women should be employed at the expense of ex-servicemen, but this should not preclude an understanding of and realistic approach to the post war employment of women.*

Anderson represented the viewpoint that a government-sponsored full-employment program was essential to accommodate a peacetime labor force of sixty million.

Full employment was the issue of the day, and community and labor leaders, business and government vocalized their interpretations of the concept. In 1945, Congress began proceedings on a bill known as the Full Employment Bill of 1945, S. 380. The Bill advocated government responsibility to provide ". . . useful employment opportunities . . . for those able, willing and seeking work . . ."27 However, women's right to work was conspicuously absent. To the drafters of the legislation, full employment was the theoretical guarantee of on job with an adequate salary for one head of each household. It is important to note, however, that this definition of "full employment" did not include the eradication of unemployment, and intentionally allowed for some level of unemployment. In the one mention of women on the Senate floor, Senator Wheeler further clarified the concept of full employment,

*Take the housewife, for instance, who ought to be at home taking care of her children or taking care of the home. She may want to have part time work in order to make a little money. We cannot guarantee work to such a woman . . ."*28

In a narrow and misconstrued view of the economic needs of women, the Senate failed to address the application of the concept of full employment. And it was not as if these Congresspeople were unaware.

Mrs. J.B. Caulkins, President of the Y.W.C.A., was present at the Hearings for S. 380. Although she was one of seventy-two persons who addressed the Senate, her testimony was the only one concerned with the post-war employment situation for women workers. Her position was clear and irrefutable.

*We (Y.W.C.A.) support this bill . . . because anything less than full employment holds danger for thousands of women and members of minority groups. We think one of the results of a congress-*

sional failure to promote full employment would be to engender bitter rivalries for whatever jobs are available—men against women, veterans against nonveterans, whites against Negroes.<sup>29</sup>

To counter the viewpoint that all women potentially had a husband to support them, she declared,

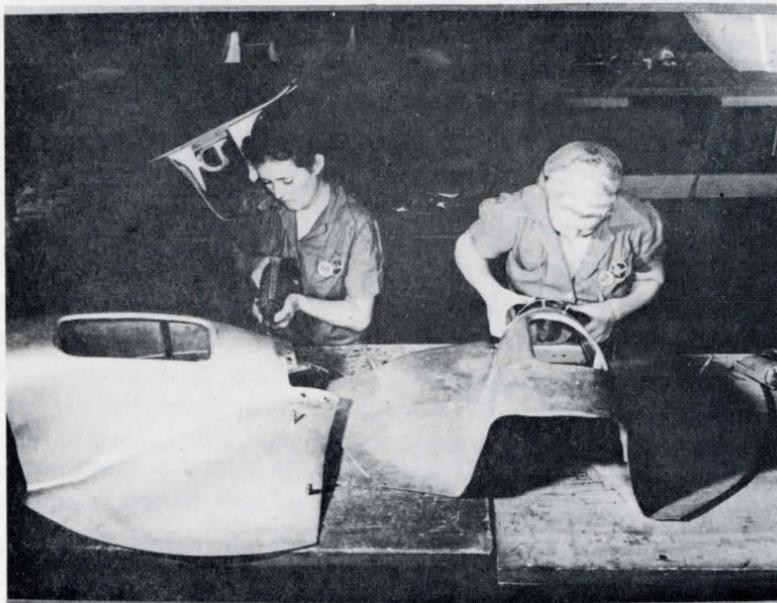
*The general assumption . . . is that married women will automatically return to their homes and that most unmarried women will soon marry . . .*"

However, "simple arithmetic" proved this wrong.

*If every single male in the nation marries, there will still be 3,000,000 women left without the prospect of marriage.*<sup>30</sup>

Full employment remained only one factor within the

Nashville, Tennessee, August, 1942. Jack Delano



larger predicament confronting the woman worker in the post-war era. Beginning in 1944, this concern received recognition in pamphlets, reports, speeches, resolutions and conferences devoted to resolving the womanpower crisis. Organizations, as well as government bureaus, such as: the War Policy Board, the Women's Bureau, the Y.W.C.A., the National Women's Trade Union League, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (C.I.O.) and the American Federation of Labor (A.F.L.) expressed concern for the working woman's economic stability following demobilization. These influential bodies challenged the assumption that women were merely temporary war workers. They offered suggestions, theories, policies and propositions showing how to maintain women in the labor force, and equitably ease the turmoil of reconversion. They recognized that the woman's working day encompassed more than her eight to ten hours at the plant, and perceived that special accommodations enacted on a nation-wide scale were necessary to maintain the woman—as worker, homemaker, wife and mother—in the labor force.

Adequate child care, shopping, laundry, transportation and medical services were among programs which had the potential of resolving employment-related problems facing women workers. However, these programs were offered as proposals on a purely advisory basis and were never implemented. To attempt to tackle the post-war employment crisis for women workers, people in positions of power and workers would have to accept the premise that all women, married or single, had an equal right and opportunity for satisfying and remunerative employment. In 1944, this country declined to make that move.

## THE UNION'S RESPONSE

In their official capacities representing the interests of women workers, the C.I.O., National Women's Trade Union League and the U.A.W. at least began to translate their concerns into working programs.

On January 14 and 15 of 1944, the C.I.O. sponsored a  
16 conference devoted to the issue of full employment in the

post-war years. One of the many topics covered was the job situation for women. Ruth Young of the C.I.O. affiliated United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America, delivered a talk stressing women's right to a job, and the government's responsibility to create conditions enabling women to work. She spoke of the particular problems of women workers which she felt were too massive to be solved solely through the efforts of the working woman and her union:

*Poor housing, refusal of housing to single women, lack of child care facilities, lack of recreational facilities, housekeeping problems, the need for community kitchens and packaged hot meals, problems of pregnant women and maternity leaves, as well as the general questions of poor transportation, lack of proper medical care, and discrimination against Negro women and older women . . .*"<sup>31</sup>

Young declared that these were matters to be tackled by the community under the leadership and guidance of its government agencies.

Young's presentation was a curious departure from the concept of the union as parent-body, offering security, protection and representation. The union she represented was one of the most powerful and radical unions within the C.I.O. Aside from the U.A.W., the United Electrical Workers had the most women members during the war years, and rivaled the U.A.W. in its articulation of problems and conditions of women workers. Yet she called for government to continue where the union left off to enact provisions to ensure equality of wages and opportunity, and government support of maternity, child care and mother's pensions. She addressed this issue which reoccurred at U.A.W. debates and conventions during the post-war years: who has the responsibility for protecting the rights of women workers, the government or the union? In opposition to Young's stance, the U.A.W. women saw dual responsibility as a means of avoiding responsibility, especially if the union had not exerted its full efforts in protecting the rights and status of

its female members.

The National Women's Trade Union League, a cross-class organization founded in 1903 to assist working women in unionization and the improvement of the conditions they faced as wage earners, took a different approach to the problem. In 1944, they published a pamphlet "Action Needed: Post War Jobs for Women" which stressed union participation and education as the means towards the goal of full employment for women. Taking a more traditional approach, the N.W.T.U.L. stated that full employment could be achieved by increasing job opportunities, raising wages, lessening the workday, and granting women equal seniority. They believed this could be accomplished via the active participation of women in union affairs. An organization with its heyday in the first two decades of the twentieth century, the N.W.T.U.L. recollected the similiar removal of women from the workforce following the first World War. They predicted that women workers in 1944 faced the same fears of unemployment. Anticipating this struggle, the N.W.T.U.L. felt it was necessary to mount the defensive to insure that history not repeat itself.

The U.A.W. aligned itself with the N.W.T.U.L. in stressing the need for women's participation in union affairs. A pamphlet entitled "It's Your Union, Sister" explained the principles of trade unionism, and recalled the accomplishments of the U.A.W. It appealed to women to actively partake in union activities and responsibilities, enticing them with principles of equality and the history of non-discrimination within the U.A.W.

In theory, the words of the N.W.T.U.L. and the U.A.W. could lead towards progress and equality. However, this proved not to be the case. If a union's principles, no matter how progressive, are not enforced, they are worth little. If a union's membership fails to concretely work for the rights of women workers, then the union itself has abandoned women.

However, it took more than pamphlets to interest women in U.A.W. affairs. The U.A.W. leadership perceived this lack of trade union spirit to be a serious problem, and in the

spring of 1944, established a Women's Bureau as part of the International's War Policy Division. The Bureau addressed itself to the priorities of women workers and the interests of trade unionism. It was designed to be an advisory board to consider in-plant problems such as seniority, safety standards and maternity leaves, and such secondary concerns as inadequate child care, shopping, laundry and transportation services. Secondly, the Bureau sought to investigate the indifference of women to union affairs, and hoped to encourage women to become active U.A.W. members.

This lack of union participation is difficult to understand in a city like Detroit where 51% of women working were employed before the war, and 78% intended to continue working when the war ended.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, 65% of Detroit workingwomen were between the ages of 20 and 39, thus they were old enough to recollect the great U.A.W. organizing drives of the late thirties. If they were married, it was possible that their husbands were members of the U.A.W., or the women themselves may have held memberships in the U.A.W.'s active women's auxiliaries.

An explanation may be found by examining women's dual role as worker and as homemaker. Wage earning constituted only one of women's many daily responsibilities and it was not given primacy in their lives. Unlike male workers, women workers were expected to work an eight to ten hour day and then return home to an additional full time unpaid job, cooking, cleaning, grocery shopping, doing dishes and laundry, taking care of children, etc. Women in the labor force often worked in hostile and indifferent environments where their family and home responsibilities were not acknowledged and their positions in the labor force were considered marginal and expendable.

Most women, regardless of the number of years spent in the labor force, were not considered workers. Social mores and expectations enforced the stereotype of woman as housewife, an unpaid worker, irrespective of what she actually did each day. Most women themselves also considered their primary vocation to be that of wife and mother. This tendency to relegate a lower and perhaps temporary status to wage 19

earning responsibilities was instrumental in preventing women from developing a self-consciousness as workers. Women's work was not considered to have the same degree of importance as the jobs which made "breadwinners" of their husbands, sons and brothers.

Even if she could become involved in the union, the woman laborer was likely to be too busy with home and family responsibilities to attend meetings which were usually held during the hours which she had to spend cooking, cleaning or shopping. Most of the meetings were dominated by men accustomed to and experienced in meeting protocol. The sessions were presumably dull, and they rarely addressed issues of immediate concern to the woman worker.

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## Post-War Layoffs

Even where women were union members, organized labor was unable to prevent the massive layoffs occurring at the end of World War II. In the immediate post-war period, the layoffs were common, and 60% of all workers separated from their employment were women.<sup>34</sup> There are numerous examples of this injustice. In 1944, women composed 42% of the workforce in aircraft parts plants and were 60% of those laid off; in aircraft engine plants, women were 40% of the employees and 86% of the layoffs; and in shell and gun plants, women were 26% of the operatives and 61% laid off.<sup>35</sup>

In the same year, prior to the majority of demobilization layoffs, the list continues . . .<sup>36</sup>

Hoover Company; of 65 workers laid off, 55 were women  
Metal Stamping Job Shop; 98% of layoffs were women  
Aluminum Company of Ames; 50% of layoffs were women  
American Brake and Block; 90% of layoffs were women  
American Leather Products; 100% of layoffs were women

Asbestos Manufacturing Company; 100% of layoffs were women.

Baker Roulang Company; 100% of layoffs were women and in 1945, 52% of workers laid off at Willow Run were women.<sup>37</sup>

From 1943 to 1946, the number of women in manufacturing dropped considerably. The following figures illustrate the situation in Detroit.

	<i>Detroit</i>
<i>Year</i>	<i>Women in Manufacturing</i>
1940	44,064
1942	71,000
1943, November	259,000
1945, after VE Day	124,000
1945, after VJ Day	66,900
1946, February	63,300

As of February of 1946, 60,000 Detroit women were unemployed.<sup>38</sup> In the country as a whole, "something over half a million women were unemployed."<sup>39</sup> Although much of this unemployment was the direct result of layoffs, the figures of 60,000 and one-half million are somewhat misleading. People listed in the unemployment statistics were only those who were actively seeking employment. It did not include those women who desired work after leaving the labor force for a short time after the war, or housewives and students who had never been employed. Many of the unemployed women refused re-employment in the available lower status female industries as the drop in wages was substantial. According to a Woman's Bureau survey, women in war plants in the Detroit area received an average of \$40.35 per week, and those in consumer manufacturing were paid an average of \$28.75. Those women employed in Detroit retail stores, hotels and laundries averaged \$24.50 per week.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, employment opportunities for some women were limited because of an inability to relocate due to poor transportation, and family responsibilities. Women with young children were frequently unable to work the second or third shift at

a plant.

The large number of women seeking and deserving unemployment compensation was viewed unfavorably by management. It was believed that women were not economically dependent upon their jobs, and therefore, were unjustifiably attempting to collect their unemployment checks. Most women, according to the myths, had husbands who could support and provide for them. In a Detroit Free Press article of February 3, 1945, spokespersons for management accused women workers of refusing jobs because they preferred to stay home and collect unemployment from the state. Management claimed that women “. . . are not dependent upon their jobs for support . . .” and used reasons such as wages, transportation and family responsibilities as loopholes to “milk” unemployment compensation funds.

Compensation regulations sometimes were used to prevent women from obtaining a job and receiving their weekly checks. In an oral history interview, John K. McDaniel recalled the situation at his local at the Packard plant.

*. . . We had an attorney for the company that was later cited by the unemployment compensation people as being fraudulent . . . He used to have a standard procedure. He would have the record card of the woman indicating how many children she had . . . They would call them (the women) down to the unemployment on a hearing because of her denial of unemployment insurance. He would look and see that she had four or five children and he would say, “Would you take a job now? We might have one on the midnight shift.” She would say, “No, I cannot work midnights.” And as a result he would cancel her out . . . Finally all of the women went by the way because of the seniority structure of the plant and the lack of hiring the women enmasse . . .<sup>41</sup>*

The large percentage of women workers separated from employment was detrimental to the survival of women in  
22 the workforce. Victor Reuther, Assistant Director of the

War Policy Division of the U.A.W. expressed his concern in a private letter to his brother Walter on March 16, 1944.

*It seems most employers are generally agreed that a line should be drawn probably at the date of Pearl Harbor, and that all veterans with no previous work experience should be given priority in employment as against those hired in war industries since Pearl Harbor . . . I think this is a very dangerous approach for the union to take, particularly in Pontiac, where large numbers of negroes have been upgraded or integrated into plants, the bulk of whom as well as many women, will be thrown out of work as a result of such an agreement.<sup>43</sup>*

This situation was damaging to the seniority system developed to protect the rights of all union members. The seniority system, if enacted without discrimination, could have been instrumental in preserving the particularly precarious employment status of women and minorities. Seniority is the guarantee of retaining one's job status on the basis of length of employment. It protects the union member from layoffs resulting from the arbitrary discretion of management on the basis of personal likes or dislikes, sex, race, creed, religion or marital status. However this theoretical equality was recklessly violated by the establishment of separate seniority lists for women and men. These separate lists enabled management to lay women off first and recall them last.

The complications that arose were the result of reconversion to a peacetime economy and the subsequent reduction in the labor force, the belief that women were temporary workers, and the varied interpretations of the Selective Service Act. This Act provided for the guaranteed re-employment of returning veterans. In some plants, the Act was interpreted to imply that workers who left the job to join the military accumulated seniority while performing their patriotic duties, while others believed that the Act provided for ". . . the re-employment of *all* servicemen regardless of their relative seniority standing in the plant."<sup>43</sup>

The latter interpretation was a special source of difficulty as it was questionable that industry could provide jobs for all servicemen with work experience let alone those who had not worked prior to entering the military service.

The economy could not provide employment for all returning veterans, and was unable and unwilling to preserve the jobs of the four million women who entered the wartime workforce. Even the 15.9 million women employed before 1941 were in danger of losing their work. When a question of priorities arose, long-held prejudices mitigated against women receiving jobs.

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# Discriminatory Practices

It does not appear that the severity of this situation was understood at the local level. In 1944, the Women's Bureau of the U.A.W. prepared a questionnaire designed to determine the extent of sex-based discrimination in U.A.W. organized plants. The questionnaire, sent to every local, did not produce the kind of answers that would have indicated an awareness of the subtleties of discrimination. In many cases, it appeared that the respondent (usually the secretary or president of the local) did not understand the question, was not familiar with the situation of his female members, or did not care. Or perhaps the correct questions were not asked.

It does seem probable that the officer of a local would be reluctant to give an affirmative response to a question which read, "Is there any discrimination in wage rates between male and female workers?" As each local retained some autonomy in negotiating contracts, such an answer would have implied prejudice and personal responsibility. If the question had been phrased differently, perhaps inquiring the wage scales that both male and female employees received, the answers

24 may have portrayed a more accurate picture. How many

union members would readily admit that, yes, their local knowingly discriminated against women?

Although there were approximately 450 locals in existence in 1944, the U.A.W. Archives at Wayne State University contained only 168 responses to the questionnaire. It could be assumed, with the exception of those questionnaires which were lost or misplaced, that only between one-third to one-half of the locals bothered to reply. And not even those conscientious enough to respond answered all of the questions. Of the 168 locals, some of them representing as many as 12,000 females, only 22 declared they had established women's committees, and a mere 14 reported having a committee concerned with child care. When reporting discrimination within the workplace, only 62 respondents admitted sex-based job classifications, 40 allowed a sex-based differential in wages, 24 claimed separate seniority lists, and according to the survey, only 18 plants laid off large numbers of women workers.

From the replies received, one might deduce that there was little discrimination emanating from the U.A.W.-unionized plants. However, the facts differ. A U.A.W./General Motors contract sent to many locals for ratification in 1944 included sex-based job and seniority classifications. The resolutions passed at subsequent conferences, and the letters and grievances received from women workers indicate that there was still more substantial discrimination tolerated by the U.A.W. Moreover, the many publications of the U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau and the U.A.W. which gave primacy to the "equal pay for equal work" campaign demonstrate the proliferation of the "less-than-equal" practices regarding women workers.

Most locals did not know how to relate to the female members. They did not understand the peculiar situation of women in war plants, and when women did not show interest in the union, the local abandoned them. Perhaps the feelings of many of the local representatives contacted coincided with those of Gerald E. Knoll, Recording Secretary of Local 87 who explained why he did not respond to the questionnaire,

. . . *We feel that being there are so few women*

*workers in our local, and the few being employed are just for the duration (of the War) that it is unimportant. (underlining mine)<sup>44</sup>*

With that, he dismissed the questionnaire, and the issue.

In spite of the survey's findings, R.J. Thomas, President of the U.A.W. until 1946, recognized that there were inequities resulting from the misuse of the seniority system. In November of 1944, he sought to remedy the situation by sending letters to all U.A.W. officers and regional directors advising them to review local contracts for seniority provisions and other clauses which could be discriminatory to women workers. He cited several examples of clauses which illustrated the breadth of sex discrimination. By reprinting a sample clause, one can understand the severity of the situation:

*Federal Mogul Corporation, Local 202, "There shall be separate and non-interchangeable seniority lists for men and women in accordance with their intra-plant seniority. Provided, however, that all female employees hired subsequent to July 1, 1942, shall be placed on a special seniority list and shall be considered as male replacements and as having been hired solely because of the shortage of male labor, and their tenure of employment shall be limited to the duration of the war, or as soon thereafter as they can be replaced by former male employees or other male applicants. In all cases of lay-offs due to the above reason, seniority provisions shall apply."*<sup>45</sup>

Thomas's letter produced few results. Almost one year later, on September 26, 1945, he sent a directive to all local union presidents and international representatives urging them to enforce seniority protection for women workers. In this more strongly worded letter, he condemned the U.A.W. locals for not enforcing and protecting the rights of women workers. According to Thomas, layoffs were continuing and management appeared to be forcing women out of the plants. He accused the locals of partial responsibility because of their  
26 laxness and acquiescence to company policies. He con-

demned the locals for encouraging union disunity through the attitude toward women. He cited an example of unexcusable harassment,

*In one case, an entire department stopped working in protest when a woman was placed in the department on a job in line with her seniority and which she could perform.*<sup>46</sup>

In a time of discrimination on all fronts against women workers, Thomas stated that the International's position against discrimination was "clear and unequivocal". He urged compliance of the locals through: checking seniority lists carefully and insisting that management adhere to them; filing and following up on grievances; watching seniority lists when workers are rehired; and investigating the circumstances when management claimed a job could not be performed by a woman.

By all outward appearances, the International office of the U.A.W. was concerned about the rights and welfare of their female constituency. In 1944, the U.A.W. Women's Bureau held a conference attended by 150 delegates representing the 300,000 female members of the U.A.W. The convention passed a number of resolutions focused on the treatment of women workers at U.A.W.-affiliated plants. Their demands were: equality at the workplace; improved and expanded in-plant and out-of-plant services; and "the right and opportunity for decent jobs at good money" for women through the implementation of full employment. The convention charged that

*. . . management is engaging in a vicious and deliberate campaign to induce women to quit by transferring them from one department to another, by assigning women the least desirable jobs, and by an unceasing psychological drive to harass women out of the plants.*<sup>47</sup>

and urged the International Executive Board of the U.A.W. to protect the seniority rights of women workers by reviewing U.A.W. contracts for discriminatory clauses and provi- 27

sions. Despite its unwieldy responsibilities, the I.E.B. was empowered only to make recommendations and suggest improvements in individual contracts and did not have the power of enforcement.

The resolutions were sound, and they enabled the U.A.W. to maintain its progressive image, but, in reality, little was done to advance the cause of women workers. As Delegate Walker from local 927 inquired at the International Convention in 1946,

*. . . I should like to ask what happened to all the wonderful resolutions we passed at the Woman's Conference. They have never been executed.*<sup>48</sup> 48

In 1946 at the International Convention, the Fair Practices Department established to combat racial and sexual discrimination of U.A.W. members, offered a resolution entitled, "Protection of Women's Rights in the Auto Industry". It was a strong statement, unequivocally declaring union responsibility for protecting the position of women workers. It was prepared in the aftermath of a controversy in which union members, particularly the women delegates, refused to endorse a resolution in support of government responsibility for women workers. They claimed that by adopting that resolution, the U.A.W. was passing the buck, and not living up to its responsibilities to its female constituency. As Delegate Biscay, Local 12, contended,

*We take their dollar, we take their dues. We take them in and give them the obligation just the same as men and then when it comes their turn to get laid off, or when management decides that, then we just kind of step aside . . . It's pretty near time we put in the resolution something to implement it or something to get some action on it.*<sup>49</sup>

The new resolution reprinted in full was an uncompromising affirmation of support for women workers. It was action-oriented and demanded that a non-discrimination clause be included in local contracts. Again, there was no penalty for  
28 non-inclusion and, as the evidence that follows indicates,

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PROJECT**



many locals' officers and membership did not support the principles adopted at the International conventions, and actively, openly, and at times in collaboration with management, discriminated against women workers.

Without the "teeth" to enforce the International's recommendations, many locals continued to negotiate contracts which openly discriminated against women workers. War-time contract provisions such as the one negotiated between H.A. Douglas Manufacturing Company and Local 822 were not uncommon,

*In cases where women are presently employed on jobs which are defined as a man's job and where a woman is entitled to a man's pay, it is agreed that as soon as the labor supply becomes adequate men will be placed on these jobs without regard to seniority and that women will continue to maintain seniority separate and apart from men as provided elsewhere in the contract.*<sup>50</sup>

Even after the war, contract discrimination persisted. As late as 1951, Florence Butcher, steward of Local 750, Marion Ohio, filed an appeal on behalf of approximately thirty employees who were laid off when, according to a contract supplemental agreement, their jobs were reclassified to be male jobs. This process of reclassification was discriminatory, and prevented women from maintaining plant-wide seniority.

According to the Appeals Committee of Region 2-B who heard their case, the women ". . . were dealt a serious injustice since their inability to return to work is brought about not by a lack of seniority but by the manipulation of jobs which deprive them of employment."<sup>51</sup>

Although these are only two examples of contract provisions, the constant references to discrimination in letters to and from the U.A.W. Women's Bureau, U.A.W. Fair Practices and Anti-Discrimination Department Quarterly Reports, grievances and appeals cases, lead one to assume that the unequal treatment that women workers faced was widespread.

Discrimination was most vividly illustrated by the locals' membership and leadership irresponsibility in upholding seniority rights. The position of women and Blacks within

the factories was constantly threatened by the arbitrary use of sex and race as a justification for a job reclassification or layoff. The layoffs were frequent, many resulting from the abuse of seniority rights and were intentionally designed to eliminate women and Blacks from the workforce.

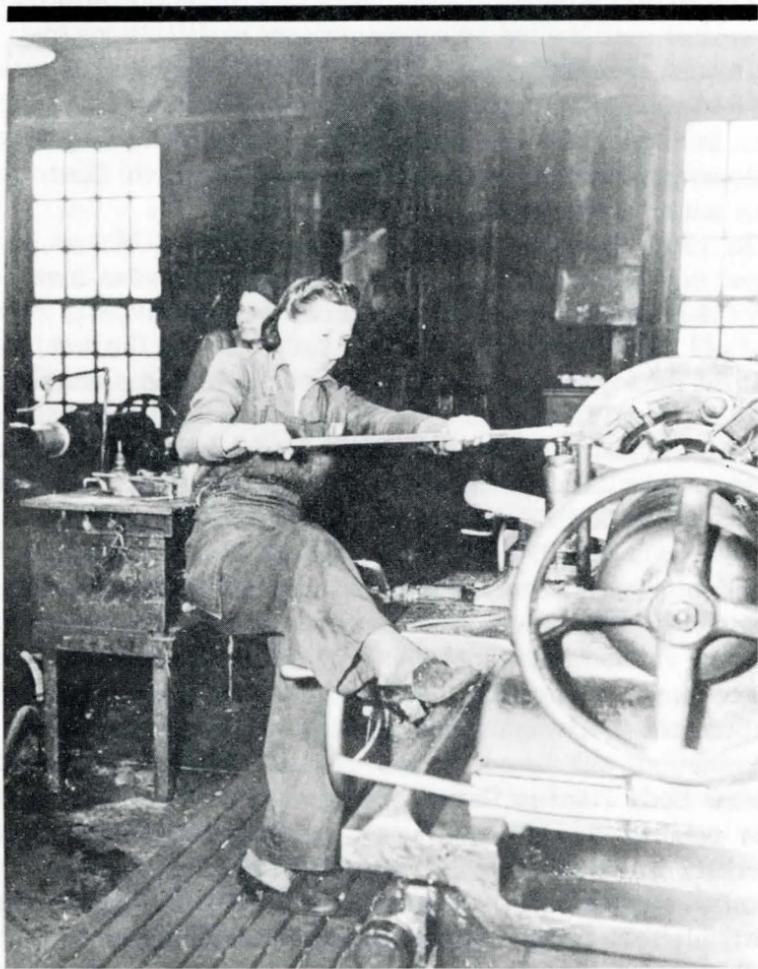
There were many reasons behind these layoffs, the most substantial being the result of reconversion from a war to peacetime economy. However, the question here is not why these layoffs occurred, but how and why women bore the brunt of this transformation. Seniority protection afforded to women was limited by supplementary qualifications specific to one sex. Many times these additional restrictions were created as a temporary solution to the problem of keeping men in and women out when layoffs became necessary. The following accounts are selected examples which illustrate how seniority was used against women.

In 1947, Pontiac Motors Division of General Motors engaged in a wholesale layoff of their female employees. Inventing the excuse that women as a group were inefficient, they laid off 150 women within a few weeks prior to the completion of their probationary period. General Motors then used men recruited from outside of Michigan to fill their jobs. To ameliorate this injustice, Local 653 filed a grievance and the women were later reinstated on the grounds that ". . . the rights of an individual are not superceded when they are treated as a class."<sup>52</sup> Although General Motor's strategy of terminating employment immediately before an employee completes probation failed, the tactic remained a means to prevent women and minorities from attaining enough seniority to remain employed.

Sometimes it was difficult to determine whether the discrimination was based on sex or race. At the Fleetwood Fisher Body Plant in Detroit, Black women were laid off and not recalled due to a contract provision stipulating that workers would forfeit their seniority rights if they were not recalled within a certain period of time. Although in this particular case, white women were hired while Black women with seniority were not recalled, the tactic of assigning an expiration date for the use of seniority was not infrequently

used to prevent women, Black and white, from reinstatement following a layoff.<sup>53</sup>

A third device used was the reclassification of jobs according to sex as a means to phase women out of a plant. In January of 1952, eight women were laid off from the Hudson Motor Car Company when their jobs were designated "male" jobs. This reclassification of jobs provided the justification for laying off women according to a separate seniority list which allowed for layoffs of women



with less than eight years' seniority. This complaint of discrimination was reported by Nettie Bennett, one of the terminated employees.

The Nettie Bennett case is particularly significant because of its many violations of the International's principle of non-discrimination. An August 1952 letter from Claude E. Bland, Recording Secretary of Bennett's local, Local 154, to Richard Gosser, Vice President of the U.A.W., revealed that a decision was made at Local 154's General Assembly authorizing that ". . . a general leveling off of females (to) be conducted at once . . ." <sup>54</sup> Through this act, Hudson Motor Car Company became one of the many companies which systematically eliminated women from their employee rolls. The eight women protested this act in a hearing before the Executive Board of Local 154 which ordered the women to be reinstated to their former jobs. However, when the women were finally recalled, they were not returned to their old positions, but rather placed at the scuff plate job, an operation which Bennett claimed ". . . the majority of women could not do . . ." <sup>55</sup> She claimed that the local and management realized that women were unable to do that work and laid them off after a two-week trial period. Following this incident, Johnnie Kallos, the Chief Steward, refused to place the women back at their former jobs which they could perform.

Furthermore, one of the women accused Kallos of going out of his way to eliminate women from the workforce. Grace Curcuri presented written testimony declaring that ". . . the scuff plate job . . . was the easiest job I ever had . . . But since I refuse to go out with our Chief Steward Johnnie Kallos . . . (he) tells me I would never get called back at Hudson Motor as long as he is Chief Steward." <sup>56</sup>

Nina Fuston Maynard also reported harassment by Johnnie Kallos. ". . . I had to take a leave (pregnancy) because he took my job. Then he had the gall to walk up and down the line with his stomach stuck out pretending he was me on the job." <sup>57</sup>

This prejudice against women working prevailed. Many women were denied the dignity of being valued or de-valued according to their work record, performance, skill, or capa- 33

bility. Instead, they were observed first as women and lastly as wage earners.

Although Kallos' behavior toward women may have been extreme, his neglect in upholding U.A.W.-guaranteed rights of women members mirrored the situation occurring in a number of plants. Many shop stewards ignored inequities, failed to process grievances, carry out mandates, or support women and minorities in labor-management disputes. In some cases even the local's membership voted on policies which were directly contrary to U.A.W. guidelines. In 1952, Carolyn Systema, Vera Rietman, Marilyn Souter and Arlene Schuelke charged Local 206 with denying their grievance which stated that they were laid off because of their marital status. Local 206's membership, composed of five thousand men and one hundred women overturned a decision between the bargaining committee of the local and management to rescind this policy and comply with the U.A.W. guidelines. The local passed a motion calling for the forced resignation of any woman employee who marries.<sup>58</sup> *In the case of Evelyn R. Peters, Nellie G. Keltner, Julia M. Mikelonis and Lora Edmondson of Detroit Local 666, female union members were punished by the Local for being victims of discrimination. In January of 1947, these four women were suspended from the Local for working at a man's job while accepting woman's pay.*

The Local, rather than upholding women's right to equal pay for equal work, and submitting a grievance to that effect, suspended the women after they were transferred to jobs which should have received a higher rate of pay. According to Lora Edmondson's letter to George F. Addes, Secretary Treasurer of the International, "On November 21, 1946, I was asked by my foreman to take a job as hour tester on a new line at Sparks, Withington Company, where I have been employed for 22 years. At 10:00 the same day . . . I was asked by the Steward to sign a grievance asking man's pay for a man's job, which I readily signed . . . The next day, November 22, 1946, I again was asked to sign a grievance, the Steward saying the first one was torn up. The second one I also signed. At a meeting on November 26, 1946 of Local 666

at the request of the Committee and passed by the body, I was temporarily suspended for failure to sign the grievance by the stipulated time—7:30 a.m. when I wasn't put on the job until a few minutes before 10 o'clock . . . On December 9, 1946 I was notified to appear for trial before a trial board . . . charging me with misconduct unbecoming a union member for excepting (accepting) a man's job without man's pay and not signing a grievance to that affect. I had signed two grievances, one before I started on the job. At a meeting of Local 666 . . . I was given a permanent suspension from all locals of the UAW-CIO of American for misconduct unbecoming a union member . . . ”<sup>59</sup>

When a local's officers and membership demonstrate their indifference, if not contempt, for the grievances particular to women workers, the women find they stand alone. The truth becomes painfully clear. Grievance machinery is effective only when utilized, and is beneficial only when exercised without prejudice. Women workers are protected by their union only when the union, on local and international levels, chooses to uphold their rights. And this choice becomes contingent on a personal interpretation of what constitutes discrimination, and how the situation could be remedied. Furthermore, an injustice is appealed only if the grievance committee, the U.A.W. Women's Bureau, Fair Practices and Anti-Discrimination Department, and/or Secretary of the International have the time and inclination to assist in the matter. From examining the following letter, it appears that many attempts to ameliorate discrimination were thwarted at their beginning stages. This letter is a form letter; it is not known how many copies were mailed.

*Dear Member:*

*In view of the fact that a great number of the female employees involved in the writing of grievances are laid off at the present time we are returning yours by mail.*

*We, of the Grievance Committee, are sending you a copy of your answered grievance along with our existing contract. We would suggest that you* 35

*thoroughly acquaint yourself with the contract and the supplement in regards to female classification.*<sup>60</sup>

The difficulties that single white women faced in keeping their war jobs were far surpassed by the legal restrictions and social prejudices which stifled job opportunities for married women. Although married women composed nearly half of the female labor force, they were considered a threat to the sanctity and stability of the family. They infringed upon the role of man as sole breadwinner, and therefore could question the sex-based division of labor and the roles, status, responsibilities and power relationships within the family. Even during the most intensive years of the War when womanpower was in vital demand for building the "arsenal of democracy", married women were hired only as a last resort, and in many cases, they forfeited seniority rights when they accepted employment. W.G. Kult, Acting Secretary of Local 72 described the contract provisions in effect in June 1944 in a very matter-of-fact manner, indicating a general acceptance of such restrictions:

*"Due to manpower shortage, we opened up part of our agreement to allow management to hire married women. The married women can accumulate seniority only in the department where they began to work . . . If for any reason that the department or the plant cannot maintain a 48 hour week, married women must be laid off so as to maintain a 48 hour week for all male and single female employees . . ."61*

Kult qualified his definition of the married women to whom the contract referred as those married women who had a visible means of support. Most contracts or agreements, however, did not make those distinctions. None took into consideration the quality or quantity of support, nor the number of dependents for whom the woman assumed economic responsibility.

36 Some married women could not sit quietly while losing

their jobs because of clearly discriminatory practices. On February 15, 1952, Local 72 member Hazel Allen appeared at an International Appeals Hearing in Detroit to protest the discriminatory practices of her local. Allen was married when she first received employment at the Nash Kelvinator Plant in Racine, Wisconsin on October 25, 1943. Representatives of Local 72 claimed that, upon receiving her job, Allen signed a paper waiving her seniority rights because of her marital status. Allen insisted that she did not remember signing a waiver nor did she recall being informed that she could not accumulate seniority. Although union records revealed that a supplemental agreement was approved before 1943 which allowed married women to be hired provided that these women would be placed on a separate seniority list, subject to being laid off before any male or single female lost their job, it was quite possible that Allen was unaware of this provision.

When Allen appeared before the International Appeals Hearing to protest marital discrimination, neither the U.A.W. Women's Bureau nor the Fair Practices and Anti-Discrimination Department supported her case.<sup>62</sup> Allen appeared *alone* on her own behalf while Local 72 was represented by five lawyers. Hazel Allen, a U.A.W. member, neither experienced the strength nor solidarity of her union. The International Appeals Committee upheld her layoff because the prejudicial treatment was incorporated in the contract, and according to the committee, did not constitute discrimination.

The Hazel Allen case was not an isolated incident. On October 1, 1953, Bertha French, with five years seniority, and Grace Elias Fairless, with one year seniority, filed complaints with the Fair Practices and Anti-Discrimination Department of Local 85 stating that they were laid off because they were married women. Here, too, the layoffs were upheld because the agreement between Local 85 and management which forbade employment to married women was established policy and therefore interpreted as non-discriminatory. Local 85's membership upheld the anti-wife provision, and supported the Department's decision.<sup>63</sup>

The Allen and Fairless/French cases clearly show that management and the U.A.W. locals collaborated to discriminate

against married women defying the directives established by the International. Moreover, according to Caroline Davis, Director of the U.A.W. Women's Bureau, Local 85's anti-wife regulation was an oral agreement. Most likely, the female employees were not aware of that stipulation. Fairless and French were more fortunate than Hazel Allen; the U.A.W. Women's Bureau and Fair Practices and Anti-Discrimination Department supported their charges of discrimination and recommended their reinstatement.

Grievances involving married women's rights were common. The nature of the cases and responses of U.A.W. members tended to correspond with general attitudes about "women's place" in the post-war era. The following excerpt from a 1949 letter to the editor in the Oakland Tribune illustrates the resentment that some male workers felt toward women in the plants. The clipping was mailed to Walter Reuther, then President of U.A.W., by a committeeman of Local 1031 who complained that he was being severely criticized by his local for upholding the seniority rights of married women. The clipping refers to a neighboring local faced with the same type of disension.

*"... Local 76 is ... doing nothing about getting rid of fifteen women who persist in hanging on to their jobs at General Motors Parts Division while veterans with children are being laid off. It's about time these women realized that the war is over, and that they should stay home and tend to their knitting. All of them are married ... They get away with murder at Parts (women, that is); the law protects them from lifting too much weight, they never get the greasy or dirty work, and I have yet to see them at a local union meeting, but yet they get the same salary as the men ... '64*

These examples support the contention that discrimination was systematic, and accepted and supported in the labor movement. The U.A.W., through the Women's Bureau and Fair Practices and Anti-Discrimination Department, was able to

support cases, make recommendations, answer questions and publish pamphlets. However, it appears that it was unable to penetrate the deep-rooted prejudice against women workers. These two departments remained advisory bodies without the power to enforce "equality". They were not able to prevent or cure discrimination, but only to comment on it.

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## Was it negligence?

A partial explanation for the U.A.W.'s negligence in fighting management-imposed discrimination can be found by examining the no-strike pledge and its counterpart, the maintenance of membership agreement. In 1942, the C.I.O. leadership signed and put into effect a no-strike pledge which sacrificed labor's right to strike for the duration of the war. The government realized that through this "sacrifice" the effectiveness of the unions had been greatly undermined and that workers might be reluctant to join unions which could not effectively protect their rights. "In this potential crisis, the government sought to strengthen the institutional power of the C.I.O.'s politically conservative leadership . . . Now the government's War Labor Board gave C.I.O. unions a modified union shop—maintenance of membership—in order to assure membership stability and a steady dues flow during the difficult war years."<sup>65</sup> This meant that all workers had to join the union within 15 days of beginning work at plants covered by the War Labor Board's mandates, and they had to remain in the union for the duration of their employment.

Because women automatically had to join the union, the union leadership had no need to recruit them by enacting policies specific to working women and protecting their rights as workers. Thereby, it was easier to ignore women workers and to permit discrimination. Even if the consciousness of the workers had been such that they recognized the divisiveness of discriminatory practices, the no-strike pledge acted as

a major force in preventing protests through strikes or job actions.

On the other hand, the U.A.W. did have the power to prevent discriminatory practices when such practices ran contrary to the union's principles of equality. Through their inactivity in this regard, the International undermined its own power by failing to uphold the union rights of the female membership. And it was not as if they lacked the power to enforce equal treatment at the international and local levels. U.A.W. officials and locals could be reprimanded, and if the charges were serious enough, they could be forced to comply with U.A.W. principles and guidelines. In extreme cases, racial prejudice proved to be the impetus. In 1952, the U.A.W. charter was lifted from a large Braniff Airlines local in Dallas, Texas, which maintained an all white membership. Both Black and Chicano workers were refused local membership, and the local was subsequently disaffiliated. The following year, the International Executive Board of the U.A.W. placed sufficient pressure on an International Harvester local in Memphis, Tennessee to force the membership to terminate an unauthorized racist strike which occurred when white U.A.W. members refused to work with a Black worker promoted to the position of welder.<sup>66</sup> These examples, while admittedly rare, illustrate the actual strength and control that the International's officers and boards could exercise over local U.A.W. bodies. Obviously, the union leadership did not consider sex discrimination worthy of punitive action.

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## Concluding Remarks

This case study of the U.A.W. provides a framework for better understanding the status of women workers and its relation to sexism during and following the war years. It is important to consider the following issues drawn from the

experiences of the 1940's and 1950's when analyzing the position of the women worker now.

**1.** The increase of women in the labor force occurred without corresponding changes in ideas about the nature of women's place, equality between the sexes, the division of labor, women's status and opportunities in the labor force: "... unprecedented numbers of females joined the labor force, substantially altering the existing distribution of economic roles. On the other hand, only minimal progress was made in the areas of greatest concern to women's rights advocates—professional employment, child care centers and uniform wage scales. Women's sphere had been significantly expanded, yet traditional attitudes towards woman's place remained largely unchanged."<sup>67</sup> In this context, the great increase of women entering the labor force is a clear example of capitalism's ability to adapt the use of women's labor to the changing needs of capital, while retaining traditional conceptions of women's work. Whereas the experiences of the war years could have been a springboard for advancing the cause of women's equality, traditional attitudes prevailed, and the post-war years became a reinforcement of the ideology of "maintaining the status quo."

**2.** The lessons of World War II and the post-war years are particularly significant when analyzing the relationship between women workers and trade unionism. Unions have the responsibility to understand the economics of women's work and the particular concerns of women workers. If these concerns are not addressed, and unions do not actively and aggressively organize, recruit and uphold the rights of women as workers, then their pronouncements of "equality" and "solidarity" are mere rhetoric. Unions have to recognize the relationship between women's dual roles, yet, rarely were the difficulties of women's combined home and work responsibilities addressed. Large numbers of women rushed from the workplace to face their second job as wife, mother, cook and homemaker. Child care and community services were limited and relegated to the lowly status of "women's issues". Yet, if women did not have proper childcare, or if the laun-



dries or groceries were not open after work, then women could not adequately perform their jobs. The high rates of absenteeism during World War II were directly related to women's unresolved home responsibilities. Women had to miss a day of work because the babysitter did not show up, or because there was no other possible time to clean the house.

In order for women to be integrated as equal members of the workforce, their home responsibilities have to be addressed as legitimate union demands. For many women workers, child care is as important as a high rate of pay. An increase of community services, maternity leave, the eradication of discriminatory job and pay policies—these are some of the issues which directly benefit women workers and offer a measure of equality at the workplace. Without the realization of these demands, sex discrimination continues to be a force which divides workers, and prevents women from achieving economic equality.

**3.** It was the common assumption that when women were displaced from their war jobs, they left the labor force.

However, the many women who needed their war job salaries found post-war employment primarily in traditional female jobs supplementary to the mainstream of modern industry. Women in these jobs stayed out of the visual and mental perspective of most male workers. Most men worked alongside of other men, and tended to associate with women in situations divorced from the work environment. Women were the wives, mothers, girlfriends, and daughters of working men, and were rarely considered as workers. Men did not frequent the places where women worked, and many of the factories in which women were employed, such as garment or electronics factories, were predominantly female, or were separated into men's and women's departments. The women who cleaned homes, worked as charladies, maids or kitchen help stayed out of the public view.

**4.** The ability to combat discrimination presupposes the recognition that this discrimination does indeed exist.

Discriminatory practices are accepted as part of the status quo until these inequities are realized as prejudicial and incorrect. For example, a sex-based differential in wages is not considered abnormal until women's right to equal pay for equal work is acknowledged. Yet, an acknowledgement of discrimination is no assurance that the conditions will be changed.

**5.** During the war years, there was not a mass organization of women workers which could have acted as a force to pressure management and the unions to curtail discriminatory practices. Although the Women's Bureau of the U.A.W. did exist, it was a department within the U.A.W., and did not reflect the united strength of female U.A.W. members. It did not have the power of organization to become an effective force in promoting the interests of women workers, and did not even consistently support grievances or uphold the rights of female workers. With few real powers, the Women's Bureau tended to act as a safety valve to con-

tain the anger and frustration of women who experienced prejudicial treatment. Although the Women's Bureau was intended to be a means to remedy sexist injustices, it did not succeed. The strength generated from unity in struggle, the power of many bodies standing up for their rights, the angry voices, the strikes, boycotts, rallies and demonstrations: this type of rank-and-file mobilization did not materialize.

6. In light of the forces which limited women's participation in the industrial labor force, it becomes clear that the U.A.W. never fully understood how discrimination prevented its membership from developing its class interests more effectively. As a union organized along industrial lines, the U.A.W. provided the basis for organizing women in unskilled or semi-skilled jobs. Thereby they made important gains in the recognition of all workers' rights. Yet, workers' solidarity was undermined by the union's compliance in separating large numbers of women from their war-time jobs. The opportunities for great gains in union strength and solidarity were aborted when women and veterans were pitted against each other for a limited number of jobs. The possibilities for united labor action were tremendous. Had the unions supported women's right to retain their jobs in the face of the peacetime influx of veterans into the civilian labor force, these veterans would have had a powerful position in arguing for increased jobs on the basis of their military service. Thus, male and female workers could have joined together to demand employment for all workers, regardless of sex. As it was, labor's pre-war and war-time gains were dissipated, and the divisive strategies of management prevailed.

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