

Women Who Work

By GRACE HUTCHINS
Labor Research Association

LIVING CONDITIONS • JOBS AND
WAGES • DISCRIMINATION • NEGRO
WOMEN AT WORK • TRADE UNIONS
WOMEN IN THE FIGHT FOR PEACE



International Publishers, New York

WOMEN WHO WORK

WOMEN WHO WORK

By GRACE HUTCHINS

Labor Research Association



INTERNATIONAL PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK

COPYRIGHT, 1952, BY
INTERNATIONAL PUBLISHERS CO., INC.



PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

CONTENTS

PART I

ON THE JOB AND AT HOME	7
Carrying a Double Load	7
"Latchkey" Children	9
Why They Work	10
What Kind of Jobs	13
On the Farms	16
Following the Crops	19
Living in Labor Camps	21
Lacking Medical Care	22
Women Get Less Than Men	24
Making Ends Meet	28
Why a Double Seniority List?	31
The Fight for Equal Pay	32
What of the "Equal Rights" Amendment?	35
Speedup in Many Forms	38
Resisting Heavier Work Loads	41
Losing Health	43
Out of Work, Less Compensation	45
Retiring on "Social Security"	49

PART II

WHY WOMEN ORGANIZE	52
Unions and Older Workers	52
Negro Women at Work	54
Toward Fair Employment Practice	58
Organizing for Equal Rights	60
Power of Unity	64
In Trade Unions	65
Auxiliaries Bring Women Together	71

In Recent Labor Struggles	72
In Progressive Organizations	76
Mobilizing Women for War	79
Action for World Peace	81
<i>REFERENCE NOTES</i>	87
<i>INDEX</i>	91

Part I. ON THE JOB AND AT HOME

Carrying a Double Load

The time is 8 A.M. in any industrial city of this country.

A woman is hurrying along the street, almost dragging with her a three-year-old boy, too small to walk so fast. But what can the harassed mother do? She must leave the child at the day nursery and still get to her job on time. Not later than 6 P.M. she must call for the boy and take him home.

But on the way home she must do her day's marketing and carry in the bundle of groceries before she can start preparing the evening meal. After supper, she must wash the dishes, bathe the child, and put him to bed. If there are older children, they may help a little with the dishes before sitting down to do their homework.

If the husband has an understanding of the working woman's double burden in our society, he may wash the dishes or help with the children. If he has not, he will probably put his tired feet up on a chair and open the evening newspaper or listen to the radio.

The mother is lucky if she can finish the housework by 10 P.M. and get to bed. She must be up before 6 A.M. to get the breakfast, dress the three-year-old, clean up, and start for her job again, via the day nursery.

She works an 80-hour week, the economists say. But if the working mother can complete the week's tasks in 80 hours, she is lucky. Ask any woman who carries this double burden how many hours a week she works. She will calculate and then probably answer: "Oh, it is more than 80 hours in all. Nearer 90, I would say, because on Saturdays and Sundays I have all the week's wash and the cleaning to do, plus the regular meals to get, of course."

This is the "double burden" that countless numbers of unknown

heroines in this country must carry day after day. And out of the slender family income the mother must pay for the day nursery care for her child. Charges may range from \$1.25 a week in a "public" nursery up to as high as \$15.50 a week in some that are run by settlement houses.

The fees are usually on a sliding scale, depending upon what the agency thinks is the mother's "ability to pay." At best, this is a substantial slice out of a wage earner's take-home pay which must cover all the necessities of life—rent, clothes, meat, milk, bread, vegetables, and other foods.

These day nurseries or nursery schools for the children from three to six are too few and too expensive to meet the needs of working mothers. If the nursery is too far from her home or too far from her place of work, the mother must hurry lest she be late on her job. Such a rush is bad for her health and bad for the child, for no little child should be hurried or made to walk faster than his short legs can easily carry him.

But worst of all is the situation when a child is ill. Unless there is someone else to care for the child at home, the mother must stay away from her job. This problem was recognized at a conference of women workers in Chicago in January, 1952, called by the United Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers of America. At the Phoenix Metal Cap Local 190, the company tried to fire a number of women workers on a charge of "absenteeism." The shop delegate reported:

"They would have robbed women of all their rights in the shop, and of unemployment compensation—but we proved that most of the absenteeism had come when women were forced to stay home with sick children, and got them reinstated."¹

To meet some of the difficulties faced by working mothers, this conference urged that a trade union should give special attention to the married woman's problems growing out of her family responsibility. By adjusting shifts and by seeing that these women are not penalized for necessary absences, the union can help to keep them on the job. The UE conference also urged a campaign for such government-financed child-care centers for working mothers as were provided in World War II. These centers should be conveniently available in every industrial community—close to the plants where women work.

"Latchkey" Children

Not only cities but smaller industrial communities as well need child care centers where overburdened working class mothers can leave their children for the day.

When there are no day-care centers and the mothers must go out to work, the children are bound to be neglected. "Latchkey" children they are often called, because the key to the family's apartment is hung around the child's neck, so he won't lose it. He comes back to the empty apartment or stays out on the streets. In either case he lacks the attention and the care that he needs.

But day-care centers usually get the reluctant support of reactionary authorities only under the stress of wartime emergencies. During World War II the need was recognized and centers were provided under the Lanham Act with federal aid for war industry areas.

But when the war was over and federal funds were withdrawn, the public day-care system disappeared. In New York, an industrial state where the need was especially acute, the state program had provided \$2.5 million for centers for the children of mothers in war work. But this program was killed in September, 1947, over the angry protests of many mothers who said that war or no war they had no alternative but to work.

A few day centers left in New York City in postwar years have been financed by the city and operated under the jurisdiction of the Welfare Department. But mothers would prefer to keep their self-respect and support the family without any aspect of "relief." In the winter of 1951-52 a measure was introduced in the New York state legislature to provide \$3 million for the revival of state-aided day-care centers for children of working mothers. It was designed primarily to enable mothers to work in mobilization industries.

This measure had the support of all organized labor, of parent-teacher associations, and of various women's organizations. The Women's Trade Union League urged its passage with the statement: "State-aided day-care centers where the children of women who must work can be properly cared for during working hours are a necessity

for growth and health of our children, for the morale and efficiency of working mothers. This bill has the approval of all organized labor."

But the bill was defeated. While billions were going for war preparations, the state legislators considered that \$3 million was too much to spend for this aspect of child welfare.

A well-rounded program for child-care facilities in a community is a preventive service that keeps families together and off relief rolls. Such a program provides nursery care for children from three to five as part of the education of children in this age group. In communities without proper recreational facilities, after-school planning for the older child is equally important. After-school activities can be provided in public school buildings.

If there is no such planned care for the children of mothers who must work, then family life is often broken up and the future welfare of the youth is threatened. But indignation at the lack of such centers is not enough. To obtain them for a community, action is imperative.

Why They Work

How many of the 18,128,000 women now on paid jobs away from their homes are working mothers, faced with the particular problems we have described? In 1950, a quarter of all working women—about 4,500,000 mothers—had children under 18, and 1,700,000 of these mothers had youngsters under school age.

From one-tenth to two-fifths of the women covered in a recent, representative government survey have children as dependents.² This survey shows that at least four million working mothers (and probably many more) in this country today are supporting or helping to support their children. Half to nearly two-thirds of all women workers support or partly support dependents in addition to supporting themselves, the report reveals.

Union groups in which the studies were made were the Brotherhood of Railway Clerks (AFL); Communications Workers of America (CIO); Hotel & Restaurant Employees (AFL); International Association of Machinists (independent when studied); International Ladies

Garment Workers' Union (AFL); Textile Workers Union of America (CIO); and Women's Trade Union League of America.

This survey is said to be the first comprehensive study ever made of the dependents supported by women employed in the production and service industries. Most working women live with their families, the Bureau reports. But even among those who live alone, from one-fourth to one-third contribute to the support of others.³

This new study demolishes once and for all the ancient myth that women work for "pin money" and do not really need the jobs they hold. The facts provide a strong argument for equal pay. The study proves that sex differentials in wages, still existing in all industries as we shall show, cannot be justified and should be abolished.

Here are actual examples from the Bureau's study showing the burden carried by individual women workers:

A 34-year-old woman in an east coast city supports her baby and sends money regularly to her mother. She is a telephone worker. "By the time I pay my bills each week," she said, "sometimes I don't have enough for groceries. . . . If my friends didn't give me and my baby clothes, we'd go ragged."

A southern textile mill worker under 30 years of age supports herself and two children completely and her mother partially. I'm "the only one working," she says.

A married woman over 40 has been working for more than 10 years, supporting her ill husband. "I had intended working for two years at the time we married," she says.

A waitress in the midwest supports herself, her child, and her 67-year-old mother. She is 40 and has worked at least 20 years. The family has no income but her earnings.

"Sister was left with a family of seven," writes a west coast woman railroad worker who supports herself, her sister, and the children.

An Ohio hotel worker over 65 is the sole support of herself and her 75-year-old husband. "When I was laid off last June," she writes, "I could not find work because I reached 65. I asked for social security. They could give me \$22.69 a month. I have to pay \$32 a month rent. . . . I was idle for three months, and was called back at my present job. Thank God."⁴

These are a few of the 18,708,000 women who in March, 1952,

were counted as being in the labor force in this country. The figures reveal a marked increase in the proportion (30.4 percent) of women in the total labor force, as compared with the 22 percent they formed in 1930.

Of the total, 18,128,000 were employed, 672,000 of them in agriculture and the others in non-agricultural industries. Counted as being in the labor force but unemployed were 580,000 others.

About a third of all the 57.5 million women (14 years and over) in the U.S. population go out to work, the Bureau of the Census reports. The proportion of those who are in the labor force rose from 22 percent in 1930 to 32 percent in March, 1952.

Married women during the decade 1940-50 came into the labor force in greater numbers than ever before. The 1940 Census showed about 36 percent of all women in the labor force were married, 49 percent were single, and 15 percent were widowed or divorced.

But by 1950, more than half (52 percent) of the 18 million women were married, 16 percent were widowed or divorced, and only 32 percent were single.⁵

Living costs and taxes have risen, especially during the recent U.S. drive for war preparations. In most families the take-home pay of one wage earner is not enough to meet even the minimum standard of living, to say nothing of the so-called "American" standard. The mother takes a job if she can possibly hold it down while also running a home and raising a family.

With typical male superiority *Business Week* comments on the idea of a working wife: "Under this setup, marriages tend to become more equalitarian, with the wife helping earn the income while the husband lends a hand with the dishes. This creeping change is becoming a part of the U.S. way of life."

"Lending a hand with the dishes" is scarcely comparable to the working wife's job.

Husband-and-wife families, with the husband as head of the family, numbered 34,556,000 at the time of the 1950 Census. In nearly eight million (23 percent) of these families the wife was in the paid labor force. For these families the total income averaged \$4,003, compared with an average of \$3,315 for families in which the wife was not in the labor force.

"It is evident," the Women's Bureau commented, "that the wife's labor force activity is directly influenced by the inadequacy of the husband's income. This influence is particularly marked in urban areas, where the proportion of working wives declined from about one-third of those whose husbands had incomes under \$3,000 to about one-tenth of those whose husbands had incomes of \$6,000 or more."⁶

What Kind of Jobs

Some 5,288,000 women, or 29 percent of all working women, were employed in January, 1952, in clerical work, the Bureau of the Census reported.

This very large proportion of clerical workers represents one of the major changes in women's employment in the last two decades. At the time of the 1930 Census, only 1,987,000 or 18.5 percent of all women workers were on clerical jobs. The number of women clerical workers has thus increased by more than 160 percent and the proportion they represent (of all working women) has grown from less than one-fifth to almost one-third.

Here are the figures showing the occupations of 18,246,000 women:

EMPLOYED WOMEN, JANUARY, 1952

<i>Major Occupation Group</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent Distribution</i>
Total employed	18,246,000	100.0
Clerical and kindred workers	5,288,000	29.0
Operatives and kindred workers	3,526,000	19.3
Professional, technical, and kindred workers	2,140,000	11.7
Service workers, except private household	2,034,000	11.1
Private household workers	1,724,000	9.4
Sales workers	1,368,000	7.5
Managers, officials, and proprietors, except farm	998,000	5.5
Farm laborers and foremen	636,000	3.5
Craftsmen, foremen, and kindred workers	258,000	1.4
Farmers and farm managers	190,000	1.0
Laborers, except farm and mine	84,000	0.5

Some 2,034,000 service workers, not in private households, include those who work in hotels, restaurants, and beauty shops. Domestic workers in private households number about 1,724,000, less than one in ten of the total number of women employed. Together these two groups of "service workers" total nearly 3,760,000 or about one-fifth of all working women. This is a smaller proportion than the 29.6 percent of all women workers who in 1930 were in domestic and personal service.

These numbers indicate that fewer women are on domestic and service jobs, while many more are now working in offices and on similar jobs. Over 1,300,000 are sales workers in stores. Only 190,000 or one percent of all are farmers and farm managers, but 636,000 are grouped as farm laborers "and foremen."

The 3,526,000 "operatives and kindred workers" are those who work in factories—about one-fifth of all employed women. This is nearly double the 1,886,000 who were on factory jobs twenty years ago at the time of the 1930 Census.

During World War II (1941-45) women were employed in great numbers in most war production, including aircraft, munitions, automobile, electrical, and other industries. With the stepped-up war preparations of the past two years, they have come back into these industries, even taking what are usually known as "men's jobs." At the Benicia Arsenal in the San Francisco Bay area, for example, women are said to form about 30 percent of the working force. They "are filling 'men's' jobs with notable success," the Secretary of the Army reports through the civilian personnel division.

"Jobs on which the women perform best, the arsenal reports, are those of crane operator, lift truck operator, fire control inspector, parts requirements planner and tallyman." They are also working on mechanical and warehouse jobs, including welding, toolroom operation, and inspection. Increased use of power tools has "enabled the arsenal to make extensive use of women in 'heavy' operations."

One of these women at the arsenal is a foreman in charge of a shop which operates three shifts. "She supervises 30 employees, most of whom are men."⁸ Few women in this country get such foremen's jobs.

Those 2,140,000 grouped as "professional and technical" include not only teachers, physicians, and lawyers but also nurses in hospitals. But

the proportion working in the professions and technical positions has *declined* from one in seven in 1930 to about one in nine this year. This drop reflects in part the continued discrimination against women as physicians and lawyers.

Some 400,000 trained nurses are classified as professional workers, but theirs is a difficult position. Even the newly established shorter workday of eight hours in hospitals is a long pull for those who must be constantly on their feet. Wages have risen somewhat in recent years but are still lower than in other fields of work. Smaller private hospitals now pay nurses about \$1 an hour or \$40 for a 40-hour week.

Nurses who have joined the Hospital Employees Union (local of the United Public Workers) have been able to win wage increases up to \$12 a day for an eight-hour day, and better conditions on the job. But in private hospitals nurses are eligible for retirement benefits under the Social Security Act only a voluntary basis, if the management and two-thirds of the workers vote to accept the social security system.

There is still an acute shortage of nurses in hospitals of all kinds, including veterans' hospitals, mental institutions, and in the public health services. This shortage may be traced directly to the difficulty of the nurse's job, usually involving hard physical labor and comparatively little recognition of professional status.

For women doctors the road winds uphill all the way. National health authorities report a critical shortage of more than 20,000 doctors in this country. Yet in the face of such need, more than half of the hospitals covered in a recent nation-wide survey said they had no resident positions open to women physicians. Only a handful of hospitals in the entire United States provide for women doctors full unlimited training and opportunity.

But when men physicians were asked for their frank opinions, more than eight out of ten said that "being male or female makes no difference in the practice of sound medicine."⁹ Most medical schools recognize that fact and 95 percent of them now accept women medical students. But the lack of adequate opportunity to practice means that many girls who would like to enter the profession hesitate to start on the long road to a medical career.

The decline in the number of women in the professions reflects also the low salaries paid to teachers in many communities. Women

find they have difficulty in living on the pay that averaged in 1950-51 only \$2,867 for elementary and high school teachers. For rural teachers the average in that year was only \$2,200.¹⁰ Many girls coming out of school and college would like to teach but decide not to enter a profession in which the salary scales are so low.

As spokesman for women in the professions and in business, the National Federation of Business & Professional Women's Clubs takes "the professional advancement of women as its special responsibility." Members of this organization oppose the discrimination against women in the professions and seek equal opportunity for the higher-paid positions in business.

In its recommendations to the U.S. delegation to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in March, 1952, the Federation of Business & Professional Women's Clubs urged greater political and educational opportunities for women and the removal of all legal discrimination. It urged adoption of proposals for equal pay for men and women workers doing work of equal value. It asked the U.S. delegation to express "disappointment that governments have not seen fit to include a larger number of women in their delegations and that the Secretary General has not found it possible to appoint more women in top posts in the Secretariat" of the United Nations.

In carrying out its purposes, however, this Federation often adopts a policy that benefits only women of the middle class in opposition to the interests of wage earners. Traditionally conservative, these business and professional women recently went on record again in support of the so-called Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. (See pp. 35-38.)

On the Farms

City workers are prone to forget that some eight million women over 14 years of age live and work on farms in this country. And thousands of these farm women still work without benefit of electricity or running water.

It is hard for the city dweller to imagine what this means to the women who must "pack the water" from the well and do all the