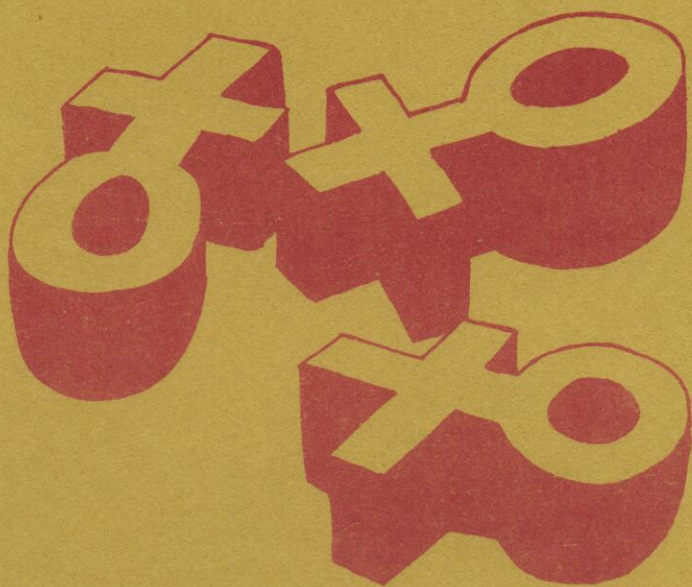


WOMEN'S WORK



A COLLECTION OF ARTICLES
BY WORKING WOMEN

25¢

WOMAN'S WORK:

a selection
of articles
by working
women

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THIS BOOKLET was edited and produced by the Working Women's Association, entirely by voluntary labor. Drawings by Lynn Ruscheinsky. Typesetting by Jean Rands, except poem by Josie Cooke. Layout and proofreading by D.J. O'Donnell, Nancy Martin, Melody Rudd, Chris Schoening, Alice Robert, Jackie Ainsworth. Printing by the Left Press.

This economic system cannot survive without the work of millions of women. We operate the telephone system, we punch the computer cards that control companies and governments, we type the letters, file the orders, and serve customers in restaurants, department stores and supermarkets.

The employer can say he doesn't need us because there are lots of women out there looking for work. But he does need women workers as a pool of cheap labor.

The corporations have always seen us as a group, but they do everything to prevent us from seeing ourselves as a group. By forbidding us to talk about our paycheck or raises, the bosses try to build competition and mistrust between workers. They try to convince us that our problems are our own individual problems, results of our own individual failure. Often women are ashamed of what they got for a raise — ashamed rather than angry! Blaming ourselves rather than the boss. The stories in this booklet are stories of individual women doing different jobs. But they show that we face common problems, that can only be solved by working together.

To survive we must work for wages that are equal neither to our needs or our worth, and are far below any unionized women or working men. As inflation continues to take away more and more of our wages it is becoming clear that as women workers we cannot

survive by ourselves, that we must organize together to fight for decent wages and conditions.

By unionizing we can fight and win demands for equal pay for equal work, maternity leave, child care, and an end to discrimination in hiring. (For instance, the telephone workers in Toronto are currently demanding that the company pay capital expenditure for a community controlled day care centre.)

It is clear, though, that we cannot rely on the existing trade unions to organize us. They have failed to take on the struggle against employers in department stores, restaurants, banks, offices. The arguments that union leaders give about the "impossibility" of organizing women workers are the same arguments that were given against early organizers who started unions on this continent. The unions which come from a tradition of militancy have all too often become bureaucratic and dominated from the U.S.

Yet any union provides some sort of job security, improved wages and working conditions, and the opportunity to bargain collectively, rather than facing the company as individuals.

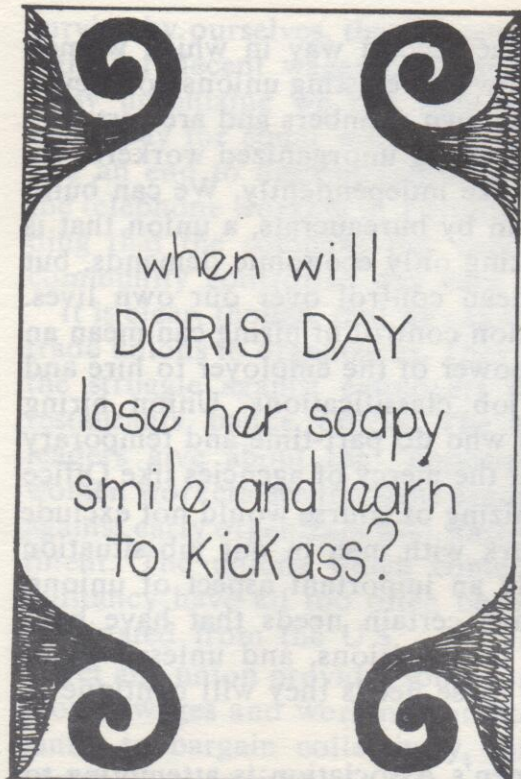
In BC only 20% of women workers are in trade unions and there has been no substantial change in that percentage in the last ten years. As working women we have to organize to change that fact. And we must do that in two ways.

Women in unionized jobs must get together as women to demand that women have some power in their unions. (Even in unions where the majority of members are women, the executive is controlled by men.) Union women can work to make their unions more responsive to their needs as women, to fight for equal pay, child care, etc. Most important, unionized women must support attempts of unorganized women to fight for our rights. Only by building a real solidarity of all working women can we win.

This brings us to the second way in which women must organize. We know that existing unions don't even meet the needs of their own members and are certainly not committed to organizing unorganized workers. We must, therefore, organize independently. We can build a union that is not run by bureaucrats, a union that is not interested in making only economic demands, but also demands that mean control over our own lives. For instance, only union control of hiring can mean an end to the arbitrary power of the employer to hire and fire and determine job classifications. Union hiring could protect women who do part-time and temporary work, who are now at the mercy of agencies like Office Overload. This organizing of course would not exclude men. Many of us work with men in our job situation and unity is certainly an important aspect of unions. However, women have certain needs that have been consistently ignored in all unions, and unless women organize to fight for these needs they will continue to be ignored.

The Working Women's Association is attempting to spread the idea that as working women we can and must organize ourselves. We are collecting information about labor laws and procedures so that women can organize independently of the existing bureaucratic male-chauvinist unions. As well, we work to support women who are organizing or on strike, whatever union they may be in.

We are a small group, and need all the help we can get. Come and talk about your job situation, and work with us. This booklet is intended as the first of a series. There is almost no literature now about the situation of working women. We as working women are the only people who will fill this gap. Join us. Contact us at our office, Rm. 3, 45 Kingsway, Vancouver 10. **Phone: 872-1824.**



when will
DORIS DAY
lose her soapy
smile and learn
to kickass?



or

GIRLS! Are you looking for a fulfilling job, a job with a future, guaranteed to eliminate your self respect, distort your value, reduce you to a mindless, servile, lowly blob or a simpering sweet dolly?

Then become a secretary!

And if you want a job that eliminates any fear that you might actually be a human being, then become a secretary in a university department! Perhaps you thought that lowly freshmen held the bottom rung of the university status ladder — wrong, even lower than the freshmen are the clerical staff: the paper typers, the messengers, the coffee makers, the file keepers of the world.

Let's drink to the hardworking people, to the salt of the earth . . . how frustrated I get when so many students and professors — some of them freaks and supposedly so hip to the troubled state of the world — run around the department I work in and look through me, oblivious to the fact that I am more than just an extension of my typewriter, or a producer of letters and other

GET YOUR OWN DAMN COFFEE MR. JONES

by Sara Gunnard, from the *Ubyyssey*

academic bullshit, who recognize my existence only and tokenly when they have some minor clerical problem that falls within my limited range of ability. Charity begins at home.

Secretaries are supposed to be pleasant, smiling, attractive, amenable, passive. You are not supposed to be bad-tempered, or ugly, or smell.

You are either treated like a retard or a child and have every word spelled out to you with microscopically detailed instructions, or you are expected to be a mind reader and to know what you're supposed to do by telepathy.

There is only a stock approach to secretaries, a standard method of relating to the girl behind the typewriter — nobody acknowledges the fact that you're different or an individual, nobody relates to you *as you are*, you are only approached by the standard secretary approach method.

We mustn't let our bosses down, we must play out the role. You start off compromising and playing the obliging, simpering secretary role because you want to keep your job and your pay

cheque, and before too long you really believe in keeping them happy and earning that rewarding little pat on the head from time to time.

At home their wives wait on them — and in the office, their secretaries do. And how many secretaries really believe in it and lovingly regard their bosses as some sort of surrogate husband/father/lover figure?

We love our masters, we crave their approval, we sell ourselves out to oblige, because we have so well assimilated the values that keep us in our lowly position with our negative expectations. Happy, happy niggers.

Willingly we rush out to get him his coffee and cigarettes, obligingly, we sit in gaggles over coffee break and giggle and act cute and simple, discussing our ailments, husband and/or boyfriends, recipes and other trivia, so that the brilliant scholars can talk academia and feel so clever and superior. Nothing like a secretary to lift a jaded male ego.

My eyes have seen: the professor who complains that he could do a better job on keeping files, or the professor who can also type who sneers because he can do my job in his stride, I have no special or secret talents, I am just a greater convenience, and besides, he had more demanding things to do, and of course it's not work an intelligent person would like to do anyway.

But it's my job, it's what I'm given to do, to fill one-third of my day, five days a week.

Or the secretary that works overtime, unrewarded for it, because it's expected of her, she's supposed to be dedicated.

Or meeting Professors Schmuckatella at a movie downtown, who's all smiles and hallos and leering looks in the office in the daytime, but who doesn't see or acknowledge my existence out of the office context.

Of the first name business, where right from the first day on the job, I'm addressed by my first name, not out of friendship or familiarity or even by my consent, but because of my position in the hierarchy. You can work for someone for 50 years but he will still be Mr. Smith or Dr. Jones.

There is no room for satisfaction or pride in our work, or any feeling of achievement whatsoever, no fruits to our labor. I tediously type and type, only to have what I've done returned to me for retyping when I'm finished because the professor made a mistake or changes his mind and wants to substitute 'nevertheless' for 'but'.

Not a thought that it might discourage you to see your work returned on a whimsical change of mind. There is no concept in his mind that this is my handicraft, my product.

Why should I even expect that at all? Am I not just the typist? I am not part of the creative process, I am just part of the replication process.

Why, are typists rarely, if ever, mentioned in the acknowledgements of a paper, regardless of what they've put into that paper, in terms of time and labor and care, in producing a perfectly neat copy, reading illegible handwriting, correcting spelling and grammar mistakes, etc.?

And what of all the sad little delusions the typist might have about her own importance, about putting her best into her work, about having pride in doing a job well?

The small lower-case initials she types after her boss's upper-case initials at the end of a letter stand as a silent, tiny plea for recognition of her individuality as the typist. Who cares anyway?

Dare anybody seek satisfaction in the things they do for a wage, or are we all supposed to accept our alienation and estrangement from our labor as part of the whole picture, as a necessary drawback to being a wage-earner in society?

Some of us actually don't want a man to support us, we want to be self-sufficient.

And then there are the working conditions. A woman can work for years and years in her job — but she will gain only years, no promotion, no official recognition, no increased remuneration other than her annual \$10 raise.

Quoted from the Office and Technical Employees' Union, in comparing the grades of secretaries, taken from the UBC scales: *"Secretary II, Stenographer II, Department secretary — preferred qualifications: high school graduation plus business training, ability to type 60 w.p.m., and to take and transcribe shorthand at 110 w.p.m. Four years experience at the University or its equivalent — salary: \$401-495. A cleaner (no previous experience) in the B.C. government service is paid \$490-533 a month."*

What can be done, short of eliminating the secretarial role altogether?

A secretary with the ability should be given greater responsibility and independence and respect — and remuneration — as is the case with other capable intelligent workers in business.

Secretaries need not be supervised like children or have their

wrists slapped because they are a few minutes late or because they did not follow office procedures to the letter. Moreover, it would surely help if they were treated as separate individual human beings, with different natures, abilities, personalities, etc.

Of course secretaries themselves need to develop a better attitude towards their profession, and towards themselves — they should not feel so subservient, they need to be less compromising and pliable, less satisfied with what they have at present, they should be more assertive, more sure of themselves, more demanding and have more respect.

They should organize together, not just for better conditions and wages, but also to help develop a stronger, more affirmative attitude towards themselves as workers and women.

from Pedestal, April '72

the post office
degrades
&
exploits
women

working women's workshop and urged women to join us. The leaflet was distributed at the garage door and another side door (used by the upstairs help and the carriers) at the beginning of the shifts.

During the week before I had had several conversations with other women about our oppression as women. When there was no one to talk to I would read a paperback of essays on women's liberation. Many people must have noticed because quite a few asked me about the leaflet. Even the men were using the figures to calculate how many letters they would have to sort to pay for their lunch or for a bottle of rye or a turkey for Christmas.

Some of the women thought the male sorters were being paid \$1.90 (the wages of porters — all men) while we were getting \$1.65. Some went around challenging the men demanding to know what they were earning.

One of the jobs of the porters was to bundle the sorted mail when our boxes got full. Often we were too fast for them and we would be stuck trying to force letters into overstuffed cubicles. When people learned through the leaflet that the rubber bands were giving the bundlers blisters, many sorters began bundling their own mail. Bundling provided a welcome change from sorting. During the last hour of my last day (Christmas Eve) I was bundling mail when my supervisor came along.

"Hey, don't do that, I'll get the boys to do it."

I was so tired and bored I snapped back, "What the hell, do you think just because I'm a woman, I don't find sorting just as boring as you?" He just backed off in surprise, but for the next hour there were bundlers constantly at my elbow.

Because our jobs were so temporary (according to our contracts we could be fired without notice), there wasn't much opportunity to organize any major confrontations on the job. But I do think quite a few people came away with a very different conception of what the movement for women's liberation is all about.

from Pedestal, Jan. '71

As we trot down the curved driveway into the garage-basement the stale warm air replaces the fresh morning air. A certain dull tired feeling begins to creep over you. Your lungs seem to sigh with a weary recognition of the products of the sleepy yawning of the graveyard shift. You sign your name next to your number, collect your time sheet, check your coat, and take your place on the assembly line.

Like anonymously numbered machines we line up before "our" boxes. We form into long rows of sorters standing before sets of labelled cubicles into which we are to place the sorted mail. We each work a set of 60 to 70 addresses. The concrete floor is covered with long thin rubber mats where we stand. Light is provided by rows of bare light bulbs. Some areas are known as headache regions because of the poor lighting. One side is reserved for parking spaces for the cars of the bureaucrats who inhabit the floors above ground. Everyone is convinced that it is the carbon monoxide given off by these cars and the mail trucks that is putting us all to sleep. Everything is filthy. The cases into which we sort the mail and the floors below them are thick with dust which especially troubles those with allergies.

The work is simple — too simple. There is no decision-making involved except to decipher an occasional illegible address. And according to written instructions (handed out the day we had to swear we would not tamper with the Queen's mail), "if in doubt, ask a supervisor, NOT the sorter next to you. . ." We always asked each other anyway, just so as to have an excuse to talk to one another. Sorting is simple but demanding. It is difficult to think in words while reading addresses. At best we could only daydream. As a result we were usually eager to talk during our coffee and lunch breaks. Unfortunately, coffee breaks were so short that by the time you stood in line to buy a coffee, if you talked to your neighbor you wouldn't finish your drink before time was called. The first days people jumped up and rushed back to work when the supervisors called time (especially the very young women) but later individuals would shout for more time and refuse to move. Though there were no direct confrontations the breaks got a little longer.

It was mostly during these breaks that we began to get to know each other. Because the jobs were temporary people did not seem to repress their dislike for their work. They readily expressed disgust with the working conditions and compared experiences with other jobs.

One woman said she was only working to earn some extra money for Christmas presents. But when a bearded fellow said welfare had threatened to cut off him and his wife if he did not work at the Post Office, she admitted that she was a widow with a young son and having a pretty hard time herself. Over the weeks a kind of conspiracy developed whereby many of us were sorting all welfare, unemployment and pension checks first and misorting any mail from collection agencies.

Everybody was talking about feet. What part of the foot was hurting most. What were the best remedies for sore feet, etc. Many of the older women carried extra shoes. But every night many people from the young girls in uncomfortable shoes to the old men were limping as we walked out.

One woman who was trying to earn enough money to pay for a jacket she had bought for her husband for Christmas, was worried about what her friends would think if they knew she was there. At first she said she was working because it was so boring staying home, but later she indicated that while her husband earned enough to send the kids to university, he kept her on a pretty stingy allowance.

The older men and women often expressed dismay that so many young people could find work nowhere else. When some of us finally admitted that we had university degrees, they were appalled. The younger ones of us were upset by the number of old people who had no security after working all their lives and were forced to take such low paying and exhausting jobs.

One of the supervisors admitted to some of us that never before had the turnover been so minimal. People were sticking it out because they needed the money. When we were sent home two hours early one day many people complained that they needed the money more than the time off.

One day an old man next to me asked me how many letters I thought I sorted in a day. I muttered something about as few as possible. He laughed and bet me it was over 5000. So we each counted for five minutes several times and averaged the results. Counting slowed us down but still we averaged at least a hundred every five minutes.

That night I ran off a leaflet I had written with suggestions from a few other sorters. The first paragraph described how most of us were sorting a minimum of 8400 letters a day and earning about a penny for every ten. The leaflet talked about the conditions everyone was familiar with. It described the projects of the

inside agitation at the post office

by Pat Uhl

*you wake up in the morning,
hear that ol' alarm ring,
go marchin' to the table;
it's the same damn thing...*

"Oatmeal!"

"Now honey, you said you always get so hungry before lunch."

It's true. I can't deny it. The work isn't very strenuous, just boring and tiring. But I'm always starving by 11:00 and lunch isn't till 1:00. So I down the thick stuff without another word and pray that heavy lump feeling in my stomach will last at least till noon.

Then it's on with my coat, grab my lunch and out the door and into the working world. It's eight o'clock. The cold morning rain (8 days out of 10) wakes me up. I start to walk unnaturally fast — like everyone else on their way to work. I check every clock I see.

Finally I turn the corner and the Post Office comes into view. The nobility of the ever faithful mail carrier etched out on the corner stones belies the ugliness that resides in the bowels of this building. In this last block I am always joined by fellow postal workers. I can usually recognize them though we are an odd assortment of humanity — very young girls who look as though they've never worked before; older tougher women who look like they've worked in factories all their lives; old men in old clothing and lots of hippie types in jeans and beads and hairbands and coats from the Sally Ann. We hurry past the fancy front doors around the corner to the back of the building and through a large garage door. We flash our temporary helper buttons at a friendly commissionaire who waves us on and warns us to watch out for the mail trucks which enter and leave the same way we do.



THERE I WAS AT THE TRAIN STATION WITH \$10,
NO PLACE TO STAY, NO FRIENDS, AND I COULDN'T
UNDERSTAND THE LANGUAGE.

by Elizabeth Dube

Being Quebecoise is something that I am proud of, but having to leave my own country because of unemployment is disgusting. My parents decided that I should be a secretary, like it or not. Being poor with ten kids, I was the only one they wanted to send to college for one year, because I didn't seem to be in a hurry to get married. Most of my sisters babysat for a huge family of up to fifteen children for \$40 a month. They finally got married because there wasn't any other solution for them, and no better job around.

My five brothers left school after grade seven, helped on the farm for a while, went to cut wood in winter time for a few months. In the summer you could pick potatoes for 25 cents a barrel in New Brunswick. Right now my father is working in a sawmill for \$1.00 an hour. Most of the jobs are for two or three months. After that people collect unemployment or pile up debt.

After my grade twelve commercial, I couldn't find a job except in Montreal or Quebec City. One out of forty graduates got a job around my town, Riviere-du-Loup. My parents encouraged me to go to Montreal where the situation is not much better because of the big shots saying, "Sorry, we only hire bilingual people or English speaking." Those men should learn French themselves. So I went to Toronto to learn English. It wasn't easy. Toronto isn't a very friendly city. Welfare wasn't easy to get five years ago. There I was at the train station with \$10, no place to stay, no friends, and I couldn't understand the language.

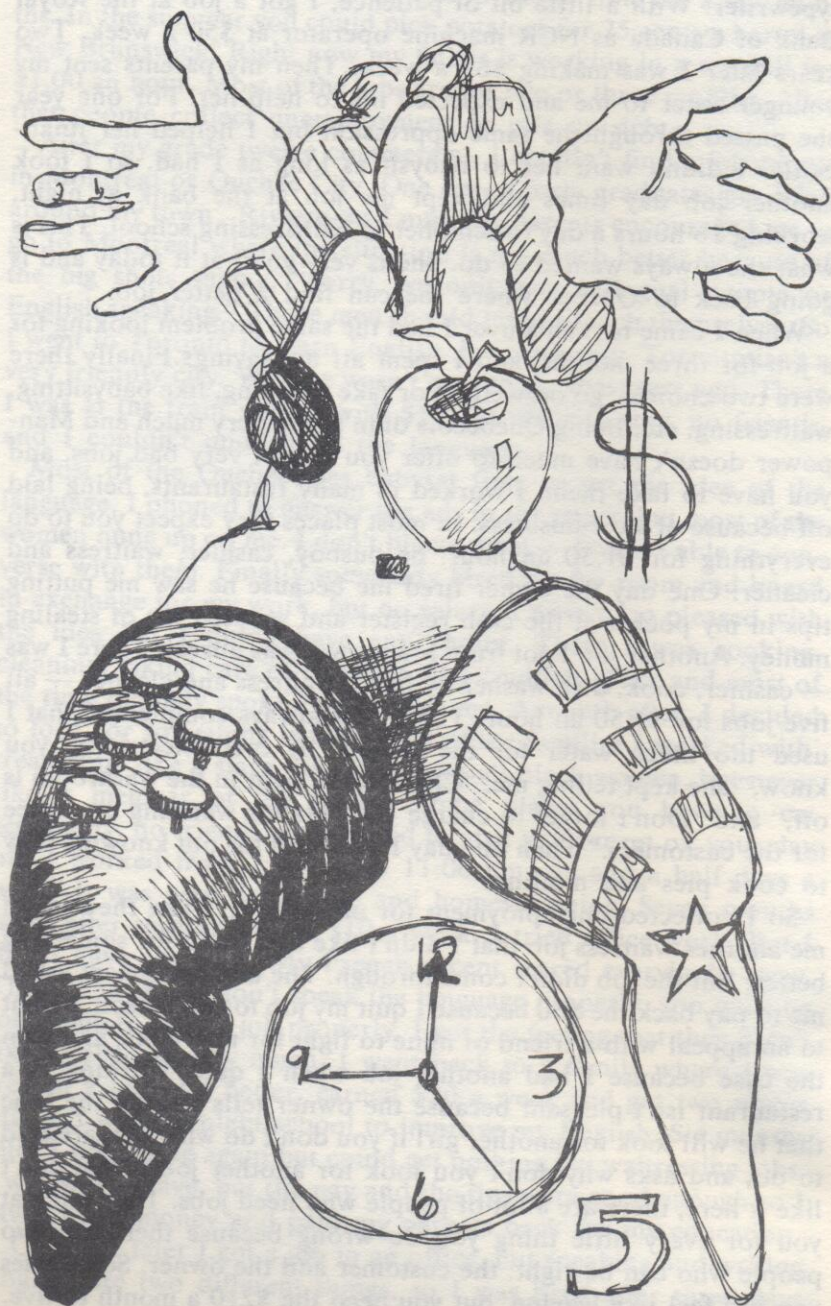
Most of the Quebecois babysat first, to get the idea of the language. I phoned to answer the ads in the paper, but most of the women hung up on me. I don't blame them — I wasn't able to converse with them. Finally somebody hired me for room and board in exchange for my work, but no salary. I wasn't too pleased with the idea but I didn't have any choice. There I was cooking, cleaning, taking care of two kids who couldn't speak and most of the time the lady spoke French with me. A month after, I decided to look for something better. Most of the families I worked with treated me like a slave, like they treat all black women, but never like a member of the family. Some places you have to eat separately, no friends are allowed to visit you except on your day off. I worked from 7:00 am to 11:00 pm, six and a half days a week. It was very depressing and homesickening. Seven months later, after several jobs at \$10 a week, I tried office work. But I didn't have any luck. My French accent scared everybody away. They think if you don't speak the language properly, you must be too dumb to do the job properly. I got the feeling that they didn't like Quebecois very much. I went back to a family where I was treated a little bit better, earned \$20 a week and got two nights off, so I went to night school to improve my English. Six months later I was trying again but could get nothing but waitressing jobs. I was still a slave, but the pay and the tips were good enough so I saved some money and paid my parents back for my education.

One year later I got a job in an office, but speaking and writing English are two different things, so I was fired after three days

because I didn't have enough experience and was too slow on the typewriter. With a little bit of patience, I got a job at the Royal Bank of Canada as NCR machine operator at \$50 a week. Two years later I was making \$65 a week. Then my parents sent my younger sister to me and expected me to help her. For one year she passed through the same oppression but I helped her financially. I didn't want her to babysit as long as I had, so I took another job day times and kept my job at the bank at night, working 16 hours a day to send her to hairdressing school. This is what she always wanted to do. She is very good at it today and is going back to Quebec where she can find a better job.

When I came to Vancouver I had the same problem looking for a job for three months, and I spent all my savings. Finally there were two choices: go on welfare or take anything, like babysitting, waitressing, etc. Being Quebecois didn't help very much and Manpower doesn't have much to offer you except very bad jobs, and you have to take them. I worked in many restaurants, being laid off because of slow business. In most places they expect you to do everything for \$1.50 an hour: be busboy, cashier, waitress and cleaner. One day the owner fired me because he saw me putting tips in my pocket at the cash register and accused me of stealing money. Another job I got from Manpower was unreal. There I was — cashier, cook, dish washer by hand, waitress and cleaner — all five jobs for \$1.50 an hour. The owner always complained that I used too much water for the dishes. "It costs electricity, you know," she kept telling me. "Check if the light in the washroom is off," and "Don't forget to charge 10 cents for warming up coffee for the customers." Then one day I was fired for not knowing how to cook pies and muffins.

So I collected unemployment for one month. Then they found me another waitress job that I didn't like and I quit for something better. But the job didn't come through. The unemployment asked me to pay back the \$60 because I quit my job for no reason. I went to an appeal with a friend of mine to fight for my rights, and won the case because I had another job when I quit. Working in a restaurant isn't pleasant because the owner tells you all the time that he will look for another girl if you don't do what you are told to do, and asks why don't you look for another job if you don't like it here, there are a lot of people who need jobs. They bitch at you for every little thing you do wrong because there are two people who can be right: the customer and the owner. Sometimes you just feel like leaving, but you need the \$210 a month to live.



SOME PEOPLE WORK FOR A LIVING WHILE OTHERS LIVE FOR WORK

YOUR LIVER IS SCREWED
AROUND STEAMTABLES AND
CASH REGISTERS

EACH WATERGLASS ENCASES YOU
AND YOU ARE LAID OUT ON THE TABLE
FOR DINNER

THE BOSS IS HUNGRY
FOR THE APPLE IN YOUR MOUTH
HE SMOTHERS YOU IN SYRUP,
FILLS YOUR POCKETS

WITH STORIES
THEN FILLETS YOUR
BROKEN SPINE

CURSING THE INCONVENIENCE.

-CHRIS
SCHOENING

WOMAN

by *Helen Potrebenko*

I'm probably the worst taxi-driver that ever lived, and besides that, I have acquired 5 points for various infractions. If I was going to be a permanent driver, I would take karate lessons and the 150th time somebody asked me if it wasn't a dangerous job for a woman I would kill him dead. I dislike the question about whether or not I'm married even worse, and get asked it more often, but it's easier to answer. I tell them it's none of their business, and therein lies one of the charms of cab-driving. You don't have to simper sweetly at the customers. I only need to smile at them when I feel like it, which, I must confess, is still fairly often. I'm a happy driver, but it's a stagnant state of grinning ignorance of which I am not proud.

When I first began driving last year, I was really indignant about the crap a woman driver has to take and gave women's liberation speeches to captive audiences. I don't any more. More and more often I answer the nauseating questions in the accepted way and agree it's a nice day. It doesn't seem worthwhile to fight. You can, with enormous energy, bring one insulter to see the

DRIVER



error of his ways, but he is followed by multitudes of others saying the same mindless things. There is no grand battle to be fought and won, only the day to day sameness grinding away.

Other jobs have some kind of hope of betterment built in. Cabbies know there's nowhere to go, and we talk about the mythical Big Trip that will boost our income to livable standards this month. We know also that there's never going to be peace in the world and that improving society is only another fool's dream, like our Big Trip.

The few steady drivers I know are men who have grown old pushing hack and who complain of the stomach and back problems that go with the job. A few are people on their way down, small businessmen who lost, ex-executives over 40. There are seasonal workers, like fishermen, who only drive during the winter. There is a fairly large proportion of foreigners; Greeks being the largest group in the company I work for. The individual members of another race or nationality do not appear to suffer any discrimination from other drivers. The Greeks, however, are subjected to about the same amount of hostility as women.

Passengers vary in their attitudes. Some will not ride with women; others will only ride with white people.

Although the number of women drivers is increasing, there are still relatively few. Three of the women I know have been driving since the war when nearly all cabbies were women. Another half-dozen or so are married to male drivers. Several of us are students.

I don't know if my initiation was typical. One day a group of about 10 of us listened to a four hour lecture, standing (amenities like chairs or coffee breaks are too luxurious for mere cabbies), and my head was a jumble of thousands of rules about what to do, when not to do it and what to do instead. Besides all that, I was woefully aware of the fact that I had no sense of direction.

The next day I was sent out with a fat old driver named Black who was supposed to show me how all the rules I didn't remember worked in practice. Instead of learning anything, I spent the day listening to Black talk about all the fucking he'd ever done or imagined he'd done. He ended the long, long monologue by telling me he'd get in my pants next, baby, and I'd find out what a great fucker he was. I was too totally demoralized by the previous day's lecture, and my lack of a sense of direction, to tell him to shut up.

My first day on my own was every bit as bad as one would expect. I kept getting lost. The car I was driving was difficult to steer and kept stalling. I took it back and the manager told me that drivers who complained about the condition of the car couldn't work there. Near the end of the day, I scraped a parked car, mostly because I was just too tired to give a damn. The manager told me I was finished, but then he changed his mind for some reason. The next week I had to go explain my actions to the Safety Committee and they were very nice to me. I think it was because I had proved their assumptions about the uselessness of women and Simon Fraser students.

I stuck it out through those first miserable months mostly because I didn't know what else to do. Now the other drivers more or less accept me as one of them, and it's been months already since the manager threatened to fire me.

Although you don't see much of them, you need the other drivers quite desperately. If there's an accident or the car breaks down, it's nice to have someone there to help quickly. At 5 o'clock on a Sunday morning when the only people still on the streets are hungry, mean, angry, hungover, you need to notice and listen for

each other. Cabbies are not nice people. They drink a lot to get the bad taste out of their mouth, they steal to supplement their meager income, they gamble in the hope that a big win will get them out of this racket. But in a hard and hostile world we make an attempt to look after each other. (Unless, of course, it means missing a fare.)

In my first months of driving everybody could tell I wasn't a cab driver. More and more often now fares accept me as the driver and are surprised to find I am also a student. I don't know why. I smile a lot less than before, but that probably has more to do with Simon Fraser than the cab. I worry less about the state of the world and more about my personal problems. I am less interested in the passenger than the amount of the tip he is likely to give. It's becoming a matter of survival; other values are becoming less important. All of us drive drunks to boot-leggers, addicts to pushers, executives to business deals. Without asking questions or even caring about it, if certain kinds of people always go to a certain place, the function of the place becomes obvious. It doesn't matter; what matters is the amount of money you can get. Values, principles, kindness, are all very nice but you can't live on the amount of money an honest cab driver would make. You have to make money on the side and there are various ways of doing this. It's life on a slightly more elemental level which makes it easier to see how you are being screwed. If I am nothing but a cheap body, then inevitably for me a fare becomes simply a fare. It's difficult to regard them as people. It may be a good fare or a bad fare, but that's as far as I go.

I have driven all over the city and am learning what it's about. The value of people is measurable only in money and I get very little money. I get the rotting stomach, the constant fear, and in return enough money for liquor to forget it all. The run-of-the-mill workers who don't ride very often are slightly apologetic about the circumstances which led them into the cab. They don't ride far and they rarely tip. The people who have the money are the pimps, pushers, executives, prostitutes, bootleggers, gamblers, stockbrokers. It isn't about to change. The ruling class might change but it will remain the same for the rest of us. It's the biggest son-of-a-bitch that rules the world and us who were born poor will die poor.

Women ride in cabs less often than men and count the change carefully and deliberate over the amount of the tip. When I started driving, I used to give away free rides but now I have been burned

enough times to know that fares are not to be trusted; they're all the same and they're all dishonest.

Attitudes to me vary with the kind of passenger. Workers, as I have said, are apologetic. Businessmen want to set up a deal. Prostitutes and waitresses treat me as an equal, fancier ladies seem frightened of me. Little old ladies are the only people delighted to see a woman driver. Loggers, diamond drillers, construction workers and other kinds of transient laborers are the best kind of fares unless they're mean-drunk and then they're the worst. Happy drunk they are delighted to see a sex object driving, make a lot of noise, carry their own luggage, and tip hugely. I'm a slightly better grade of meat than they've been accustomed to and sometimes they are vastly indignant to find I do not sell my body as well as my soul. I prefer that to driving the ruling class around, in spite of everything, and tend to hang around the lower class hotels. The people there seem to me less dangerous.

I like being a cabbie. It's honest. I've worked in a cafe, an office, and many hospitals. Once I was training to be a teacher and now I am almost a university graduate. Having done all that, all I ask of my job is that the dishonesty be open and direct; and the lying deliberately vindictive. If somebody is out to get me, it's better that they do it with a gun or a knife or a fiery crash on the highway; it's easier than being stepped on like an ant without even being noticed, or with innocent protestations that it's all for my own good.

I like the city. It's a great sprawling organism; its inward particles continually changing without altering the essential pattern.

I like the sunrises best: the sun coming up over the mountain, its light filtering through the city muck.

I like the sound of tires on pavement. Sometimes it seems I end where the car does, rolling down Granville, the sun beating down on the black top, covered with sweat and grease, the radio mumbling its incessant monologue.

The first time I went to Grande Prairie as a child from the farm, I thought it the most enormously magnificent city possible. The dreams of poverty are limited and I never imagined I would have an identity that was acceptable; that I would be driving people around Vancouver in this kind of casual routine. When I first went back to university I told people it was because I wanted to have bigger daydreams, but they turned out to be just as restricted in their own way as those of poverty. So now I push back and I think it's a big deal.

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