

# Working 9 to 5



by Natasha Beck

9 to 5, the National Association of Working Women, celebrated its tenth anniversary this winter. The organization is concerned with many working women's issues: pay equity, office automation, health and safety, and rights and respect. Formerly called "Working Women, National Association of Office Workers," the name change reflects a return to its "roots." The first office workers' organization in the 1970's, founded in Boston by former secretary Karen Nussbaum, was known simply as "9 to 5." Nussbaum is now executive director of the organization, which has branches in a number of cities. On the West Coast, chapters are active in Los Angeles and Seattle.

The national organization publishes a monthly newsletter which deals with the above issues as well as child care, the working family, and practical advice on office politics. During National Secretaries' Week in April, the organization holds demonstrations and rallies, highlighting the "sexist boss of the year." (A recent winner was an employer who required his secretary to mend his pants while he was wearing them.) Offices with especially progressive policies are also recognized.

Karen Nussbaum predicts that the 1980's will be for office workers what the 1930's were for industrial organizing. Clericals are 20 percent of the U.S. workforce and 35 percent of all women workers. The industrial, predominantly male, blue collar sector is declining due to plant closures in rubber, steel, auto and lumber with an accompanying decline in union membership. Thus it is necessary to organize the two expanding sectors, clerical and service, which are predominantly female, both minority and white, and constitute 80% of all working women.

To this end, 9 to 5 is now engaged in joint organizing projects with the Service Employees' International Union (SEIU). A recent success occurred this spring at the University of Washington where clerical workers joined the SEIU bargaining unit; Seattle 9 to 5 was instrumental in the victory, which is particularly significant in a period of high unemployment and decreased union organizing.

As in industrial work, automation is a major concern to office workers. The introduction of VDTs (Video Display Terminals, or word processors) to office technology has had mixed results. On one hand, word processors eliminate the need for retyping; changes can be made quickly and easily. On the other hand, VDTs cause many health and safety hazards, and have eliminated jobs. Hazards include eye, back and

neck strain, radiation, and boredom from repetitive tasks and lack of control over the work process.

Advantages of secretarial work have been the ability to organize one's work and variety in tasks performed. In some offices automation has eliminated this autonomy by having one worker file, one type, one phone, and one supervise. Use of a word processor doubles or triples a worker's output, but this increased production is not compensated.

9 to 5 published several brochures on health and safety, including a consumer's guide to VDT's. Adequate rest breaks, low glare screens, and chairs with good support are essential to reduce the health hazards of VDT work.

In a speech in Salem last fall, Nussbaum stated that Western European countries such as West Germany and Sweden are far ahead of U.S. businesses in recognizing these hazards; 15 minute rest breaks every hour, a maximum of 4 hours a day on the word processor, and 4-6 weeks vacation are common policies to reduce stress. (VDT operators have the highest stress levels of any occupation, and secretaries rank second.)

Another stress factor for clericals is the double day — 8 hours on the job in addition to hours spent on housework and frequently child care. Office workers who are single parents face even greater responsibilities. Hypertension, anxiety and depression are byproducts of unrelieved stress. Exercise, adequate rest and recreation, sharing of household tasks among family members and quality child care facilities are necessary prevention tactics.

Stress is also caused by the low pay and lack of respect clerical workers receive. Clericals average \$11,000/year, with little promotional opportunities; most jobs are "dead-end." Overall, women workers receive 59% of what men earn; the figure is even lower for minority women. The small number of female managers are mostly recruited from outside the companies, and most female supervisors are in the lower levels. Thus management is still dominated by white males, who in many white collar industries are paid higher salaries and have longer career ladders than the "women's jobs."

Organizing is one solution to low pay. Clericals in unionized jobs receive 30% more than their unorganized counterparts. They also get contracts to spell out all their benefits, grievance procedures, and pay scales.

Another solution to occupational segregation and low salaries is pay equity, or equal pay for comparable

worth. Several unions, including SEIU and AFSCME (American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees), have endorsed this concept, which involves upgrading jobs by rating them according to skill, education and responsibility. Clerical work involves communication, technical and administrative skills which need to be recognized and compensated.

The State of Washington has started the process of ranking its state jobs by the above criteria. State Senator Margie Hendriksen (D-Eugene) will chair a committee formed by the 1983 legislative session to study implementing a similar system in Oregon. On the municipal level, San Jose, California conducted a survey of its city classified jobs following a strike of its clerical workers.

Lack of respect for secretaries is shown by requests for personal services (buying presents, non-business typing, making and serving coffee and food), sexual harassment, being addressed by one's first name yet required to address the boss formally, not being allowed to participate in staff meetings: in other words, any action which undermines one's dignity or ability to perform the job. Respect can't be written into a job description or union contract, but having these safeguards can facilitate better treatment. 9 to 5 distributes an "Office Workers' Bill of Rights" which spells out equitable treatment: the right to refuse personal errands, the right to choose one's lifestyle, freedom from age, race and sex discrimination, among other things.

The office workers' movement is growing and changing. The issues it raises are essential ones for women, minorities and all working people.

Adult women returning to the labor force have provided a large share of labor force growth and are expected to constitute an even larger share in the future, according to "Women at Work: A Chartbook," published by the U.S. Department of Labor.



Mrs. Yvonne Cardwell, clerk-typist for the City of Portland.

(Photo: Richard J. Brown)

Women remain concentrated in the traditionally female occupational fields; in 1982, 99 percent of secretaries, 96 percent of nurses, and 82 percent of elementary school teachers were women, according to "Women at Work: A Chartbook," published by the U.S. Department of Labor.

Women are on the payrolls of every major industry group but are especially concentrated in the service-producing sector of the economy. Of all employees in the service-producing sector in 1982, half were women; in contrast, women made up a little over one-fourth of the workers in goods-producing industries, according to a U.S. Labor Department publication.

Between 1972 and 1982, the number of women working in clerical and professional occupations rose by more than 50 percent to 23 million. A substantial increase also occurred in the service occupations, which in 1982 accounted for one out of five employed women, according to a U.S. Department of Labor publication.

Women have constituted the major share of labor force growth since the 1960s, and are projected to account for seven out of ten additions to the labor force in the 1980s, according to "Women at Work: A Chartbook," published by the U.S. Department of Labor.



## REWARD YOURSELF WITH CONFIDENCE

Solid foundations help support what we build. Whether a house, a project — or a life. One of the surest foundations is confidence. And Shari Ichida-Busse has it.

An early hunch that led to her first job, at WGN-Chicago, also opened the door to the career she maintains today. Once just on the ground floor of Traffic Operations for the Illinois station, Shari now oversees an entire department as Traffic Manager for KPTV. The confidence that grew with her is well-earned. It also had to be learned.



Lessons could be found from home, and from honest self-assessment. On the one hand, Shari recognized the example of her parents. Though both second-generation Pacific Northwesters, they were interred in the American concentration camps that sprang up after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Determined to put the experience behind them, they relocated after the war and raised their family with values to depend on, such as perseverance and respect for life.

For her part, Shari moved gradually through the ranks of her business specialty, becoming familiar with all its aspects. The desire for a fresher, more hospitable environment impelled her to seek work in Portland, where she and her husband then moved. Her willingness in Chicago to master the new computer-based Broadcast Industry Automation System — now standard in the business — enabled Shari to transfer her abilities to TV-12. Patience with much to be learned again proved worthwhile, as she garnered further experience necessary for her present position.

After so much effort, Shari is comfortable with her proficiency, but not surprisingly, she still pays close attention to what is before her. Keeping her staff motivated. Upholding organization. Handling the turnover of technical data. These are simply par for the expectations she sets and upgrades. In her view, "You've got to take pride in what you do, no matter what." That means, "overcome the past, rise above it, and strive to be better." Shari also senses the importance of education, formal and informal. "If you don't have guidance, find it from someone who knows." With such a blueprint, efforts are rewarding, and confidence is inevitable.

Whether or not your training is broadcast-related, the skills you take pride in might be applicable to a television career. To learn more about such possibilities, consult the KPTV Personnel Department.

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