

# NOW union is fighting firings of 17 employes

By John McCarron

WHEN THE BOSS decides to fire 17 female employes, somebody is bound to charge that sexism is involved.

But what if the "boss" is the National Organization of Women [NOW]?

Clerical employes of the nation's largest feminist organization planned to file a complaint with the National Labor Relations Board Friday charging NOW with unfair labor practices.

The women, who work at NOW's headquarters at 5 S. Wabash Av. and at the group's legislative office in Washington, are alleging that NOW's board of directors is attempting to close the two offices to break the employe's labor union.

AUDREY DENECKE, a bookkeeper in

the Chicago NOW office and president of the newly formed Organization of Social Change Employes, said the NOW board voted on Dec. 7 to close the two offices and open a new smaller office in Washington.

Mary Lynn Myers, a NOW board member who voted against the firings, said "economy reasons" were given for the closings. Denecke suspects the board took the union's drive for better health insurance, job security, vacations, and a grievance system into their decision.

Denecke said the union also disputes a "feminist principle" of the NOW board that all employes should be paid the same regardless of performance.

The complaint will ask that NOW be restrained from closing the two offices on Dec. 31 as planned.

# NOW Sued by Fired Employees

By Isabelle Shelton  
*Washington Star*

**WASHINGTON**—The National Organization for Women has fired its entire paid staff of 14 in Washington and Chicago, and the employes have responded by filing unfair labor practice charges against NOW with the National Labor Relations Board.

The controversy is an outgrowth of a hotly contested election for national officers of the 60,000-member organization, the nation's fastest-growing group of activist feminists. A so-called "majority caucus" slate, headed by the incumbent president, Karen Decrow of Syracuse, N.Y., won that election, at the NOW national convention in Philadelphia in October.

Decrow and her associates had promised in their platform to consolidate NOW's three national offices—the headquarters office in Chicago, the legislative office in Washington and the public relations office in New York City—into one national action center to be situated in Washington.

AT ITS FIRST post-convention meeting, held in San Diego Dec. 6 and 7, the new board voted to carry out the consolidation of offices by Dec. 31, and to write letters of dismissal to all of the 14 employes, to be effective Dec. 31.

By the time of the San Diego meeting, the public relations office already had been transferred to Washington, and there were 10 employes in Chicago and four in Washington—all but one of whom had formed a union in August, called the Organization for Social Change.

At its final meeting, held the day before the Philadelphia convention began, the outgoing board—which Decrow headed but did not control—voted to recognize the new union.

That recognition formed the basis of the union's charges, filed last Friday with the NLRB in Chicago.

**AUDREY DENECKE**, a bookkeeper in the Chicago office and president of the union, said the brief alleges that the current leadership of NOW violated three sections of the National Labor Relations Act by "refusing to bargain, making unilateral changes in working conditions (by voting to close the offices), without negotiating with the union, and discriminating against employes who joined a union by firing them."

Eleanor Smeal of Pittsburgh, the new "chairone" (NOW's word for what many groups call chairman of the board), said neither she nor Decrow had seen copies of the NLRB charges, and therefore did not wish to comment.

However, she objected to the word "fired" in reference to the employes and said that all 14 had been offered the opportunity to apply for the five paid jobs at the new center.

She also contended that the three-week notices the employes had received was "more than private businesses generally give," and she said all 14 would receive two weeks' severance pay "even though several of them have been there only six months, and none longer than 26 months."

# Food stamp coalition stays active in area

The Chicago Metropolitan Food Stamp coalition is now in its fourth month of active outreach to the hungry in Chicago.

To date, the food stamp hotline has received over 12,000 calls from people requesting information on eligibility. Over 75 per cent of the callers to our hotline number, 663 5470 appear to be eligible for the food stamp program.

The tremendous response to the "hotline" has demonstrated dramatically the need for this kind of outreach service. The Chicago Metropolitan Food Stamp coalition is determined to continue searching out even more of the nearly 300,000 people eligible for food stamps who do not receive them. To meet this objective, the coalition has secured two staff coordinators, Doris Ashbrook and Audrey Denecke, to devote full time to the outreach project.

Ms. Ashbrook brings a rich and varied background which is particularly strong in techniques of community organizations. She has

served as assistant director of county youth service in Wayne City, IN.

She has also directed a five county metropolitan task force on juvenile justice, organized a national lawyers guild and worked as a counseling director for half Step Inc., a veterans self help organization.

Ms. Denecke's history includes working in an open education experimental program in Round Lake, as well as major involvement in organizing for women's civil rights. This latter interest led her to serve on the administrative staff at the national office of the National Organization for Women, and to chair the Chicago N.O.W. chapter's employment committee and legal advocate corps.

She will bring, in addition to her organizational knowledge, financial expertise, research skills and experience in public relations to the outreach position.

The arrival of additional staff will enable the coalition to intensify its efforts to find and assist the hungry of Chicago.

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# Careers



## Time for a change

Midstream changing  
can bring new life

Page 2

3 dream jobs, and  
how they came true

Page 3

Hobbies can lead  
to second career

Page 4

# Job sex distinction changing

By Michael Haederle

IT USED to be that most newspaper classified sections were divided into "Help Wanted—Male" and "Help Wanted—Female." But that's rarely the case any more, because many employers have dropped gender distinctions from their job descriptions.

Analysts say women in the work force still tend to be concentrated in the "pink-collar ghetto"—low-paying jobs traditionally held by women. But in a variety of fields, the distinction between "men's work" and "women's work" is becoming obscured.

At Illinois Bell Telephone Co., for instance, it is no longer unusual to hear a male operator or to encounter a female cable splicer, although both were once single-sex occupations.

Harriet White, Illinois Bell's division manager in charge of affirmative action, said that since the Bell system signed a federal consent decree prohibiting sex-based discrimination in 1973, the number of women in jobs traditionally held by men has nearly tripled and the number of men in what were once female occupations has nearly doubled.

NOW, OF 26,000 nonmanagement employees, close to 2,000 women work in such specialties as telephone installation, line repair, construction, delivery and supply, and cable splicing.

On the other side of the coin, almost 1,200 men now work as operators, service representatives, and clerks, White said.

Walter Johnson, 24, a Chicagoan, said he became an operator after gaining communications experience in the military.

Johnson said he began as a directory-assistance operator but now works as a toll operator, helping customers with credit card, collect, and person-to-person calls.

"I get some satisfaction out of knowing that I've helped a customer, knowing that I've possibly saved a life, when they call up and say, 'This is an emergency — connect me with the fire department,'" Johnson said.

Although operators sometimes run into abusive customers, Johnson said, "You're not supposed to take it personally. I try not to."

He said he is one of 400 male operators at Illinois Bell; statewide there are a total of 4,200.

ALTHOUGH MOST employers no longer practice overt job discrimination, many do not go to the lengths Illinois Bell does to direct men and women to nontraditional careers. The Midwest Women's Center seeks to rectify the situation by asking, in one member's words, "Where are those high-paying jobs? Let's take a look at where they are and get women into those occupations."

Reggi Marder, a researcher for the center's Women in Trades project, said the program tries to steer women toward higher-paying jobs in areas that might not interest them immediately, such as cable television, computers, or electronics.

"It's a struggle to get women into those areas," Marder said. "I think that women need to be educated about where to find those jobs."

Audrey Denecke, who directs the center's pre-apprenticeship program, said she has helped to find jobs or women in the construction and manufacturing trades—fields where women traditionally have been underrepresented.

"WHAT WE DO is run monthly orientation sessions on apprenticeship. Then we ask them to a career-planning session. Then, through counseling, we design a particular plan to get them into the particular trade they have chosen," Denecke said.

Through the program, women have been apprenticed as ironworkers, electricians, carpenters, sheet metal workers, machinists, and tool and die makers. At the same time, Denecke noted, just 4 per cent of all trade apprentices are women. The federal government has set a goal of having women represent 6.9 per cent of those employed on construction projects.

Denecke said the center also has "developed a curriculum for high schools and colleges to encour-

Continued on page 12

# Sex distinction on job ending

Continued from page 9

age better guidance counseling and make sure girls get the right kind of training."

**WOMEN FOR** the first time are entering technical and scientific fields in greater numbers, although many are still put off by "math anxiety" and doubts about whether they have what it takes to succeed.

One such profession is engineering, where women will encounter "excellent" employment opportunities and receive starting salaries slightly higher than those of their male counterparts, according to Lois Graham, head of the Society of Women Engineers and an engineering professor at Illinois Institute of Technology.

Graham said that, although only about 2 per cent of all engineers in the United States are women, that figure is up from less than 1 per cent 20 years ago. Significantly, 13 per cent of all engineering students are women, an indication that their numbers may swell in the years ahead.

**ONE FIELD** that has not seen as much crossover is nursing, where men make up only 3 per cent nationwide. Karen Wellisch of the Illinois Nurses Association speculated that was because nursing "is one of the most ghetto-ized of the female professions and suffers from a public image that lags behind the nurse's role."

Although nurses make good salaries, Wellisch said, they are "undervalued" in comparison with doctors.

When men do take up nursing careers, Wellisch said, many encounter heavy pressure to accept promotions to supervisory or instructional jobs. She said she has heard some male nurses complain that they could not continue in a patient-care role.

Overall, because nursing-school admissions are dropping slightly and many hospitals have nursing shortages, "you can write your own ticket, and you can do pretty well in terms of salary," Wellisch said.

## U.S. cuts cloud picture for women, minorities in trades



Tribune photos by Earl Gustle

Plasterers Nydia Ramos and Al Mendoza have taken what they have learned from the Building Trades Training Program . . .

GAINING ACCESS to a skilled trade or nontraditional occupation has been particularly difficult for members of minority groups and women.

Recent federal budget cuts in Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) programs, which provided access to these fields, and legislation affecting affirmative action programs are clouding the future picture for women and minorities in nontraditional trades.

Audrey Denecke, director of the preapprenticeship project at the Midwest Women's Center, said that government funding for her program ended, but new assistance from a national foundation kept the program from being sharply curtailed.

"If we had not secured the national foundation funds, we wouldn't have been able to continue our program," Denecke said. "It would have folded or been cut back."

"THE FUNDING SITUATION is pretty desperate right now. With the CETA program being cut back so drastically, a number of CETA preapprenticeship programs have been affected," she said.

The program at the center, 53 W. Jackson Blvd., has been successful in "educating a number of women to the options of nontraditional careers and developing positive referral relationships with unions and employers who sponsor apprenticeship programs. We're beginning to see some progress in terms of women being accepted into apprenticeship programs," Denecke said.

"I think it's important that there continue to be a program which advocates on behalf of women, with the kind of regulatory threats to affirmative action that have been occurring at the federal level," she said.

THE DEPARTMENT of Labor's Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs issued regulations in late August that significantly cut the number of federal contractors that will be subject to affirmative action programs.

The regulations now cover only employers that have \$1 million or more in federal con-



tracts and employ 250 employees, up from the former level of \$50,000 in federal contracts and 50 employees.

"They're also making contractors submit affirmative action programs every five years rather than annually, which means less monitoring," Denecke said.

"The contract compliance office is proposing deletion of any preaward reviews, which means that if they're not reviewed prior to being granted an award (a contract), and then they're reviewed every five years, the systemic problems would continue," she said.

"Regulatory threats and legislation being introduced will have an impact on affirmative action and cloud the future picture of programs such as ours and women in the trades," she added.

ANOTHER PROGRAM, which works with Hispanic high school dropouts in the Pilsen community, also may face drastic cutbacks if federal funding is ended.

Soyla Villicana, project director of the 18th Street Development Corp.'s Building Trades Training Program, said the program has been in existence since 1976 and is beginning to make excellent inroads with unions.

"We're one of the few programs in the city that does have union commitments and hires union instructors. All this would be wasted if we're not funded," Villicana said.

"We've worked a good five years putting together a quality program. Contractors generally look upon CETA programs with a negative view, but we bring them out and let them see that we're not doing cosmetic work but real rehab work, and our reputation with them is good," she said.

The program, which has been funded by CETA, is a 12-month preapprenticeship training program in carpentry, plastering, and bricklaying.

The trainees spend 32 hours a week in intensive on-the-job training — rehabilitating abandoned buildings in the Pilsen area—and another 8 hours in classroom and shop classes.

"THOSE WHO COMPLETE the program successfully are allowed to take the exam for the union to become a first-year apprentice," Villicana said.

The program is set up for ages 16 to 19 because of the high unemployment and dropout rate among young people in the Pilsen community.

In addition to classroom and on-the-job training, participants must work on their high school diploma or equivalency certificate on their own time.

Villicana said preapprenticeship training gives individuals, particularly women, an opportunity to see if the trades suit them.

"Most women between the ages of 16 and 19 are not willing to make the decision to go into a nontraditional job.

"This gives them an opportunity to try it without a commitment to a four-year apprenticeship," she said.

Villicana said some people have received their high school equivalency certificates and gone on to college. Others have used their skills to support them in other kinds of jobs.

The current program, with 30 participants, concludes at the end of this month, and Villicana said a new group wouldn't begin until funding was determined.

WASHBURN TRADE School, 3233 W. 31st St., offers apprentice programs and other training in such areas as auto body and fender work, and for vending machine mechanics and chefs. The training is provided in an open enrollment program.

Anne Coyne, special projects coordinator, said that in the open enrollment program, women comprise 12.5 per cent of the students and minorities 50.6 per cent. In the trades or apprenticeship programs, 4 per cent are women and 26 per cent are minorities.



. . . and put it to use on a structure in the Pilsen neighborhood. Like other trainees, they spend 32 hours a week in on-the-job training.

## Breaking barriers difficult

# More women wear blue collar

FOR YEARS, WOMEN have been told that the way out of low-paying, dead-end jobs is to exchange their pink or white collars for blue ones.

"In addition to better pay and opportunity, blue-collar women are often happier in their work than women who seek more traditional white-collar work," says Mary Lindenstien Walshok, sociology professor at the University of California in San Diego.

Her four-year study of female blue-collar pioneers followed the progress of 90 women who entered the



**Carol Kleiman**  
Women at work

fields of cabinetry, plumbing, welding, appliance repair, mechanics and electronics.

In 1978, the United States Department of Labor drew up affirmative action guidelines for federal contractors to follow and instituted apprenticeship training programs through the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA).

AT THE SAME time, scores of supportive groups to help women enter the skilled trades sprang up all over the country. Among them were Hard-Hatted Women and Women in Skilled Employment in Cleveland; Women in Trades Project of the Midwest Women's Center in Chicago; Wider Opportunities for Women, Washington; Women in the Trades, New York; the Southern California Area Construction Opportunities, Santa Ana, Calif.; Better Jobs for Women, Denver, and Women in Apprenticeship, San Francisco.

Throughout the country, thousands of women have been trained to do everything from working in coal mines to laying bricks, repairing cars and working on construction sites.

"It sure beats waiting on tables," a former waitress training for construction work says.

THE PHYSICAL facts of blue-collar work were brought home recently to women in Grosse Pointe Farms, Mich., where homemakers repaired potholes because the city would not. It took them about an hour and 200 pounds of mix to fill a half-block's worth of potholes.

"It wasn't hard at all," Sue Kinnaird commented. "They get \$18 hour to do this job? I'm going to apply."

Applying is one thing. Getting a job is another. Despite support groups and federal regulations, women are "seriously underrepresented in blue-collar jobs," reports the Labor Department.

Because of the recession, there are fewer jobs. Be-

cause of the long-time maleness of blue-collar work, women aren't being hired where there are jobs.

THE LABOR Department reports there are 5 million women in blue-collar jobs today, an increase of one-tenth of one percent in a decade. Blue-collar women are stretched into a few traditional categories, mostly as operators in manufacturing plants, especially the garment industry where women operatives are 39.8 percent of those employed in that area. But in nontraditional blue-collar fields such as cable installation and repair, less than one percent of those highly coveted jobs are held by women.

The missing link in the emphasis on women entering blue-collar jobs is letting the people who do the hiring know about it. To the rescue is a most unlikely institution in today's era of Reaganomics: Though CETA training programs have been halted, the federal government has funded a one-year program through the Labor Department's Women's Bureau to increase recruitment, placement and retention of women in apprenticeship occupations.

Only \$115,000 has been awarded for the entire program, which encompasses the department's 10 federal regions, but the commitment of those running it makes up in part for the lack of funds.

"MORE PEOPLE involved in recruitment and placement of apprentices need to know that women are interested in nontraditional occupations, can do the work and have the same economic need for good jobs as men," says Lenora Cole-Alexander, director of the Women's Bureau.

One- or two-day seminars are planned nationwide and people involved in hiring, including federal and state agencies, are being tapped to attend. The hope is to reach some 3,000 employment and training professionals in the U.S. and to start a ripple effect that will benefit female blue-collar job seekers.

"If we don't make an impact on the people who have the responsibility to do the hiring and can do something about helping women get jobs, nothing will ever change," says Arleen Winfield, social science advisor and national project manager for the new program.

PART OF THE "impact" is to get the community involved from the very beginning. Myra Baker, who devised the program under a Labor Department contract for Urban Management Consultants of San Francisco Inc., began "training the trainers" last November with that in mind. Even before most of the workshops were held, business, labor and community groups offered to donate time and services.

"Our hope is to leave something in place, to have a successful support system remaining when the training is done," says Baker.

She reports, for instance, that Sears, Roebuck & Co. is being helpful in various parts of the country. Ironworkers in Atlanta have offered to refurbish offices



Tribune photo by Bob Fife

A telephone cable-splicing technician at work. Despite some inroads, women still are "seriously under-represented" in blue-collar jobs, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

for a training center there. Women groups in Boise, Idaho, are raising money. Computer companies are offering help. Coca Cola Co. is participating.

"THE PROGRAM IS exciting because it leads people from consciousness-raising to action on a community level," says the training consultant. "We hope that millions of women will ultimately benefit."

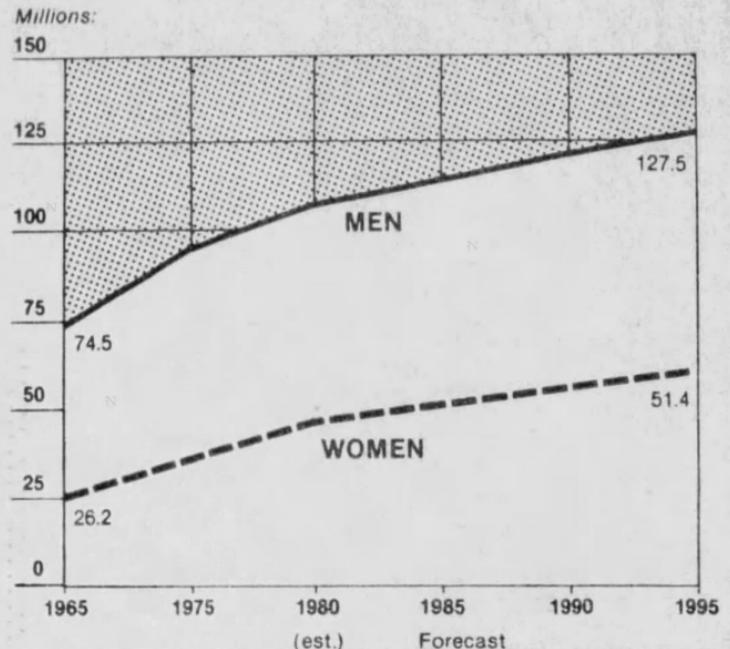
Each region has a goal of reaching 300 people. In Region 5, which includes Chicago, the Midwest Women's Center has contracted to do the training. Audrey Denecke, regional trainer, is also director of the center's pre-apprenticeship project. Denecke plans to hold workshops in Chicago, Alton, South Bend, Lansing, Minneapolis, Columbus, Ohio, and Oconomowoc, Wis.

"We've had a tremendous response," she reports. "Contractors have not been meeting their goals, and we're set up to help them. We plan to concentrate on the access routes to blue-collar jobs. Both women and men are unemployed, but women are victimized more severely by the economic system than men."

*The next local training program will be Wednesday, April 28, at the YWCA, 304 E. Third St., Alton. Those interested should contact Denecke at 922-8530. /*

## A woman's place is . . . in the workforce

Women will continue to make up a greater share of the labor market, a U.S. Department of Labor study shows. The study predicts the percentage of women in the overall civilian workforce will increase to 47 percent by 1995, compared to 35 percent in 1965.



# Affirmative action discussion planned

CHICAGO — A call for the renewal of affirmative action will be the focus of a Midwest Women's Center-sponsored conference for women in trade occupations.

The Midwest Blue Collar Tradeswomen's Conference, from Sept. 30 to Oct. 2, is entitled "Women Forging New Employment Frontiers." The program will address the issues of sexism, racism and ageism as they affect women in skilled craft and blue collar occupations.

Featured speaker Arlene Blum, a biophysical chemist and leader of the first American Women's Himalayan Expedition that climbed Mount Annapurna, will discuss the challenges facing women in non-traditional jobs.

The conference also will examine

the causes of and suggest solutions to the phenomenon known as the "feminization of poverty," a term that refers to the predominance of women in traditionally female occupations that have low pay and few opportunities.

Among the solutions that will be suggested is that of increasing female participation in apprenticeship programs. Those programs provide most workers' training for skilled craft trades such as construction, printing and mechanical service, according to Audrey Denecke, the conference coordinator.

Denecke cites U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training figures that reveal that currently women

comprise only 5.5 percent of the registered apprentices in Illinois. Sessions at the conference will focus on strategies to overcome barriers to female involvement in training programs.

Workshop topics will include

sexual and racial harassment, health and occupational safety, organizational dynamics, leadership skills, small business development, basic unionism and collective bargaining.

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# CHECK OUR RATES

# Apprenticeships called key to women in trades

CHICAGO (AP) — The leader of a meeting of 200 tradeswomen here says the current process of obtaining apprenticeships in traditionally male-dominated professions is "a long-kept secret handed down from father to son."

Currently, women make up 5.5 percent or 577 of 10,434 registered apprenticeships in Illinois, according to U.S. Department of Labor statistics cited by Audrey Denecke at the first Midwest Blue Collar Tradeswomen's Conference here over the weekend.

"These (trades) jobs pay, on the average, from 100 to 300 percent more than most traditionally female occupations," Ms. Denecke said. "Yet employer and union barriers have systematically prevented women from entering these trades."

In the Midwest as a whole, only 6 percent of the apprenticeships for the skilled trade jobs in the Midwest are held by women, according to statistics released at the conference.

Those statistics lead to other discouraging numbers, said Ms. Denecke, like the 30-percent decline in women's construction jobs during the recent recession compared to a 1-percent increase in similar jobs for men, according to the Bureau of Labor.

One way to better the situation, Ms. Denecke and the women say, is to open the apprenticeship process — traditionally dominated by men — with open recruitment and eased regulations for selecting apprentices in such skilled trades as construction, printing and mechanical services.

The issues being raised by the tradeswomen in the two-day conference will be presented to U.S. Labor Secretary Raymond Donovan later this

year, Ms. Denecke said.

"We feel there's a need for pressuring the federal government. They don't agree that there is non-compliance by unions and contractors," she said.

"I really believe that it's a complicity between unions and contractors to keep women out, whether it's conscious or unconscious," she said.

Issues targeted by the women at the conference include:

- The economy. Ms. Denecke said unions and contractors use the recession as an excuse for not hiring more women, and when the economy is bad, women are the first to lose their jobs.

- Age restrictions and other eligibility requirements for apprentices. Ms. Denecke said that age restrictions in the construction trade as low as 24 years old exclude women who discover later in life that they want to work in traditionally male jobs. She said women are not counseled as early as men to consider skilled trades.

- Apprenticeship recruitment and selection procedures. Unions and contractors discriminate against women by not openly advertising for apprentices, she said.

- Sexual harassment. Ms. Denecke cited recently reported cases in which a tradeswoman's coffee was poisoned, and another in which a welding student had water thrown on live wires where she was standing.

The conference is sponsored by the Midwest Women's Center, a Chicago-based referral and advocacy organization. Aside from Illinois, states in the region include Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin and Minnesota.