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# ORGANIZING WORKING CLASS WOMEN

## Sojourner Truth Organization

### 25¢

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## Introduction

There are numerous examples in history of mass actions on the part of working women. In the United States, the Uprising of the Twenty Thousand in New York City began as a wildcat strike in 1909, and lasted three months, projecting the demand for a general strike. The Chicago Garment Strike, involving 40,000 male and female strikers, was led initially by an organization of women. The famous IWW Lawrence strike was due primarily to women industrial workers. In addition, we can look at the organization and participation of women in the strike at Flint and see the wives of workers acting in the interest of their class. These are but a few historical incidents in which the action of women in relationship to the workplace has been significant. In this paper, we want to examine our own experiences in organizing women and begin to develop an analysis of the tasks of Marxist organizers in relationship to proletarian women. In order to do this, we must first discuss the specific role of women in the economic-social order of today and, from this, begin to determine what this role means for the development of autonomous workers' organizations which actively include women.

In attempting to build mass organizations at the workplace, we must understand the position of women in the workforce, i .e. the role of women in the economy. Analyses of "workers" in general are frequently unproductive in answering questions concerning the organization of proletarian women because these analyses lack an understanding of the specific differences between women and men as members of the proletariat. Three differences in their relationships to the means of production become apparent in examining the position of women in the labor force. Understanding these in their correct context is crucial for successful strategic development of class conscious workers.

## Women's Position in the Workforce

1. In selling their labor power, women are not a primary factor in direct commodity production. By this is meant that in the basic industries which constitute the structural backbone of the capitalist economy, women have no real part. Numerically constituting 40% of the labor force, women proletarians are neither concentrated in the primary industries nor are they directly responsible for the functioning of a commodity production economy. Percentage concentration of women in the workforce is:

- a) 15% factories
- b) 23.5% service
- c) 34.5% clerical

The majority of working class women are in other sectors of the labor force, namely clerical and service, the remainder being in light industrial point of production. To bring women together as workers, conscious of themselves as part of a class, we cannot state simplistically that their identity or power as workers is solely at the point of production; rather, we must deal objectively with their secondary status in a commodity production economy.

2. Women serve as a reserve army of labor in the capitalist economy. This point was clearly demonstrated by women's job role during the two world wars. Today, women's reserve role is played out much more by the transient and fluctuating nature of their employment. Because women are often involved sporadically in the workforce, complications are created in organizing them.

Women are often employed in industries which have a yearly planned layoff policy, i.e. the canning industry. In such cases, women work when their labor is needed and are subject to stable layoffs. The same is true of industries which work in conjunction with textile production employment being highest at seasonal changes, followed by definite cutbacks. The electronics industry also has a seasonal employment, often revolving around the Christmas season. These factors

tend to decrease the consciousness of women as workers. Often their length of employment in a certain industry does not exceed a few months, at which point they must seek another job, unemployment or welfare compensation. Thus, welfare recipients fall into this category. These circumstances create complications in organizing women along specifically industrial lines and inhibit the growth of stable organizations of working class women.

3) Many proletarian women do not rely on selling their labor power only, to achieve the means of subsistence. We find working class women whose relationship to the means of production is completely dependent on the fact that the husband is a worker. Nevertheless, the housewife must be brought to a stage of class consciousness which will allow her to participate in working class struggles and will prevent her adoption of a reactionary role in the development of these struggles. The wife who works to supplement the family income is another case of a proletarian woman whose labor power is not sold to completely attain the means of subsistence. In this case, employment is often transitory and sporadic, depending on home conditions. In both these cases, there is not immediate identification as workers condemned to sell their labor power on the capitalist's terms. Their objective situation hinders class consciousness unless this is dealt with by organizers. The purpose of this point is to raise the fact that women are sometimes in the position of being members of the working class, but on the job organizing does not touch them, and provides no way to increase their class consciousness.

### "Two Points Need to be Made"

A lot of confusion has arisen about the reason for making these distinctions between male and female

workers. Some have mistakenly felt that it is an argument against point of production organizing for women. For this reason, we feel it is necessary to clarify further this question. First, in recognizing the role of women in the economy, we can provide an understanding of the potential for development of an independent women's socialist movement. We can arrive at conclusions concerning what the development of independent workers' organizations means to proletarian women specifically. Secondly, we can begin to deal with an understanding of what is the nature of the workplace for women, and what this means in terms of strategic concentration for Marxist women.

An independent proletarian women's movement will not be developed in isolation from the organizational development of the working class generally. Possibilities for changing women's social and political position without basic change and challenge to the existing social order is limited. Primarily, this is due to their relationship to the means of production and their limited sense of power caused by this. Marxists, recognize that the ruling class is responsible for the ruling ideas, that as long as bourgeois society holds sway the role of women in society will never be effectively altered.

Historical precedents can be found in the U.S. in the submergence of socialist women and the dominance of bourgeois feminists in the Suffragette Movement. The same can be seen in the contemporary movement for women's liberation. Briefly, we would argue that an autonomous women's movement cannot reflect the interest of the proletariat when its development is attempted in isolation from the organizational development of the working class as a whole. Male supremacy in a capitalist system dictates a negation of autonomous power of women at the point of production. Working women's power lies

with their class, with the growth of working class consciousness, and the development of concrete challenges to bourgeois society and bourgeois ideas. Through the development of dual power organizations of workers, proletarian women can identify where their power lies as a class, even though they may not be directly involved in production,

#### Importance of Workplace Organizing

In terms of what the growth of independent workers' organizations means to proletarian women specifically, we come back to the point of where their power lies in relationship to the means of production.

"In industry, women are more likely than men to work for marginal businesses characterized by small size, low capital investment, low profit margins, haphazard personnel practices, high employee turnover and low pay. Many thousands of women still work in such plants, making cheap clothing, costume jewelry, paper hats and party favors, inexpensive toys or picture frames, knick knacks, and similar products. Sometimes ignored by government and union alike, these are the plants where conditions are most likely to be reminiscent of the last century. ..."

(Smuts, Women and Work in America)

This is an excellent description of the workplace of women and points out many of the differences and problems of workplace organizing of women, as well as the potential for organization.

Whether in industry, service or clerical work, the nature of the workplace for women is generally

different from that of men. Recognition of this calls for the strategic concentration of women at the workplace for the development of autonomous workers' organizations regionally. The workplace is not just any plant that hires women in the area, but includes all areas of the work force where concentrations of women are employed and where there is the realistic potential for involving large numbers of proletarian women in fighting for their day to day interests, and preparing them for participation in the functioning as a ruling class.

Here we would like to explain some of our experiences with organizing women at the workplace. We have found numerous women eager to act, with a recent history of spontaneous struggles. Of course, women experience defeats and individual frustrations over getting the boss to recognize individual needs for leaves or transfers or hours of work. But, at the workplace when the women unite in a section, department or plant and decide to act, they know they will be heard.

We were involved in a slow-down when the women felt compelled to challenge the boss. In an electronics plant, wages were \$2.25 an hour, but the company had a bonus based on piece rate which meant \$20-30 a week more in pay. The production line workers received a group bonus. On a line of approximately thirty women, a high guaranteed bonus had been in effect. The company needed more production and raised the rate to a very difficult level. The workers were unable to make the rate. By Wednesday of the week we knew we would be receiving the tiny bonus, several women began discussing possible retaliation. We decided on a refusal to work Saturday.

We had been working compulsory Saturday overtime for a month and a half, and knew the company needed Saturday work since we had not been making rate. Response from other women was mixed. The real bootlickers were reluctant, but the average workers and militants were ready. The women on individual work who fed the line did not support it because they thought their bonus was unaffected. All this changed when the checks were distributed. Instead of the \$20-25, it was \$1-7. A very up-tight group leader distributed the checks to angry, yelling women just before lunch. As he gave each person her check, she cussed him out and stopped working. During lunch, people urged a strike, a sit-down, and wanted to sign up for the union. It was finally decided "to work like we get paid" in a general slow down. This was supported unanimously and carried out even by the most reactionary footdraggers. A furious group leader could not yell the line into speeding up, and by the end of the day the company had agreed to restore the bonus.

#### Fight against Racism

In addition to the possibility of exercising power, there is another factor unique to women at the plant and in hospitals. These are the places where white supremacy can be combatted effectively and overcome in a way that is not possible in the community at this time. Because of the strong segregation in housing and social patterns in north and south in this country, there are practically no places where black, latin, and white commonly are together. It is a regular United Nations in plants and service industries, with immigrants, blacks, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, southern whites and northern whites all together eight hours a day. But it is more than the social contact that makes the job a place to overcome racism. On the job, all these people are dependent on one another.

The overt racist has a tough time getting materials or completing a job if her hatred is constantly spewing out. Even though the boss has a thousand and one little tricks to keep workers at odds with each other, cooperation is the basis for getting tasks done. The job is also the place where it can be made clear that white supremacy hurts everyone. Unity is the keystone for successful struggles.

#### One Example

At a medium-sized hospital, a black nurse's aide requested to change from fulltime to part time employment in order to continue her education. The woman was married and raising a family, so it was impossible for her to continue working full time and attend school; also, it was impossible for her to quit working entirely, as her job supplemented her husband's income. She was told that the hospital policy did not allow an aide to go part time unless she had been employed full time for one year and had maintained a good work record.

A white nurse's aide had requested the same change, and was allowed to go part time. Neither woman had worked a full year before she entered the request. In discussing the matter off the job, they decided that the only possible reason was racism, and decided to confront the supervisor with this fact.

After a fruitless discussion with the head of the department, it became clear that there was no policy. The discussion turned up three different reasons why the white woman could go part time at less than a year and the black woman couldn't. The first was that the policy was the same, but that the white woman was an exception. Then it was changed to the "institution of a new policy." Finally, the reason became that a mistake had been made on the employment date of the white woman.

After stirring up a ruckus and accusing the hospital of being racist, the two decided to file a discrimination suit with the EEOC. It was hoped that a legal suit would help to protect the job. Finally, the supervisors stated that they would reconsider the matter and let those involved know in a week what the policy was. In the meantime, the women went around talking to others about the suit and encouraging them to attend the coming meeting.

Before work, the black woman was informed that the matter was settled and she could not go part time. The aide then informed her supervisor she had filed a discrimination suit against the hospital. Then she informed her black and white co-workers that she was being forced to resign because she could not continue working full time. Later that evening, this same woman was fired for allegedly stealing hospital property. It was during working hours, and nothing had been removed from the hospital. The woman immediately went from floor to floor, spreading the news of her firing. She made it clear to the other workers the relationship between the firing occurring on the same day she had informed the hospital that she had filed a suit against them.

Eight or nine women congregated in one room, mad as hell. There was one white woman who said she was ready to go home if the black aide was going. After some discussion, it was decided that since the fired aide was supposed to pick up her final check the next day, as many aides as possible should accompany her and demand to know the real reason for the firing. They decided to write a petition which protested the firing and demanded a meeting with the administrators to investigate racist policies-in the nursing department. All these actions at the time of the firing were spontaneous and based on the initiative of black and white-women who worked there.

Right now, the people who signed the petition are trying to formulate some strategy to win. The group is small, but are beginning to meet off the job to discuss general grievances and ways to get "workers to stick together." It should also be mentioned that this hospital does not have a union; therefore, even signing a petition is putting your job in jeopardy.

These are the kinds of job actions in which women attack white supremacy and see it as in their interest to promote unity for their own strength as workers. This struggle is still going on, and hopefully will develop into an ongoing group of working women. It is difficult to imagine such an opportunity for class action arising outside the workplace.

Even the most backward woman knows that when the department stops work, the more who stop the stronger everyone's position is. Of course, there are all white plants, and the northern white women receive preference for the higher paying jobs, but, because women's work is generally such a low job classification, in the overwhelming majority of plant situations the workforce is multinational. Certainly white supremacy and ethnic pride play a divisive role on the job, but it is at the plant and in hospitals where the possibility of overcoming racism exists. Women in Service Industries

Most of our experience has been with women at the point of production and in hospitals. But these are not the only places that working class women work. Though women are increasingly entering the work force, there is a disproportionate entrance into various occupational sectors. Statistics show the overall increase of women in the labor force, but in conjunction with this is an increase of unemployment among women factory workers. This illustrates the need to organizationally develop women workers throughout the labor force. We must con-

sider the potential for developing women in all three areas in order to accomplish the growth of their identity as workers who struggle to uphold their day to day interests, and to participate equally in functioning as a ruling class. This means exploring possibilities for organization of service and clerical workers as well as factory women.

In considering women in service industries, categorical differences become apparent in type of work performed, and these are relevant in evaluating the organizational potential of the workers. On the one hand, there is the service worker operating as an individual in provision of a service. In this category is the technician, waitress, janitor, etc. Though workers in such a field are working for a larger institution employing many individuals in the same function, their job conditions do not provide a sound basis for organization. Generally, the job performed is an individual provision of a service. There is a separation from other workers in performance of the job. Also, there is a certain degree of independence and freedom of action for the workers due to decreased immediate discipline. This usually takes the form of no supervisor immediately present and accountable to in the performance of the job.

The other type of service workers is immediately involved in collective labor in the provision of the service. In this category would be hospital and telephone workers as examples. There is the social rendering of a service to benefit the capitalist. The workers function in the collective performance of a job over which they have no control in its performance, and they are under immediate supervision. The job conditions are not essentially different from the factory worker, except that the labor does not produce a tangible commodity. It renders a service

with a use value and an exchange value. These service industries differ from the first in that they do not simply render a service, but they have become part of the economic structure for the direct production of capital, and play an important role with respect to commodity production. One cannot separate the process of production and the object produced; the service is a commodity.

The good organizing possibilities of this type of service worker is illustrated by the success that New York City organizers have had with involving telephone operators in several job actions and strike support.

Telephone operators, etc., are also under highly repressive job discipline. It is daily drummed into them that they are mere cogs in a vast machine and they must all follow uniform standard. It is probably one of the most highly structured and sharply disciplined jobs. Although this creates a very repressive atmosphere, once women begin to challenge the authority, the situation alters dynamically. In recent years, there has been a history of sporadic, spontaneous actions by telephone women.

The whole area of mail order house workers is also a tremendous place to build organization and advance consciousness." Alden's, Wards, Sears, Spiegels have huge concentrations of women in their warehouses packaging, sorting and checking their merchandise. During a recent leafletting campaign at one of these warehouses, the women were very eager for literature. Many stopped to ask for more direction on what to do inside.

#### Hospital Workers

We are speaking about organizing non-professional hospital workers. There is a considerable difference in job conditions and pay between the professional nurses and doctors and the non-professional workers. Job conditions for the non-professionals have simi-

larities to factory work. The labor is physically hard, but more importantly, it is collectively rendered. In dietary, the laundry, housekeeping, and nurses' aides the work is socially performed and close cooperation is necessary. In addition, these workers know that someone else is getting rich because of their labor. Generally, conditions are such that these non-professional workers are prepared to go to great lengths to fight their bosses for better job conditions. In the past several years the most militant strikes by women in the Chicago area have been by hospital workers. They were mostly involved in getting recognition for the lousy Hospital Employees Labor Program. HELP offers workers little, but they are so dissatisfied that they support it and outstrip the union leadership in militancy.

There is an added dimension to hospital work which closely binds it to the community. The hospital treats people and any organization or transformation of a hospital affects community residents. With community support, a hospital worker's program has added strength, and even more emphatically, with hospital workers' support, a community health program has power behind its demands. In one hospital where we worked, a community organization was attempting to force the hospital to support its free health clinic with money, equipment and doctors. This organization contacted the workers only once with a leaflet describing its demands. They did not incorporate any of the workers' demands for a union, and made no effort to develop personal contacts with the workers. Most workers felt threatened by the two demonstrations by the organization at the hospital, and believed outlandish rumors about plans to take over the hospital.

A few concessions were won and the campaign withered. However, we are confident that if the campaign had been waged with close connection with the workers (who would have been eager to support community health demands, since many were from the neighborhood), a very powerful campaign and program

would have materialized. It is true that hospital workers can be organized around job issues without active support of the community, but with close ties to the community, they can begin to address the broader health care issues of who receives health care and who profits from it.

#### Possibilities of Organizing Clerical Workers

The same categorical differences which apply to service industries apply to clerical work. Depending on her work situation, the worker will see herself with an identity apart from production or as a part of the production process itself. In the former case, the worker sees herself as the bosses' advocate; in the latter, she performs work which is analogous to the production process. This distinction is very important since so many women are in clerical positions. In general, the large office pools operating in the heart of large cities reinforce a negation of class consciousness. There is a real material separation from the point of production and a physical isolation from working class communities. The upward mobility syndrome is a felt reality in the eyes of these women, and the potential for organizing these women looks bleak until precedents have been set by their sisters in more organizable situations.

On the other side, we have the employment of large numbers of clerical workers in plants where their job is directly dependent on production, and the consequences of capitalism are immediately present. When overproduction, unemployment, and layoffs hit the factory worker, they often also hit the clerical staff because the amount and conditions of their work correspond to plant production. These working class women have been virtually ignored by unions and they have often been used as scabs during production workers' struggles.

The working conditions are not exceptional. They warrant organizing attempts. The work is boring and repetitive. Some of our experience has shown these women to be extremely bitter about their situation. The sexual oppression tends to be greater than in plants. Even the non-unionization of these workers

operates in the bosses' interests because of their widespread use as scabs during strikes. Also, when a plant stockpiles for the usual three year contract, the organization and transportation of stockpiled items is highly dependent on these women; if they were out on strike, the goods couldn't move. With all their paperwork, these women have access to information which could be valuable for an in-plant organization.

Because so little work has been done with production clerical workers, it is difficult to put forth definite conclusions about their potential. In two instances we have found clerical workers enthusiastic and interested in the activities of plant organizations. At one large heavy industry plant employing mainly men in production, an insurgent newsletter is put out. The clerical and technical workers manage to get a hold of a few copies of the newsletter and reproduce it and distribute it among themselves each time (there are 2000 of them). In another, the production of a newsletter ignited independent attempts by the women in the office to self-organize and link up with plant organization. One woman was attempting to organize keypunch operators in a predominantly male plant. Success at such situations will further the organizational attempt of the men at the point of production.

It would be absurd to write off office workers as unimportant and unorganizable at this point. Work has not developed enough to arrive at such conclusions and the large numbers of proletarian women at such jobs cannot be ignored. Marxists should seriously evaluate the area they are working in, attempt to identify concentrations of proletarian women and determine the potential for waging successful struggles at such places.

## The Situation of the Working Woman

In this section , we shall deal with some of the national differences found among working women, and their relationship to their bosses, their jobs and their union.

### Black and Latin Women

There is a great difference in consciousness between black and Latin women. We have found generally a good level of consciousness among many black women. On most of our jobs, the strongest leaders and most militant workers are black. The reason for this is fairly clear.

Black workers have been involved in collective production for over four hundred years. Their experience has led most of them to understand the value of collective opposition. This has not been true for Latin women. They have only recently been involved in the workforce in occupations collectively performed. Thus, there is a lack of consciousness of methods of struggle. Often they do not understand English well, and are passed by when literature is distributed or discussions held. Being so dominated by their husbands makes many timid and reluctant to act on their own. However, as Latin experience in the workforce increases, this situation alters. We recently experienced such a change in consciousness with Latin women.

There is a medium-sized, predominantly Latin, plant with many immigrant Chicano green card workers, as well as illegal entrants. The plant has a scattering of black and white workers, too. They pay particularly low wages, \$1.85 an hour, and have a piece rate system whereby a few people can make relatively good money if they work extremely hard. An entire department of about twenty women stopped work for nearly one half hour when they were given bad materials making it unable for them to make rate for nearly two weeks.

One Latin woman stopped work, and we encouraged a general stoppage. All but two of the other women were rapidly convinced to stop work. After thirty minutes, the women returned to work after various threats by the management. They worked another forty minutes, and the company promised some of the women a few cents an hour for the bad material. A Latin woman and us, dissatisfied with the settlement, attended a union meeting that night and forced a meeting between union, management, and department. At this meeting, the management was extremely conciliatory, and several women were quite outspoken. All of their demands were agreed to. The women were elated and knew that it was their actions that had won their demands.

### White Women

It is also helpful to consider several differences among white working women. In the plants, most white women are either foreign immigrants or southern. With recent immigrants there is often a language problem which isolates them from other workers. Some have previous factory experience and others don't. Many from Eastern Europe may be strongly anti-communist, but consider themselves socialist. Thus, beyond the language problem, it is difficult to generalize their behavior in militant situations.

With southern white women, the problems are very different. In addition to the fact that many come from small rural communities with little industry, they come from very strong anti-union as well as racist traditions. We have usually found southern white women to be the most backward. However, again it should be pointed out that this changes as their experience in collective labor changes, and as the South becomes more industrialized and organized.

Most northern white women in plants are older (over forty). Many do have a history in plant work, and the chief thing holding them back from action is job security. It is difficult for anyone over forty to find work. Most young northern white women are in clerical positions.

Generally, we have found black women to be the most advanced. However, there is really nothing in Latin and white women's consciousness or experience that cannot be changed in the heat of struggle.

#### Importance of the Job

The importance of the job itself to the women worker is closely related to her situation as a woman in this society. The job is the one place where women can express themselves independently. They are no someone's wife or mother. Even though the work is very alienating and repetitive, some women work for this one reason--they can have their own identity on the job. In this society, many women find marriage stifling, or at least restrictive on their personal development. As much as they enjoy their families, they find it important to get away. We have encountered numerous women who say they hate staying home all day. Paradoxically, they long for the time they can quit working, but even after it is not economically necessary for them to keep working, they stay on. (Of course, some of this can be attributed to the fact that working people never make it in this" society, and thus there is always something more they need to buy for security.) They hate the exhaustion that working both at home and on the job brings, but they will not give up the independence they find on the job. This may be one of the reasons women react so fiercely to being treated as children.

Many foremen and supervisors are paternalistic and treat "their" women -workers as slightly backward children. Thus, they frequently go into rages

over work problems. Many times we have seen women become exceedingly indignant over such treatment, and declare that they expect to be treated as adults. This sense of independence is different from men's identification with work, though. Most men see almost their total identity wrapped up with work--I am a set-up man, I am a maintenance man. They also determinedly accumulate seniority and higher job classifications for more security. On the other hand, most women know that there is no better job for them.

In the plant, the most repetitive and boring jobs are usually women's jobs; many men refuse to do such "women's work." In one department where we worked, there were several highly repetitive machine jobs. For women, the jobs were better paying than most, but they were among the lower paying for men. In the space of three weeks, three different young men were hired and quit on those jobs. One punched out after two hours on his second day. Finally, a woman from the department was promoted. For women, there are no "more fulfilling" jobs to go seeking. Only the contact with other women on the job begins to meet this need.

#### Unions

Women's relationship to unions is slightly different than men's. Most women are employed in either non-unionized situations or in places with extremely poor unions.

Working in places where there are no unions presents certain problems. Several times we have been in the situation where a union is trying to organize our jobs. Very often they have been lousy sellout unions. The problem has been that the best, most militant workers were actively supporting the union efforts. It would have been folly to remain aloof from the union struggle. To oppose the union would have clearly lumped us with the reactionary and backward workers. We found ourselves encouraging people to sign union cards and attending organizing committee meetings. Naturally, our support was critical, and with our close contacts we discussed demands to place on the union. Our decision was to support a union drive and build an independent group

to develop demands. We did not take leadership in the union structures, so that we would not be identified as synonymous with the union

In non-union situations where no union is attempting to organize, the problem is slightly different. Often it seems useful to ask a union to come to organize to create some activity. This is seldom a good idea, because it creates more problems than it solves. In practically all work places, no active or so-called "good" union will come to organize. If they do, it is to support their other locals. Thus, both the Teamsters and the UAW occasionally organize a place like Montgomery Wards, but the name of the union is the only thing Wards workers have in common with the more highly paid truck drivers or auto workers. These unions use the dues to finance the fringe benefits and strikes of their "real" locals. Thus, other than the initial activity around organizing a union, any union turns out to be crummy and inept, discouraging those who worked to organize their plant.

It seems, then, that much more solid work can be done with building an independent organization. We are in many senses much freer to try innovative things without worrying about the union's reaction. The bad thing about a union organizing campaign is that the workers don't really have much control over it. If, for some reason, the union wants to get paid off and pull out, there is not much that can be done. Concentrating on building an independent group also puts us in a better position if a union does try to organize the plant. There will be a clear independent force to pressure the union into positions and actions it would rather avoid. Thus, asking for a union before one decides to come is asking for headaches.

The other side of the coin is the numerous women with crummy unions. One of the major difficulties

with these situations is that it makes women very anti-union without much understanding. There is very little in women's socialization anyway that develops their trade union consciousness. They also have not experienced many of the sophisticated union operations and aren't interested in its mechanism. This has its good points in that often women have a simple concept--"The union ought to be for the working people." They do not get bogged down in intra-union politics the way many skilled men do. Thus, women along with unskilled men may be more receptive to independent revolutionary organizations.

#### Conclusion

Thus, working class women can be found at various times at home, in the community, or on the job. Hopeful organizers must understand the specific role of women in the labor force in order to build the organization which will meet the daily interests of working women and prepare them for functioning as a ruling class.

In our discussion of women, we are not posing arguments contradictory to point of production work. What we are talking about is a realistic appraisal of women in the U.S. economy and how we will be able to utilize this specific role to develop class conscious organization in which there is the recognition of two totally opposed classes — the ruling class and the working class. At that stage of development, all issues become clearly class issues, and the struggle is clearly class against class; they are no longer job actions against the bosses or company or community struggles against institutions.

The development of autonomous workers' organization must be seen as a task of women organizers. We have shown how it is essential to understand what male supremacy means in relationship to the role of women in the work force in order to see how

to involve women in the building of these organizations. Our understanding of the differences between men and women in the work force leads us to conclude that there must be a strategic regional concentration which will provide the building of an alternative view of society in working class communities.

In terms of building mass working class organization, it is important to understand the historical "division of labor" that Engels talks about in Origin of the Family. Its implications are that men and women each have an area of responsibility in their everyday lives. Men, the economic burden: job, unions, strikes, and world affairs. Women have the burden of children, home, family (and health, education and welfare). The problem of going beyond bread and butter issues to include institutional issues that affect workers' lives, particularly minorities (housing, education, health, etc.) is central to building dual power organizations. The specific role of women provides an immediate link-up of these two areas.

Building such organizations is not easy. In preparing workers to function as a ruling class, all areas of their lives are affected. This fact has added significance for women. Women's organizational consciousness manifests itself at a higher level than men's in the community; witness the participation in PTA's, church groups, anti-pollution groups, organizations for stop lights and better schools. The problem for Marxists is to develop strategically the organizations to experience the exercise of real control. The basis for this is the workplace, where the power of workers lies. But the workplace extends beyond the chain link fence surrounding it. In any struggle, Marxists must define the nature of the struggle, identify the problem and relate that to

the workplace. In community struggles, the problem of the local power structure can be related to the surrounding plants. For example, the problems with a school board should be attacked in relationship to the corporate industrialists who are making the decisions. In non-working roles, proletarian women in their concern about the quality of life for their families can frequently act as detonators for broader industrial struggles. Remember the women in Salt of the Earth?

Success for developing these workers' organizations demands the broadest possible participation of working men and women engaged in struggles and projects which will foster working class creativity and initiative in constructing a new society. At this time and based on our experience, we can summarize our ideas on how to begin to build these organizations and encourage the involvement of large numbers of workers.

Initially, such groups will evolve around the collective functioning in dealing with the day to day interests of working people. For women as well as men, this will be a social as well as political task. It will require organizational projects that will involve them in struggles to change society, by their own exercise of control. A job action may lead to further involvement, such as regular production of a newsletter for the plant. In addition, it can generate involvement in another struggle, such as strike support. Community groups may become interested in supporting workers in a hospital trying to change their job conditions, and the struggle may widen to include demands on the quality of health care in the community. Likewise, health workers could become involved in attacks on unsafe industrial working conditions. Tax protest groups can be re-oriented into attacking the companies with tax breaks which impoverish the community workers live in.

In any of these situations, pulling these actions together, changing them from weak, isolated struggles

into common struggles which identify the same enemy becomes the task of organizers. Forums, victory celebrations and benefits are other activities to bring men and women together off the job and broaden the activities they engage in. All of these would revolve around a workers' center. Attempts would be made to develop continuity and conscious organization.

Throughout this paper we have not been speaking of two mutually exclusive historical moments, one for the working class and one for working women. We are speaking of the development of women, whether this development occurs through workplace organizing or in the community, as class conscious organizers for proletarian revolution. Sometimes it may be most expedient to form a working women's group which would function without a significant number of male participants. It is easy to see how this could develop from a predominantly female work situation or in the community. At other times, the organization may be a mixed workers' group. However, after the initial stages of formation, the strength of any group and its ability to grow depends upon its ability to unite with other proletarian groups and cement the class to wield power against the present ruling class. Through learning a sense of power and accomplishment, the workers begin to understand their ability to change existing conditions.

The present is a time for broad experimentation. We advocate the development of workers' centers or neighborhood centers by Marxist men and women who are consciously concentrated in relevant industrial communities in strategic regions. Workplace struggles would constitute the basis for such organizations; however, ongoing activities should include: strike support, building struggle across industrial lines; educational; films; theatre; forums; women's meetings;, etc. By establishing a real presence in the community, communists can begin to initiate authentic challenges to the existing order by the involvement of

large numbers of working class women and men in the development of an organization through which they can really control their lives, on the job and off. Finally, the involvement of women in these will be crucial for their initial development and the key for their extension beyond the workplace.