

# WOMEN'S HANDBOOK FOR



## TRADE UNION EDUCATION

Commonwealth Trade Union Council

Southern Africa Project



# Introduction

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All over Africa today, and particularly in the Southern Region, women in trade unions are wanting to stand up and be counted.

How do we get counted, is a question we ask ourselves?

Education being the unanimous answer, we were all very happy when the CTUC decided to fund a Women's Handbook project with the blessing of the Southern African Trade Union Co-ordination Council.

The project was implemented in July 1986 in Harare, Zimbabwe.

Sisters from Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe got together and our initial objectives were:-

- To identify problems faced by working women in the region.
- To come up with solutions to these problems.

Once the main topics had been defined - i.e. women in society, in trade unions and the law, bargaining issues, health care and education for women - we set about drafting material which was to be used for pilot courses with women workers in each country.

Now, nearly a year later, after having met again in Mbabane, Swaziland in March/April 1987, we have our handbook. We want this book to be used to help women educators run courses for the rank and file women workers.

Here it should be noted that as women who feel we have always been discriminated against, we do not wish to carry this on by excluding our male counterparts. Therefore even though our book is aimed at women, we would welcome assistance from our brothers!

Finally, we hope that this book will be instrumental in bringing about an end to our struggle for women in the labour movement.

## Where to use this book

This book is for the use of trade union educators in the Southern African region. The text and activities are designed to be used on courses - study circles, weekend schools or longer seminars - on the material in this book. Some of the material may also be useful on mixed courses for men and women together.

The material in the Handbook is applicable to most of Southern Africa. Some details of laws, statistics and union structures from individual countries are included, but the intention of the authors is that educators will supplement the material where necessary with information relevant to their own country.

We wish you luck with your union education programmes!

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## **FORWARD WITH WOMEN!**

# Who worked on this Handbook

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Here are the women who worked on the handbook written in the two workshops in Zimbabwe and Swaziland:

## Project Participants

### Botswana

Joceminah Kgomo, Botswana Bank Employees Union  
Matsetseleko Gaberone, Botswana Mine Workers Union.

### Lesotho

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Pontso Molapo, Maseru District Trade Union  
Rose Malerato Motseta, Lesotho Congress of Free Trade Unions

### Swaziland

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Zodwa Mkhonta, Swaziland Electricity, Maintenance and Allied Workers  
Union  
Jane Mkhonza, Swaziland Agriculture and Plantation Workers Union.

### Zambia

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Margaret Harawa, Zambia National Union of Teachers  
Margeret Mukamba, National Union of Posts and Telecommunications  
Workers  
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### Zimbabwe

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Rhoda Mandaza, Technical and Salaried Staff Association  
Ellen Mlauzi, Railway Workers Union  
Beauty Moyo, Zimbabwe Society of Bank Officials  
Alice Mutema, Zimbabwe Union of Journalists  
Miro Pswarai, Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions.

### SATUCC Representative

Alice Ranthimo

### CTUC Project Worker

Jenny Beale

## Additional Participants at Final Workshop

### South Africa

Jeannette Kweyama, Food and Beverage Workers Union  
Mabel Nkosi Sibiya, National Union of Wine, Spirits and  
Allied Workers Union

### Swaziland

Sbongile Dlamini, Swaziland Union of Financial Institutions Workers  
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Dudu Patricia Nxumalo, Swaziland Agriculture and Plantation Workers  
Union  
Dumisile Mavimbela, Swaziland Union of Civil and Public Service Workers  
Charity Tshabalala, Swaziland Union of Journalists

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# List of Contents

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## Introduction

### Section 1 - Women Workers and Society

- A Woman's place is .....
- Women - the Backbone of Africa
- Women in Employment
- A Conflict of Roles
- Forward with Women!

### Section 2 - Women Workers and Trade Unions

- A Woman's Place is in her Union
- Women in Leadership
- Special Provision for Women

### Section 3 - Bargaining Issues

- What is Collective Bargaining
- Issues for Bargaining
- Handling Grievances

### Section 4 - Women Workers and the Law

- The Law and You
- Maternity Protection
- Discrimination at Work

### Section 5 - Health Care for Women Workers

- Health Care - a Union Issue
- Occupational Health Hazards
- Trade Union Action
- Family Planning and Child Care

### Section 6 - Education and Training

- The Right to Education
  - Schools
  - Adult Education
  - Vocational Training
-

# Acknowledgements

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We would like to give special thanks and praise to the Commonwealth Trade Union Council for organising this project, and particularly to commend the co-ordinator Jenny Beale, as without her guidance we would have fallen short.

We would also like to thank the Commonwealth Foundation, the Commission of the European Community and the ILO for providing the CTUC with the necessary funding for the project.

We would like to congratulate and thank the participants who showed dedication and devotion and commitment to the project. Without them, this book would not be a reality and a dream come true!

It is hoped that the Handbook will play a part in strengthening women's role in trade unions in Southern Africa.

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Drawings: Daniel Aryeequaye



# WOMEN WORKERS AND SOCIETY



COMMONWEALTH TRADE UNION COUNCIL

# A Woman's Place is

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African women have always played important economic, social, as well as domestic roles. Women also have a long tradition of struggle against the oppressive conditions of their lives. In Zimbabwe, for instance, women fought side by side with men during the struggle for independence. In all countries, women are standing up for their rights. Women are making changes in structures and attitudes which are essential for achieving true equality of opportunity and equal treatment for all women.

Women resist the view that the place of an African woman was at home and in the fields. According to this view, men were the superior beings. They were the spokesmen and the heads of households. Women were expected to be submissive. A woman's only aspiration in life was supposed to be to get married and raise a family. A girl was under her father's control until she married, when the control passed to her husband. Families regarded it as proper to have a son and would keep on trying for a boy even if they ended up with many children.

This view affected women in many ways:

- women were minors under the law. This meant that they could not make their own legal or financial decisions
- the day to day responsibility of raising the family rested with the woman, often with little practical support from her husband
- the practice of paying lobola/roora (bride price) allowed men to see their wives as their property
- when education came, boys were sent to schools since daughters were not considered permanent members of the family
- the few women who managed to get a good education were prepared for sex stereotyped jobs such as nursing and teaching
- women had few chances to be independent adults, and were often discouraged by their husbands or fathers from being successful in a job or a public position.

Women have a long history of fighting against oppression. Today, attitudes are changing. Although many problems remain, the position of women in African Society is slowly improving.

"Women comprise over half the world's population, work twice the hours of men, earn one tenth of the income and own one hundredth of the property"

**United Nations  
International Labour  
Office**





## Discussion Points

- 1 What improvements have been made to women's status in your country through new laws and changes in attitudes?
- 2 Do any problems remain?



# Women - the Backbone of Africa



The fact is that women's work is essential for the survival of us all. It is women who:

- prepare food for the family
- bear and raise the next generation
- make or buy clothes for the family
- plant and harvest the crops
- preserve and store food for non-productive seasons
- turn a house into a home.

"Women produce, process, store and market 90 per cent of Africa's food for family consumption"  
**Promised the Earth, IBT**

Thirty to forty per cent of rural households in Zambia are headed by women because the men are working in the towns

In Swaziland, 59% of full time farmers are women.

In Zimbabwe, 60% of all working women are communal farmers.

## Rural Women

Rural women are the main producers of food and other basic needs. Also, because of migration to the towns or mines, many women are the heads of their households for long periods.

Women's work is not recognised as being as important as it is. Rural women work hard to produce food and look after their families but get little in return. Conditions are often difficult. They may have to travel long distances to get water and fuel. The land may suffer from soil erosion and poor farming technologies. Women may have to walk to market carrying heavy goods on their heads or backs. Another problem is that rural development projects have often focussed on men, even though women are the majority of farmers.

The United Nations decade for women, which ended in 1985, threw some light on the important role women play in society. Governments and development agencies are beginning to give more attention to the needs of rural women. They are also realising that it is vital to integrate women into every level of economic activity and development programmes.

Most important of all, rural women themselves now realise that they can do something to change their position in society and improve their day to day lives.

As trade unionists, we can support rural women in several ways:

- by supporting projects which provide rural women with skills training and literacy classes
- by helping to set up income generating projects such as co-operatives and craft and vegetable markets
- by helping women who sell their own produce or live a marginal existence to identify their own needs and meet them through methods requiring solidarity, as tried by trade unions.



## Activity

### Attitudes Towards Women

#### Aim

- To discuss attitudes towards women workers

#### Task

In your group, discuss the following statements about women. Do you agree or disagree with them?

- 1 A woman has as much right to a job as a man.
- 2 A woman must always put her family first.
- 3 Women are not as intelligent as men, so they are not good in leadership roles.
- 4 A woman can do anything a man can do, providing she has the necessary education and enough support at home.

## Women in Employment

### Discussion Point

Why did you take a job?

Due to industrialisation and urbanisation, women found themselves venturing out of the confines of the home to seek paid work. Working women in urban areas are vital to the economies of African nations. In most countries there are fewer women than men in jobs, but women are concentrated in particular industries. We can see several common features of women's work:

- most women do sex stereotyped women's jobs. In the professions, women are teachers and nurses, in offices they are clerical workers, in factories they are in food processing, clothing and textiles. Most women's jobs are extensions of their roles at home. The jobs involve food and clothing, caring for the young and sick and servicing the needs of others.

Zambia shows a typical pattern of women's work.

Of all women in jobs:

**38%** are professional or technical (teaching, nursing).

**25%** are in clerical jobs.

**18%** are service workers.

**9%** are sales workers.

**8%** are in production (factories).

**2%** are administrators, supervisors and managers.

**1980 figures**



In Swaziland, semi-skilled women earn on average 64% of male earnings; unskilled women earn 86% of male earnings.

In Zambia, women in technical and professional jobs earn 72% of male earnings, women in production earn 67% of male earnings.

- in spite of legislation on equal pay, women on average earn less than men. This is because women are in poorly paid jobs and in lower grades than men.
- there are few women in top jobs. We must remember, however, that there are some women in almost every job. Women are making a contribution as doctors, judges, civil servants and politicians.

## A Conflict of Roles



### WOMEN TODAY Career woman: asset or threat?

IS A career woman a threat to the husband's traditional role or bread winner or is she an asset?

Have Zimbabwe women made much progress in the previously male dominated jobs?

What makes a successful marriage? How important is family planning?

These are the questions that Margaret Gono, who is a planning officer in the Ministry of Local Government (Physical Planning Department),

"I do not see very or how a career woman can be a threat to her husband. What you consider the economic advantages that a family where both partners are working enjoys, it becomes obvious that a working woman is an asset to the family," said Gono.

Although she agrees that Zimbabwe women have made tremendous progress since independence, she feels that they lag behind in most professions when it comes to being involved in decision



MARGARET GONO  
"a working woman is an asset"

bitious, and more active in their attitude."

Gono confesses to having a deep interest in women's affairs. She has attended seminars and lectures involving women's issues in London and Harare, where she spent three weeks in 1985 attending a course on development studies.

She points out that although she feels that as much as possible of the traditional values should be maintained, some aspects of culture have lost their relevance in today's world.

"One aspect I would like to see done away with is the position of the woman in the home who

the children while perhaps the husband is reading a newspaper and enjoying his supper to be put in front of him.

"That shouldn't be the case. Men should be at home involved in household chores."

On the issue of family planning, Gono said that it should be left to each family to determine how many children they should have.

"But the income level of each family should be an important factor of consideration. It is not good for a family to have five or six children when they can only support two adequately."

She is not keen that the use of contraceptives should be taught in schools. While on one hand she says teaching about contraceptive methods before the incidence of "schoolgirls' pregnancies," she says that on the other hand it might be taken to mean that "girls are meant to have sex."

"This is a very sensitive topic. But I think that sooner or later both boys and girls should know about the facts of life before it is too late."

A working woman finds herself in a dual role. She is a paid worker in her job and she is an unpaid worker in her home. Society expects women to carry out both roles satisfactorily, though this can be very difficult to do. Employers expect women to be reliable and hard working, yet society expects women to put their families first. A working woman often feels this conflict: between herself and her job on the one hand, and the needs of her family on the other hand.

Because of her family responsibilities, it is hard for a woman to be away from home for union activities or business trips. Also, women may be expected to give up their jobs if their husbands are transferred.

To help women deal with their dual role, it is essential that they get the support of their husbands and families in carrying out household tasks.



## Forward with Women

Women are making efforts to improve their status and end discrimination. We have seen positive changes in the last few years:

- laws have been passed in many countries giving women majority status, and rights such as equal pay and maternity leave
- rural women are joining co-operatives and other projects to improve their lives



- women are making changes at home - insisting that their husbands treat them as equals, and bringing up their sons differently
- women's voices are being heard in political parties, unions and other organisations.

Trade unions play an important part in helping women to better their lives. women join unions not only to improve their working conditions but also to protect and defend their interests as women workers in the widest sense. Working women call on their brothers in the unions to assist them in their struggle and support their cries for equal status and for an end to discrimination in all areas.

## Activity

### Building Support Among Women

#### Aim

- to discuss how to build support for women in leadership.

#### Task

In your small groups, discuss the following questions and prepare a report:

- 1 What support can you give to a fellow woman who is the only member of your union executive?
- 2 You are a group of women activists and one of you wants to contest a leadership position in forthcoming elections. What feelings would you have towards your colleague and what suggestions would you have for supporting her?



## Activity

### Building Support for Working Women

#### Aims

- to explore the issue of family support for women
- to develop the skills of putting arguments forward.

#### Task

This is in the form of a role play. Mrs M. has been nominated to attend a seminar on leadership skills. In order to accept the nomination she must convince her husband and get his support for the training.

#### *Mrs M.'s brief*

You have just received a letter from your union stating that they are nominating you to attend a seminar on leadership skills which is being organised by the National Women's Organisation.

You are very keen to go, because you are becoming active in your union and with a local women's club and you think the leadership skills will be very helpful to you.

You were nominated for the last leadership seminar but could not attend because you were pregnant.

You have the task of persuading your husband of the value of the seminar and getting his support. You will be away from home for three days.

#### *Mr M.'s brief*

You are a working man who takes pride in his family. Your wife works also and has had a letter nominating her for a leadership seminar.

You are not keen that she should go as you think she already spends too much time away from home going to union meetings and helping with a local women's club.

You think she should spend more time attending to her duties looking after you and the children but you are prepared to listen to what she has to say.

#### *Observer's brief*

Your task is to observe Mrs M. How well did she put forward her arguments? Can you think of any other points in favour of women being free to undertake training?

# WOMEN WORKERS AND TRADE UNIONS



COMMONWEALTH TRADE UNION COUNCIL



# A Woman's Place is in her Union



Why did you join a trade union? There are several possible reasons. Some of the common ones are:

- for better wages
- for better conditions
- to get a problem solved
- as protection from exploitation.

Women join unions for the same reasons as men. Women, like men, help build union solidarity. Without women members, unions would not be as strong as they are. Every member counts. The union is not the officials, but the members. We are the union.

Unity is the basis of trade union strength. As individuals we have little bargaining power, but when we come together in a union we gain strength through solidarity and can negotiate with management. Union strength also helps protect workers against unfair treatment and exploitation.

Building union strength means overcoming divisions between workers. A divided workforce is weak and has little bargaining power. We have to work to build solidarity between all groups:

- women and men
- black and white
- lower paid and higher paid workers.

## Discussion Points

- 1 How long have you been a union member and why did you join?
- 2 What arguments would you use to persuade women workers to join a union?
- 3 Are there any divisions between members in your union that stand in the way of unity? How could these be overcome?
- 4 Are there any divisions between women workers themselves. How could these be overcome?

## Talks discuss women and leadership

Sunday Mail Reporter  
WOMEN hold less than five percent of decision-making positions whereas women in most democratic countries comprise more than half the voting population.

## Women in Leadership

What is the proportion of women on:

- your union branch
- your workers' committee
- the national executive of your union?

Many union members are concerned about the lack of women in trade union leadership positions. It has been proved that the few women that are in such positions can lead as effectively as their male counterparts.



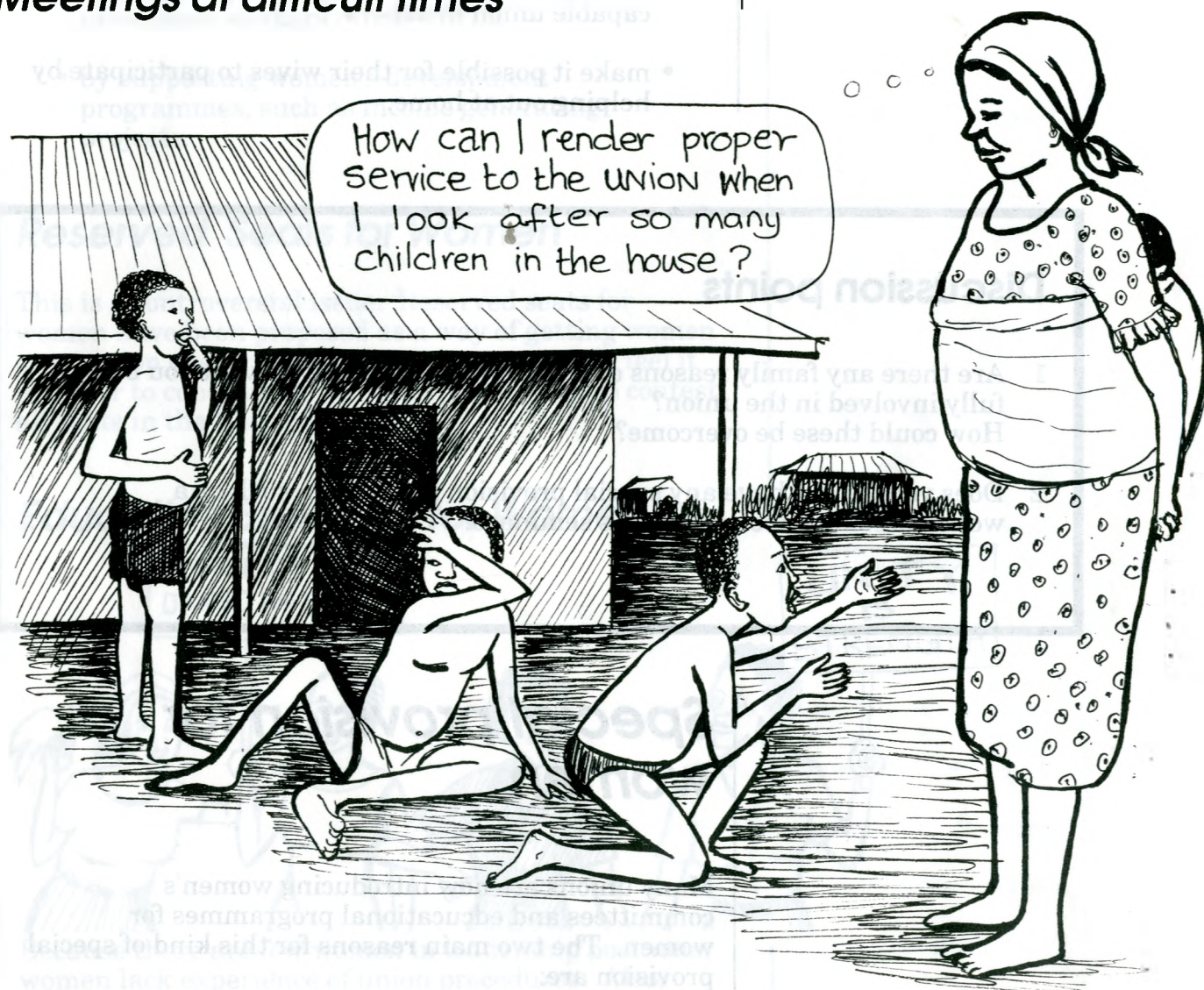


Yet if we look around at our union leaders, at the national executives, and even at branch level, we find fewer women than men. Why is this? There are many reasons:

## **Combining too many roles**

Women have many responsibilities as mothers, wives and workers. It can be difficult to cope with all these and union activities as well. At home, it is usually the woman who looks after the children and feeds the family. Unfortunately, many men still believe that a woman's place is in the home. All too often, men do not want to release their wives to go to evening meetings or weekend activities.

## **Meetings at difficult times**



It is hard for women to attend meetings if they are held at a time when they need to be with the family. Also, there are very few childcare facilities for union meetings or educational seminars.

## **Lack of encouragement**

Many women do not fully understand how the union works or how they could get more involved. Women may see men in leadership positions and think that the union is a 'man's world'. Their lack of involvement is not because they are not capable, but because they lack encouragement and sympathy from their fellow members.

To get more women involved it is essential that our male counterparts do the following:

- actively encourage and help women in their union activities
- learn to accept them as their equals and as capable union members
- make it possible for their wives to participate by helping out at home.

## **Discussion points**

- 1 Are there any family reasons or other constraints that prevent you being fully involved in the union?  
How could these be overcome?
- 2 Does your union have any special provision for women, such as a women's committee or women's seminars?

## **Special provision for women**

Many unions are now introducing women's committees and educational programmes for women. The two main reasons for this kind of special provision are:

- to help women to become more confident and involved in the union
- to help the union to treat women's issues more seriously and act on them.



We can now look at three kinds of special provision for women:

## **Women's Committees**

Most national trade union centres now have a Women's Committee or a Women's Wing. More and more individual unions are introducing them too. The job of these committees is to represent women's interests. They can do this in several ways:

- by looking at issues facing women workers
- by making recommendations to unions on promoting women's involvement
- through organising educational seminars for women workers
- by supporting women's development programmes, such as income generating projects.

Botswana, Lesotho, Zambia and Zimbabwe all have women's committees attached to their national trade union centres.

## **Reserved Seats for Women**

This is a controversial issue. Reserved seats for women have been proposed as a way of getting women on to union executives. However, most women feel it is better to concentrate on educating women to contest all seats in the leadership.

## **Education Seminars for Women**



Because there are few women in leadership positions, women lack experience of union procedures. Also, there are very few women educators in the unions. Education seminars - like the one we are on at present - are a good way of building up women's interest in unions. Women's seminars give us a chance to look at the issues facing women workers and sort out union strategies for dealing with them.

## Activity

### Union Women's Committees

#### Aims

- to develop arguments for women's committees
- to develop the skill of putting a case forward.

#### Task

This is in the form of a role play.

A group of women activists are to meet the national officers of their union to persuade them to set up a women's committee.

#### *Women Activist's brief*

You are in a union in which 30% of the membership is women.

At present there is only one woman on the national executive. You want to persuade the national officers to set up a national women's committee to look after women's interests in the union. You think this would promote women's involvement in union affairs and get more attention paid to women's issues.

Prepare your arguments and plan how to put them forward at the meeting.

#### *National Officer's brief*

Thirty per cent of your union are women. At the moment there is only one woman on the national executive.

A group of women activists has asked to meet you to discuss the formation of a women's committee in the union.

You are opposed to the idea as you think women's needs are already well catered for. You also think it is divisive to have special facilities for women. However, you are prepared to hear what they have to say.

Draw up your arguments and prepare to put them forward at the meeting.

#### *Observer's brief*

Your task is to observe the meeting and comment on the women activists:

- had they prepared good arguments
- did they put their case well?



## SECTION 3

# BARGAINING ISSUES



COMMONWEALTH TRADE UNION COUNCIL

# What is Collective Bargaining?

Collective bargaining is when a trade union or a workers' committee negotiates with the management over the workers' wages and conditions. The individual worker cannot bargain with management as she is not strong enough. She has no choice but to accept what she is given.

When workers realise that they have a common interest they can organise together to oppose the employer. This is the basis of trade union strength. A united workforce has bargaining power and can solve the workers' problems through collective bargaining with the employer. Through bargaining, unions and employers draw up collective agreements which lay down wages and conditions for the workers.

## Issues for Bargaining



Unions can bargain over many issues. The stronger the union, the more areas they can bring to the negotiating table. Some of the most important issues are:

- **Better wages.** To secure a decent standard of living for all of us and to obtain additional protection such as sick pay, maternity pay and pensions
- **Better working conditions.** Unions bargain over many terms and conditions such as hours of work, welfare facilities, health and safety and promotions
- **Job security.** Unions are important in protecting members against unfair dismissal and victimisation. Unions also oppose discrimination and fight for equal treatment regardless of race, tribe, sex or marital status.

All these issues affect both men and women at work.



There are also many bargaining issues of particular interest to women, such as:

- paid maternity leave and breast feeding breaks
- childcare facilities at the workplace
- health care facilities, especially for pregnant women
- equal pay for equal work
- equal opportunities in promotion and training
- equal access to benefits such as housing and leave allowances
- flexible or reduced hours of work
- full protection for part-time workers.

## **Discussion Points**

- 1 Who represents you in negotiations with your employer?
- 2 Which terms and conditions of your work are controlled by collective bargaining between your union and your employer?
- 3 Are there any areas at present controlled by the employer which you would like to see your union bargain over?

## ***Handling Grievances***

Another part of the job of a union representative is to take up grievances on behalf of members. A grievance can be a case of unfair treatment or victimisation, a problem of discrimination or sexual harassment. Many unions have negotiated a grievance procedure which sets out the steps to be taken by a union representative taking up a grievance.

A union representative taking up a grievance normally takes the following actions:

- she interviews the member carefully and sympathetically and notes down the main points of her problem
- she assesses whether or not the problem is a grievance which the union should take up



- she agrees with the member what action to take and keeps the member informed
- if she fails to sort out the problem, she follows the next step in the grievance procedure, which may mean bringing in a union official.

## Discussion Points

- 1 Is there a grievance procedure at your workplace?
- 2 If so, what are the stages of the procedure?



## Activity

### Grievance Handling

#### Aims

- to understand the role of a union in taking up members' grievances
- to develop the skills of grievance handling
- to look at union strategies for dealing with women workers' grievances.

#### Task

You will be asked to take on one of the following roles:

- a union representative or workers' committee representative
- a union member with a grievance
- an observer.

The members will each be given a brief outlining a problem to take to their union representatives. The representatives will also be given a brief outlining their role. After preparing what they have to say, each worker will meet her representative and explain her grievance. The representative will interview her and decide what to do.

#### *Observer's brief*

You will observe a union representative interviewing her member about a problem. Please be ready to comment on the following:

Was she sympathetic?

Did she note down the main points?

Did she decide what action to take?

Did she inspire confidence in the member?

## Activity      Grievance Handling

### Case 1      Sexual Harassment



#### **Member's brief**

You are a woman working as a clerk in the offices of a large insurance company. Most of the lower office grades are women, and most of the insurance agents and managers are men.

One of the male insurance agents has made sexual advances towards you over the last few months. He has touched you several times and asked you to go out with him. You have always said no. You try and avoid him when he comes into the office but this is difficult as you have to do some work for him. Last week he was waiting outside the office for you and you had difficulty in getting away.

You are getting rather afraid of this man and decide to go to your union representative for advice.

#### **Representative's brief**

You are a union representative for the clerical workers in the offices of a large insurance company. Most of the lower grades are women and most of the insurance agents and managerial staff are men.

One of your members has been looking a bit upset and has asked to see you about a problem. Your task is to interview her to find out what her problem is, decide whether it is a grievance and what action you will take on her behalf.



## Activity Handling Grievances

### Case 2 Maternity Rights



#### ***Member's brief***

You are a worker in a large food factory. You had your first baby four months ago and came back to work after taking maternity leave.

While you were pregnant you worked on a line where you attended a machine which packed food into packets. You could sit for most of the time on this job.

When you returned to work after maternity leave the supervisor moved you to another line where you have to stand all day, moving between two machines.

You find this exhausting as you are still not fully recovered from a difficult delivery.

You have asked the supervisor about moving back to your old job. He said it wasn't possible and that if you couldn't manage the work you shouldn't have come back.

You are upset and decide to go and talk to your union representative.

#### ***Representative's brief***

You are the representative for workers in a section of a large food factory.

Your members operate many different machines on lines that process, package and label food products. One of your members who has recently returned from maternity leave has asked to see you about a problem.

Your task is to interview her to find out what the problem is, decide whether it is a grievance and what action you will take.

## Activity Handling Grievances

### Case 3 Victimization for Union Activities



#### **Member's brief**

You are an assistant in a large department store. You are a good worker and the manager has always been friendly to you - until recently, when you became more active in the union.

You have accompanied your union representative on several occasions when she has gone to see management, and you have not been afraid to stand up and speak on behalf of other workers.

When a recent post as departmental supervisor came up, you applied. It would have been a promotion, and your colleagues expected you to get it.

At the interview, management questioned you about your attitude towards the union. You did not get the job and you think this was because of your union activities as someone with less experience than your yourself was appointed.

You decide to go to your representative and talk about it.

#### **Representative's brief**

You are a union representative in a large department store. One of your members has asked to see you about her recent failure to get a promotion.

She has been very helpful to you over recent months and has accompanied you several times in discussions with management. She speaks up for other workers and you would like to encourage her to become a union representative.

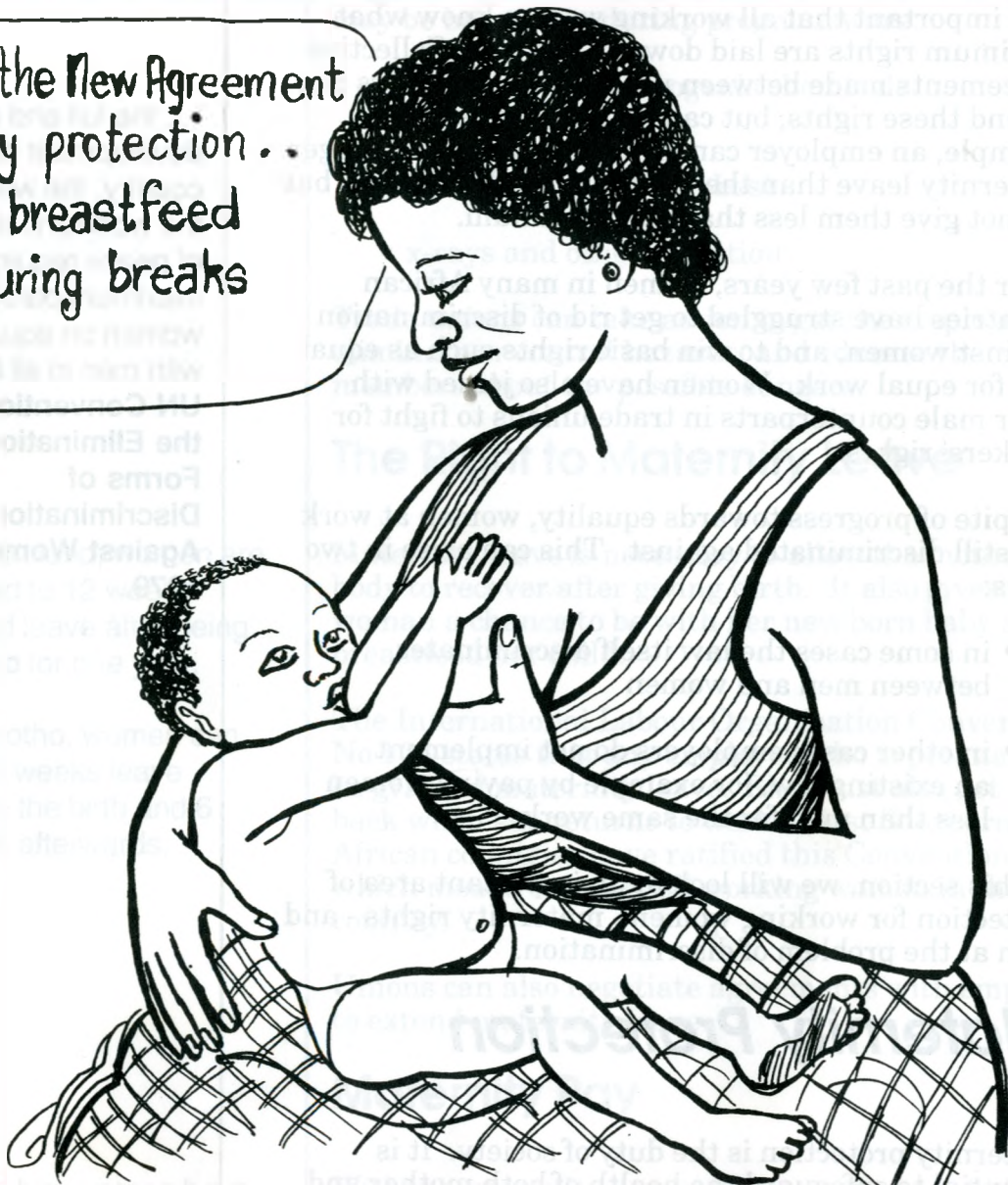
Your task is to interview her to find out what her problem is, decide whether it is a grievance, and what action you should take.



## SECTION 4

# WOMEN WORKERS AND THE LAW

Thanks to the New Agreement on maternity protection... I can now breastfeed my baby during breaks at work.



**COMMONWEALTH TRADE UNION COUNCIL**

# The Law and You

As women workers, there are certain laws that affect us. These laws are:

- laws that extend our rights, such as equal pay and maternity rights
- discriminatory laws, such as laws on tax, marriage and succession that treat women differently to men.

It is important that all working women know what minimum rights are laid down in the law. Collective agreements made between unions and employers can extend these rights, but cannot reduce them. For example, an employer can give women workers longer maternity leave than the minimum set by the law, but cannot give them less than this minimum.

Over the past few years, women in many African countries have struggled to get rid of discrimination against women, and to win basic rights such as equal pay for equal work. Women have also joined with their male counterparts in trade unions to fight for workers' rights.

In spite of progress towards equality, women at work are still discriminated against. This can arise in two ways:

- in some cases the law itself discriminates between men and women
- in other cases employers do not implement an existing law, for example by paying women less than men for the same work.

In this section, we will look at an important area of protection for working women - maternity rights - and then at the problem of discrimination.

## Maternity Protection

Maternity protection is the duty of society. It is essential to safeguard the health of both mother and child. Women point out that bearing and raising the next generation is an essential job. Working women should not be penalised in any way for giving birth to children. We need both financial and medical protection throughout pregnancy, at the time of birth and when the child is small.

'... the full and complete development of a country, the welfare of the world and the cause of peace require the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields'

**UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 1979.**



In Swaziland, women are entitled to 12 weeks unpaid leave after being in a job for one year.

In Lesotho, women can take 6 weeks leave before the birth and 6 weeks afterwards.

In Zambia, women have 90 days paid maternity leave after an interval of two years.

Full maternity protection means all of the following:

## **Protection of pregnant working mothers**

Pregnant women should have the right to stay in their jobs and should not be dismissed because they are pregnant. Unions can ensure this applies to single women as well as married women.

It is also important that safety measures are taken to protect pregnant women from health hazards which might affect them or the baby. Some of the things that may be hazardous during pregnancy are:

- corrosive or carcinogenic chemicals or gases
- live organisms (microbes)
- x-rays and other radiation.

Trade unions can take action to get the employer to eliminate or control hazards, and educate their members about the possible dangers.

## **The Right to Maternity Leave**

Maternity leave is necessary to allow the mother's body to recover after giving birth. It also gives a woman a chance to be with her new born baby and to breastfeed her child.

The International Labour Organisation Convention No 103 states that any employee who is pregnant must be granted maternity leave. She must also get her job back when she returns to work. Most Southern African countries have ratified this Convention, which means it covers all working women in the country.

Unions can also negotiate agreements with employers to extend maternity leave.

## **Maternity Pay**

Without maternity pay, many women cannot afford to take the full period of maternity leave. They are, in effect, financially penalised for giving birth. Maternity pay is important for the health of both mother and child. Women need the money to pay for many essentials during the first few months of the baby's life.

The ILO Convention does not cover maternity pay. Some countries have introduced a law about maternity pay. Also, unions can negotiate directly with employers on maternity pay.

In Zimbabwe, employers must pay women 60% of their salary while they are on maternity leave.

## Breastfeeding Time

Thanks to the New Agreement on maternity protection... I can now breastfeed my baby during breaks at work.



In Swaziland, public sector unions have negotiated 3 months paid maternity leave.

It is well known that breastfeeding is vital for the health of the child. Working women need, wherever possible, to be able to breastfeed their babies during working hours. In Zambia and Zimbabwe, the law allows mothers to take half an hour breaks to breastfeed their babies. This raises the issue of childcare facilities as it is difficult for most babies to be brought to the workplace for breastfeeding.

## Family Planning

Working women should have the right to plan and choose motherhood freely. Information on family planning is necessary for both women and men. Family planning helps us to space our children well. It also helps us to plan how to combine our work and family responsibilities.

There are, then, three sources of maternity rights:

- the minimum rights laid down in the law
- additional rights won by unions through collective bargaining with employers
- facilities provided by the state for family planning and health care.



## Activity

### Negotiating Maternity Pay

#### Aims

- to develop arguments for maternity pay
- to develop negotiating skills.

#### Task

You will be asked to play one of the following roles:

- a company manager
- a union representative
- an observer.

The role play takes place in a large, private company. Thirty per cent of the workforce is female. The union representatives have arranged a meeting with management to discuss the question of paid maternity leave.

#### *Union Representatives' brief*

At your workplace you are entitled to 12 weeks unpaid maternity leave. You have had several complaints from women members that they cannot manage without pay when they take maternity leave. You have decided to take the matter up with management. Prepare your arguments and put them forward at the meeting.

#### *Managers' brief*

You are managers in a private company. Union representatives have made an appointment to discuss the issue of maternity pay. You know that company policy allows only 12 weeks unpaid leave. Prepare your case and put it forward at the meeting.

#### *Observers' brief*

You are to observe a meeting between a team of union representatives and management. Comment on the following:

How well did the union side present their arguments?

Were their objectives clear?

Did they work well as a team?

What could have been improved?

# Discrimination at Work

Women are discriminated against when they are treated differently to men simply because of their sex. Another form of discrimination is by marital status, when a married woman is treated differently to a single woman. Discrimination has retarded the advancement of women. It also divides women from men and makes it difficult for unions to build unity.

## Discussion Points

- 1 Do you have any examples of discriminatory practices at your workplace?
- 2 Are there any laws that discriminate against women in your country?
- 3 What can your union do to fight discrimination against women?

Unions seek to protect women from discrimination wherever it may arise. Ending discrimination against women workers means:

## Equal Pay for Equal Work

If a woman does the same job as a man, she is entitled to the same wages. However, some employers still pay women less than men for similar work. Unions can ensure employers implement the law on equal pay.

## Equal Opportunities at Work

As women workers, we should get the same opportunities as men for promotion and training. Unfortunately, discrimination is still common in these areas, and in job advertisements and appointments.

## Equal Rights for Married and Single Women

A woman's marital status should not affect her employment rights. Whether a woman is married or single, she should get the same terms and conditions of employment, including benefits such as housing, leave allowances and training opportunities.





In Zimbabwe, before the Legal Age of Majority Act, women were minors under the law. Now, women and men are equal before the law.

## An End to Discriminatory Legislation

Discriminatory laws vary from country to country. Some income tax laws treat a married woman's income with her husband's. Under some matrimonial laws, women are still considered as minors and cannot own property or enter into legal agreements in their own right.

## Revision of "Protective Legislation"

In trying to protect women, some laws discriminate indirectly. For example, according to some labour laws, women are not supposed to work underground or work night shifts.

# Women still fight for equal status

ZIMBABWEAN women have come far since independence and legal changes give them the fuel to fight discrimination, but the onus is on them to use these weapons to the fullest.

In response to questions raised by The Herald on progress made by women in development, a spokesman for the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs said the women's situation today was one full of opportunities

because they were shy or they refused to be taught by women;

● That most old learners had eye-sight problems and did not have reading glasses;

● Some areas had no suitable meeting places for learners and as a result classes stopped functioning during the rainy season; and

● That the campaign had not received maximum support it deserved from politicians and

As we can see, there are still many areas of discrimination to fight against. The question we then ask ourselves is what can unions do to help?

- They can take up cases at the workplace through the grievance procedure.
- They can represent their members in hearings before industrial courts.
- They can put pressure on governments to enforce existing laws and to change discriminatory laws.

## **Activity**

### **Ending Discrimination**

#### **Aims**

- to become aware of discriminatory practices
- to look at union strategies for ending discrimination against women.

#### **Task**

In your small group, discuss the following cases, and prepare a brief report in answer to these questions:

Is the law contravened in this case?

How could the union take up the case?

#### **Case 1**

Your company advertises in the local paper and clearly states that it requires a lady typist.

#### **Case 2**

Women assistants in a large store complain that they are being paid less than the men. The women's job is to serve customers and check the stock. The men are in different departments of the same store. Their job is also to serve customers and check stock, and they also deliver boxes of goods from the storeroom to various departments.

#### **Case 3**

You work for a company whose policy is to offer housing or a housing allowance to all employees. However, the company will not give anything to married women employees unless they can prove that they are homeless.



## *Women - the Backbone of Africa*

It is high time we bought the new co-operative idea through which we can organise transport and storage facilities.







O-o-o-h my back,  
and we have twenty  
kilometres more to  
reach the market.

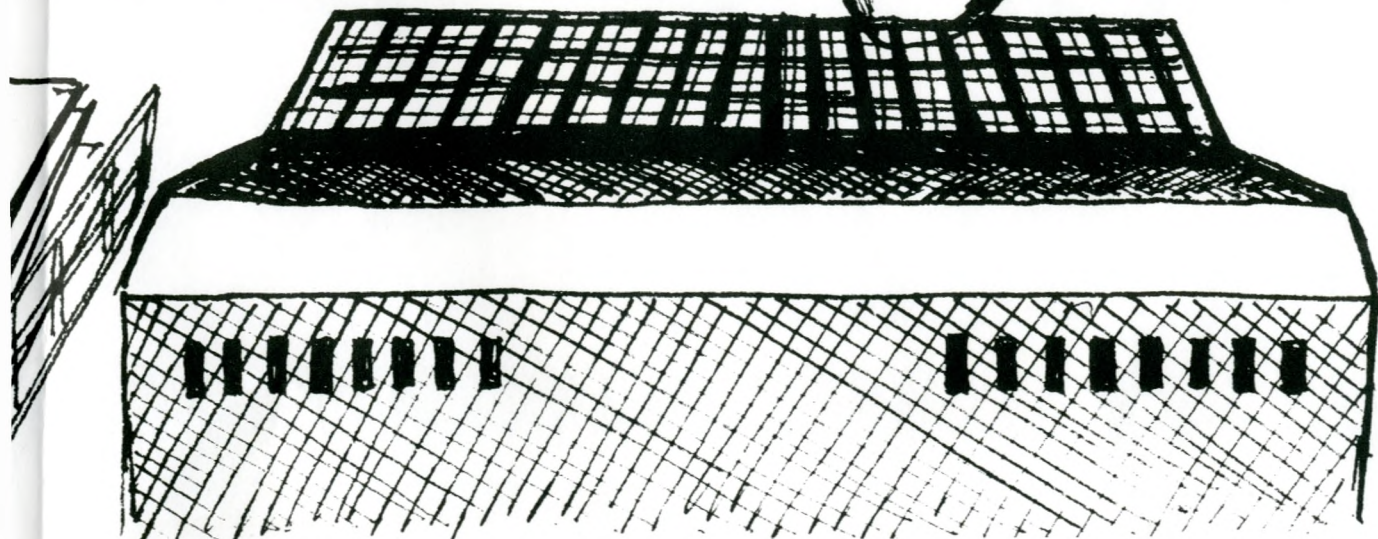


## Case One - Sexual Harassment





But, why do you worry me?  
I'll scream the next time  
you try to touch me.





## Case Two - Maternity Rights

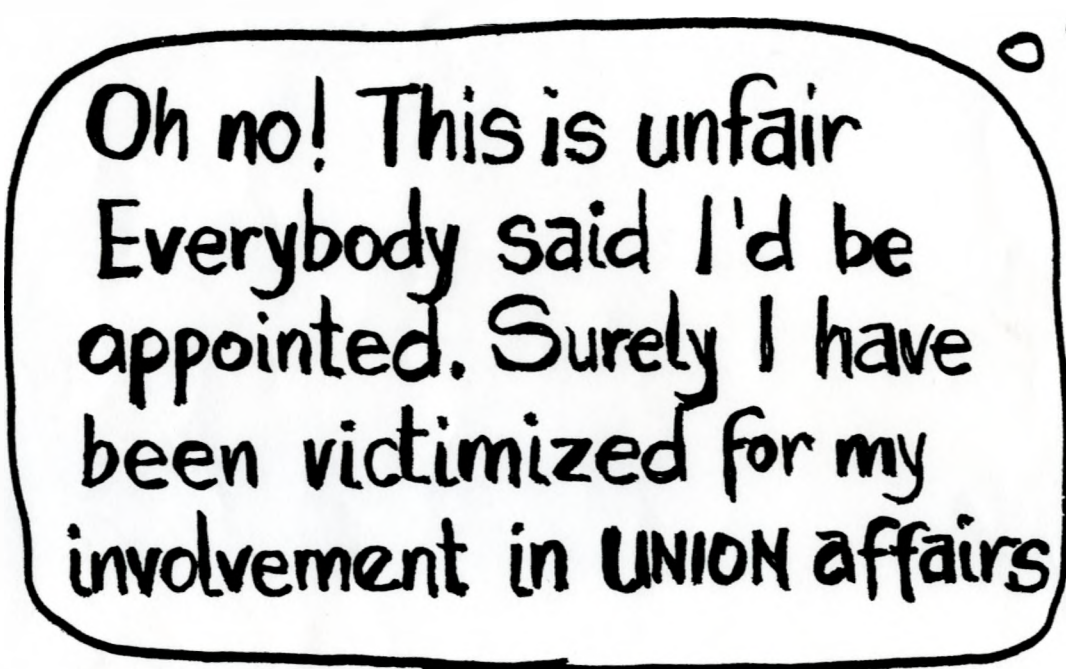


What do you want me to do?  
You can go back home if you  
cannot work here.





*Case Three - Victimization for Union Activities*



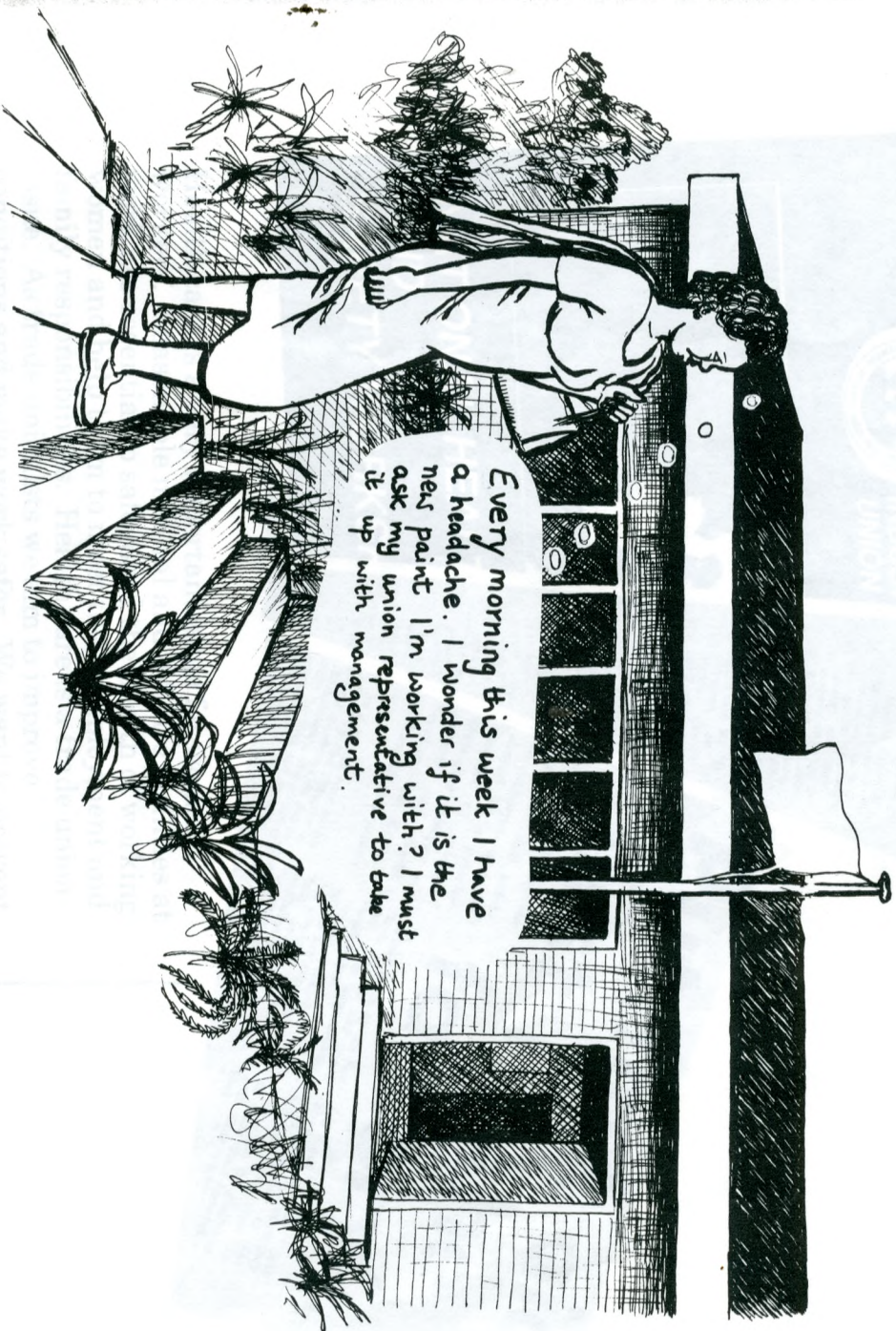
Oh no! This is unfair  
Everybody said I'd be  
appointed. Surely I have  
been victimized for my  
involvement in UNION affairs





SECTION 5

HEALTH CARE  
FOR  
WOMEN  
WORKERS

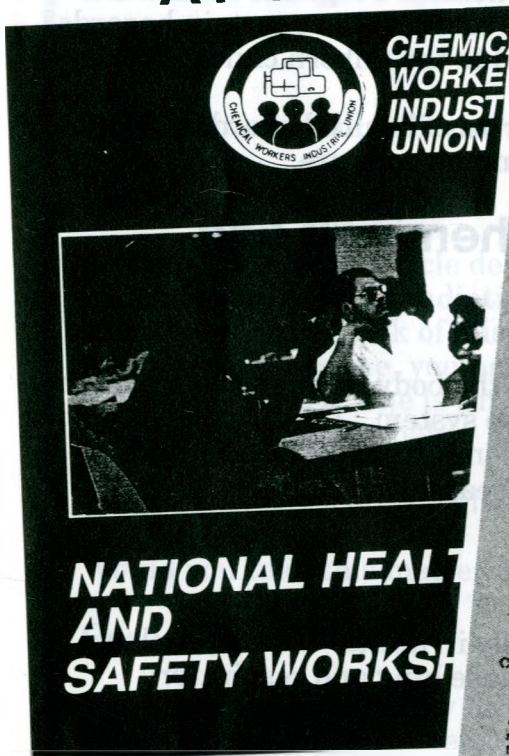


COMMONWEALTH TRADE UNION COUNCIL



# Health Care: a Union Issue

## FIGHTING HAZARDS AT WORK



Johannest

### Workers' safety must be ensured

**Herald Reporter**  
THE management of companies have a responsibility to ensure safety of their employees, says the Deputy Minister of Labour Services, Robson Manyika. Officially opening a day international conference host Shell and BP Mr Services on night. Cde said employers train, set exas force and prov safety meas appropriate clothing to a 'Supervisors a ment must a for unsafe stop them dents occu He said ti safety p any ors pended ship of and ma "Their a safety worki be r worki ward com Cde V' sho all m. of st l

### 'Put first aid first in the factory'

**Sunday Mail Reporter**  
HEALTH and safety of employees at work should be a priority concern of management, the Minister of Labour Services, and Social Development, Cde Kumbi Rai Kangai, said yesterday.

In a speech read on his behalf by the Director of Social Services Cde Jafrus Mutambikwa, the minister said: "A first aid training programme offered a the lead taken by the Red Cross in this and hoped that other organisations would follow. "The Factories and Works Act stipulates that an employer must maintain and furnish such appliances and services for rendering first aid to workmen. He urged the graduates to share their knowledge with their work-

Health care is a very important issue for women workers. Reasonable medical and welfare facilities at work are essential to safeguard the health of working women and help them to meet their employment and family responsibilities. Health care is a trade union issue. As trade unionists we aim to improve conditions and make work safer. We want to prevent accidents and diseases, not just get paid compensation. Good health care at work is an integral part of the health care for the whole population.

In this section, we will look at two areas that affect women at work:

- occupational health hazards
- family planning and childcare

We will also look at what trade unions can do about these areas.



# **Occupational Health Hazards**

As women workers, are we aware of the health hazards at our workplaces?

Whether we work in offices or with heavy machinery, the working environment carries potential hazards that could affect our health. Pregnant women are especially vulnerable and there are certain hazards which can be harmful to the unborn child.

There are many sources of health hazards at work. Some of the most common ones are:

## **Dangerous Chemicals and Gases**

Chemicals can enter the body through the lungs, the skin and the digestive system. They can cause a wide range of health problems, from dermatitis and headaches to lung diseases and cancers.

## **Dusts**

Some dusts are simply irritants. Others, such as asbestos dust, can cause lung and respiratory diseases.

## **Noise**

Prolonged exposure to excessive noise at work causes hearing loss.

## **Unsafe Working Environment**

There are many possible safety hazards, such as poor lighting, unguarded machinery, wet or oily floors, poorly maintained electrical equipment and fire hazards.

## **Unhealthy Conditions**

Workers' health can be adversely affected by conditions such as dampness, stressful working positions, poor sanitation and poor eating facilities.

## **Activity**

### **Health Hazards at Work**

#### **Aim**

- to work out a trade union approach to health hazards at workplaces.

#### **Task**

In your small group, discuss each case and prepare a brief report.

##### **Case 1**

A recent magazine article described some surveys of computer operators which suggested that radiation from computer screens may be linked to slightly increased risk of miscarriages and foetal abnormalities. As a union representative, you have been approached by a worker in the computer section. She is three months pregnant and worried that her work may be affecting her baby. This is her first child.

What assistance can you give?

Would you take this matter up with management?

##### **Case 2**

Workers in a shoe factory have recently been supplied with a new glue. Several members have been complaining of headaches and nausea which they think are linked to the glue. Management says the glue is safe.

What steps would you take to deal with this situation?

## **Trade Union Action**

Health care at work is a trade union issue. As most measures taken to control hazards cost something, unions have to use their bargaining power to get management to make improvements. Legislation is helpful in setting health and safety standards, but laws alone cannot solve all the problems. Unions have to ensure that management implement the laws.





To take action against health hazards at work unions can do several things:

- **Negotiate with management to:**
  - eliminate or control the hazard at source
  - label all substances
  - educate workers in safe procedures
  - provide protective clothing
  - provide medical check-ups
  - keep a register of exposures to harmful substances
  - implement all laws and International Labour Organisation Conventions.
- **Educate their members on health and safety issues.**
- **Carry out inspections of the workplace.**
- **Raise health and safety matters at the workers' committee or union branch.**
- **Put pressure on the government for improved health and safety legislation, and for effective enforcement of the law.**



# Family Planning and Childcare

As trade unionists, we can encourage women and men to know the importance of child spacing. Family planning allows us to choose when to have children. It helps prevent mothers damaging their health by having many children too quickly.



Child spacing and good childcare help to safeguard the health of children. Having healthy children is something desired by every country.

Good childcare facilities are important if we are to be productive at work. Mother cannot concentrate on their work if they are anxious about their children.

Healthy, happy families make up a healthy nation.



## Activity

### Childcare

#### Aims

- to discuss attitudes towards childcare
- to look at the issue of workplace childcare facilities.

#### Task 1

Discuss the following statements in your small group. Do you agree or disagree with each one?

- 1 Childcare is a matter for parents - it has nothing to do with trade unions.
- 2 Fathers should take an equal share in looking after children.
- 3 Children are an investment for the future so it is good to have a large family.
- 4 Family planning denies a man proof of his manhood.

#### Task 2

The following case has been brought to your union meeting:

A woman reported late for work carrying her baby with the complaint that her domestic worker had not turned up.

The manager called her into the office as she was upset and the baby was crying. She was threatened with disciplinary action if she was late again.

Some women at the union meeting propose that the union should approach management about starting a nursery on the premises so that the workers' children can be looked after properly.

Do you support the proposal?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of workplace nurseries?