

LABOR

Canadian clericals form union

VANCOUVER—Five years ago, when Elizabeth Godley couldn't get paid sick leave from the art gallery where she worked, she went to the Office and Technical Employees, the Canadian branch of the Office and Professional Employees union.

OPEU wasn't interested. They told her an office of 30 workers was too small to organize and that no sick leave after six months on the job was common in union contracts.

But Godley wasn't satisfied. She had read of a "Working Women's Association" in Vancouver, and began attending meetings, along with five other women who had similar experiences.

That small group has grown into an independent women's union, SORWUC—Service, Office and Retail Workers Union of Canada—with over 800 members.

SORWUC's successes were small at the beginning—the first contract in 1973 was with a law firm of only two employees. But in the summer of 1976 they began doing what the unions said could never be done: organizing Canada's banks. Today, they represent 700 workers in 22 bargaining units in British Columbia banks, have a number of certifications pending, and have begun negotiating what they hope will become a master contract.

While bank organizing is what has gained them the most publicity, and the most members, the union has been involved in a variety of other efforts. SORWUC Local #1 has won model contracts in small social service agencies, and their fourth strike recently entered its second month at a B.C. pub, cutting the establishment's business by 80 percent. A sister organization, AUCE, Association of University Clerical Employees, initiated by SORWUC women, has now unionized 3,000 college employees whose wages have almost doubled.

Becoming more practical.

SORWUC has remained independent from unions that have historically ignored women. But its recent growth is causing the union to become more "practical," says Godley, who is now its national secretary. That includes considering affiliation with the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) for much-needed strike and financial support and making some revisions in its Constitution.

Before the Canadian Labour Relations Board (CLRB) approved SORWUC as a bargaining unit for the legal workers in 1973, the organization held educationals, walked picketlines and leafleted.

Leafletting is still a major part of their strategy. Standing in front of office buildings in the early morning hours, members pass out information comparing non-union to union wages (workers at a SORWUC credit union make \$875 a month to the bank workers' average of \$600-700). The pamphlets answer common questions like "Can I get fired for organizing?" and "Will I have to go on strike?" and talk about the value of women's work.

The union also tells of contract gains other than higher wages: full pay for maternity leave, two weeks paternity leave with pay, company subsidization of day care, union meetings on company time (so women with families can participate), employer-employee hiring committees, and excellent seniority and grievance procedures.

SORWUC calls itself a "union for working women," but that doesn't mean it's composed exclusively of women, says Linda Reed, a former bank worker who now devotes her time to the union. However, it does concentrate its organizing in traditional women's fields.

With women's movement.

The union also has a relationship to the women's movement in Canada. A statement by Local #1 to the British Columbia Federation of Women explained their

Vancouver's clerical union, SORWUC, has received "mixed" support from the local trade union movement. Some unions have given money to strikes and many individual union members have helped out. On the other hand, there have been some jurisdictional disputes with old line unions.



SORWUC has two paid staff members, including organizer Heather MacNeill, above, but it depends primarily on volunteer support from its members to make things work. Here volunteers stuff envelopes.

position that "inroads into traditional, male-dominated occupations...will not of themselves end the social and economic inequality and oppression experienced by women." It spoke of the "imperative" to gain a power base rather than to organize solely around the social demands of the movement, such as rape reform and an end to educational stereotyping.

"SORWUC is seen as a 'movement union, and it attracts all sorts of leftwingers and people interested in social reform," says Godley. Although they may not be actual members, such supporters often help out in the office, a big boost to an organization that has only recently been able to pay two staff members, President Jean Rands and UBW (Union of Bank Workers) organizer Heather MacNeill.

The familiar problems of organizing women still exist. As Godley explains, "One of the main problems in the bank organizing is the paternalism. A woman sees her boss or her supervisor as a benevolent figure who will look after her. Often the first person a woman asks about joining a union is her boss.

"We also run into women who've belonged to unions that were run by men and they never want to again, as well as women whose husbands don't think they should," she continues. "But then you meet some incredible women, older women who say 'I've been waiting for this for 20 years.'"

Mistrust of male-dominated unions with headquarters in the U.S. is common among office workers who fear that "joining a union means less, not more, control over your life." It was a reason for SORWUC's birth, and problems with the organized labor movement continue to plague the union.

Godley says they've received "mixed" support from the trade union movement. Some unions have given money to their strikes and individual union members

have walked the picketline.

There have been jurisdictional problems with the OPEIU (Office and Professional Employees International Union) and the Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union. The latter began an organizing drive at a SORWUC struck pub, but criticism from the B.C. Federation of Labor aborted the attempt.

SORWUC was formed because these unions weren't organizing women. "Women are the only people left to organize—in offices, banks, retail stores and restaurants, everyone else is organized," says Godley, adding that B.C.'s militant labor history has led to a high standard of living. She points out that the OPEIU has not attempted to organize banks since it was turned down 15 years ago in a branch with only three employees.

"It's all very well for them to say we're encroaching on their territory, but they've done nothing." Look at their records, she says bluntly, "you can see that they're paying more to park the president's car than to organize.... And," she concludes, "they want to keep their jobs."

Since SORWUC's breakthrough at the banks, however, the CLC has established a committee to conduct a national bank organizing drive. The move indicates that the CLC will probably ignore SORWUC's request for financial assistance and that jurisdiction may be granted to one of its affiliates, which include the OPEIU, the Retail Clerks and the Steelworkers.

SORWUC bank workers have expressed interest in affiliation with the CLC if the union could be assured of financial support and organizational autonomy. But CLC is only interested if SORWUC would affiliate with an existing union (such as the OPEIU), or as a directly chartered local of the CLC.

SORWUC's rapid growth has led to changes in the union. One involves the number of terms that the union's president can serve. Originally it was to be only one one-year term, but a referendum

vote changed it to three. The concern of the Constitution drafters was to stop bureaucracy at the top, to ensure that officers would not be people who hadn't worked in 20 years. Facing such a formidable opponent as the banks, they began to realize that an experienced president is essential to contract negotiations.

"Actually," says Godley, "people see this as the thin edge of the wedge. Now it's three, soon it will be seven, then ten, then 20."

Another recent change was the hiring of a paid organizer. One concept fundamental to SORWUC was that women should organize themselves rather than relying on people from the outside, who in the past often were men. Again, necessity and the fact that MacNeill is a former bank worker with experience in AUCE changed the union members' minds.

Despite these limited changes, the union's structure remains very democratic; locals are autonomous, and major decisions are made by referendum.

The situation with the bank workers is more complex, especially given the CLC's recent move. SORWUC has been organizing the banks branch by branch under a 1976 CLRB ruling. They probably could never have gotten anywhere otherwise. But now the banks say that they must negotiate branch by branch, a tiresome task that puts the idea of a master contract in question and makes striking almost impossible.

The Royal Bank, however, is contesting the branch by branch decision. If upheld by the courts, it would force SORWUC into a regional organizing drive. If SORWUC is able to pull off such a drive, it would make moot the piecemeal negotiations and strengthen their bargaining position immeasurably. But that is a big if—one that also depends largely on what happens with the CLC's organizing drive.

Michelle Celarier is a free-lance writer in Seattle.

Random Samples

Send in those cans

The Environmental Action Foundation has announced a national campaign to send thousands of empty, non-returnable cans to President Carter at the White House to demonstrate support for national deposit legislation.

EAF wants legislation to reduce the use of non-returnable bottles and cans. They encourage citizens to attach labels to non-returnable cans and mail them to the President as a symbol of their support. They cite large energy savings, lower consumer costs and reduced litter from such a law. Four states have adopted deposit laws—Oregon, Michigan, Maine and Vermont.

County, U.S.A.' it would be less troublesome," Chapnick says. "The film is a beautiful lyric poem. The interweaving of historical footage with the present is masterful... The film clearly deserves the wide audience it is attracting. Indeed, it may serve to educate its mass audience about workers' problems and corporate arrogance and deceit. But, it also will reinforce anti-organized labor attitudes and the belief that places like Harlan County are isolated and unusual.

"More importantly, it will mislead people who are ready to struggle. It creates the illusion that a large and powerful organization (union or party) is not required. ...It omits the interplay between the or-

"a very high margin of profit of about 400 percent," Fernandes said. Over the last 25 years the company has shipped more than \$12.5 million back to the U.S. "by way of imports, profits, home office and service charges."

Socialized baseball

Socialized baseball has come to Visalia, Calif., *Rural America* recently reported.

When the New York Mets pulled out their farm team Visalia was left without any ball team. Unable to attract another club, Visalia's city council bought the city a franchise from the Minnesota Twins. The Twins would supply the players and manager and pay their salaries, while the city would meet all other expenses, including equipment and travel. A budget of \$87,000 for the first year was approved and the Visalia Oaks were born.

Up, up and away

The Energy Action Educational Foundation, in a September report that garnered little public attention, revealed that profits for the top 21 oil companies in the first six months of 1977 were greater than the profits for the same companies for all of 1972, the last year before the Arab oil embargo.

The study showed that in a period when profits for these companies were increasing by 103 percent, earnings of the average American worker increased by only 38.5 percent, and that workers faced energy price increases ranging from 77.4 percent for gasoline to 140.4 percent for fuel oil.

The EAEF can be contacted at 1523 L St. NW, Washington, DC 20005.

By any other name it still kills

Reporters for the American Forces European Radio and Television Network in Germany have accused American military officials of meddling in their news operations, the *L.A. Times* reported Jan. 4.

At issue is a dispute over the "proper" way to refer to the neutron bomb. The bomb is generally described as capable of "killing people without destroying buildings," a description used by the American Forces network until mid-December, when military officials decided that the description added to generally negative reaction to the neutron bomb's possible deployment in Europe.

Broadcasters were first encouraged to use the term "enhanced radiation device," and finally permitted to call it simply "neutron bomb" without further description.

No sale

Opposition to the sale of the South African gold coin, the Kruggerand, is growing in the U.S. Jan. 1 the brokerage firm of Merrill Lynch ceased sales of the coin in all its offices.

Bill Clark of the company's corporate relations department in New York said that the decision was "not a political decision," and came because the company found it "economically unfeasible" to sell gold coins.

But opponents to Kruggerand sales, like the Eugene-based People for Southern African Freedom, challenged that explanation. "There's been a growing protest movement against the Kruggerand," said Bob Guldin of PSAF. "The city councils of Portland and other cities have condemned its sale, TV stations have been refusing to advertise it, and Merrill Lynch in Eugene was picketed twice in recent months. We think it's a political decision but they can't admit it."

Similar efforts have taken place all over the country, directed both at Merrill Lynch and at other stores that sell the coin.

From the other side

On Dec. 13 the Mexico City newspaper *Excelsior* carried an interesting page one account of testimony from Mexicans who had been imprisoned in the U.S. and returned to their native country under a much publicized exchange program:

"Thirty-six Mexican prisoners, reintegrated into our country's prisons by the exchange agreement with U.S. prisoners, yesterday gave most impressive accounts of the cruelty and sadism they experienced during their captivity in the neighbor country's prisons.

"They were welcomed back to Mexico with a dinner and presented to the press yesterday, and expressed their joy at having left what they called the 'inferno of gringo jails'."

"In a wheelchair in front of the group was Esteban Santoyo Paredes, ex-inmate of the Hanford (Texas) prison, who when made to do forced labor in the prison had an accident falling from the fourth floor while carrying a sack of cement. He suffered fractures from which he has not recovered because he was not given medical attention, but was sent back thus fractured to continue working in the prison kitchen. He cannot use his arms to push the wheelchair.

"Most of the men were tried and sentenced by U.S. judges for robbery and offenses against health. One, Estaban Mendoza Reza, was sentenced to 100 years in prison for the homicide of his girlfriend. Here, in accordance with the maximum penalty under our law, the sentence will be 40 years of which he has already served nine.

"Homosexuality, racial discrimination against Mexicans, drug traffic and sadism are commonplace in these prisons, they said. The wardens set dogs on the inmates for the slightest fault and submit them to cruel beatings. They also said that the Mexicans Juan Cuellar and Margarito Caceres were hung (ahorcar-execute) by the wardens of a Texas prison 'only because they were Mexicans.'"

(Translation courtesy of Cedric Belfrage)

Cheaper to live in sin

Those of you working people out there "living in sin" may have to stay there for a while longer. Jan. 9 the U.S. Supreme Court refused to decide whether current income tax laws unfairly discriminate against married couples while rewarding wage earners who live together but remain legally single.

The Court left standing a lower court's decision denying relief to two Indiana couples who had protested the "marriage penalty" in present tax laws.

Currently, married couples are taxed at the rate applicable to the sum of both salaries, while single people living together are taxed only on their own salary, usually at a lower rate.

Efforts to eliminate the "marriage penalty" are now up to Congress.

Table's turned

Finally, things are a little different among the Khasi people in the tribal state of Meghalaya.

For one thing, the newly-wed husband moves into his wife's home and takes her family's name. Once there, the husband can't count on being secure in his marriage until his wife gives birth to a baby girl.

If only boys are born to the couple, the Khasi husband is eventually asked to leave.

—Compiled by Doyle Niemann



Oregon, which enacted the first law in 1972, reports widespread consumer acceptance, reduction in roadside bottle and can litter of 83 percent, and a net increase in jobs.

Legislation to enact a national deposit system is pending in Congress; the Senate Commerce committee will hold hearings on the bill January 25-27.

EAF can be contacted at The Dupont Circle Building, Suite 724, Washington, DC 20036.

Harlan County anti-union

A new criticism has arisen of the Academy Award winning film *Harlan County*. Ellen Chapnick, a former United Mine Workers staff member, writing in the *Mountain Eagle* of Whitesburg, Ky., says the movie, while beautiful and moving, is ultimately fraudulent.

"The film teaches that if a small group of workers and their families are tough enough, brave enough and persistent enough, their demands will be met. By extension, one could reason that if many such groups waged campaigns, corporate and state power would yield. It simply is not going to happen that way. Nor did it happen that way in Harlan County," Chapnick says.

The filmmakers, she says, "totally ignored the massive contribution of a rich, powerful, international trade union, the United Mine Workers of America, to the struggle in Harlan County." The UMW, she says, dedicated over \$2 million and thousands of staff hours to winning a contract for the miners at two small mines in the county.

Chapnick cites a variety of ways that the UMW aided the miners in Harlan—from direct aid to public relations and political pressure. "The state troopers seen early in the film are gone in later scenes because the Union put political pressure on the newly elected governor of Kentucky and not because the baseball bats and the curses of the picketers drove them away," she says.

"If the film were titled 'Ode to Harlan

organization and the members.... If we learn the wrong lessons, we are doomed to repeat our errors and thereby to fail," concludes Chapnick.

Klan 1, ACLU 0

The Ku Klux Klan is taking credit for weakening the American Civil Liberties Union, according to a recent letter to Klan supporters, obtained by the Southern Institute for Propaganda and Organization in Louisville, Ky.

In a pre-Christmas letter KKK national director David Duke listed the weakening of the ACLU among the Klan's major accomplishments during 1977. "By our pressing of the suit for the White Klan servicemen at Camp Pendleton and elsewhere, we have caused the basically anti-White ACLU to lose 40 percent of their support," wrote Duke.

Other cases that have caused the ACLU to lose support have included its defense of the rights of Nazis to march in predominantly Jewish Skokie, Ill., and for the Klan to hold a rally on a public school ballfield in southern Mississippi.

No Coke for India

Rather than let Indian shareholders in on its secret formulas, the Coca-Cola Company is preparing to pull completely out of the world's second most populous country.

The Indian government has adopted a policy requiring multinational companies operating in "low priority areas" such as soft drinks to transfer 60 percent ownership and the "know how" to operate to Indians. But the fully American owned company that distributes Coke in India has indicated that it will shut down its 22 bottling plants before it will part with the "trade secret" of its drink formulas.

George Fernandes, Indian Minister of Industry, pointed out to the Indian parliament that Coca-Cola offers a good case study in why the government wants to "Indianize" beverage manufacturing.

Starting with an investment of slightly more than \$100,000 in the early '50s, Coke sold concentrates to bottlers with

IN THE WORLD

Two South Africans from the island

By Hilda Bernstein
"It was cold in winter, with the fog low over the island, and the south-easter blowing across the bay."

Cape Town's winter south-easter can make you cling to railings, can toss cars across streets. Robben Island, a rocky outcrop at the entrance to Cape Town's beautiful harbor, is a penal colony. Black political prisoners from all over South Africa and from Namibia are sent there.

Mac Maharaj was on the island for 12 years, Indries Naidoo for ten. I knew them both before they went to jail. Recently they were in London and talked of life on the island.

Cut off from world.

Over the years conditions changed. Overt brutality, torture and mass assaults were a common feature of life on the island during the '60s. But protests and action from the prisoners themselves, from people inside South Africa and in other countries, including the UN and the Red Cross, brought changes. The prisoners even used hunger strikes to try to end brutal treatment; a number were charged with "endangering their own health" and given additional sentences.

Mac: "Physical conditions improved, but in other respects there is increased severity and deprivation, and intensified efforts to demoralize the men. More and more we are cut off completely from the outside world, even from family and friends. I once received a letter where all that was left was the address of the sender. The entire letter had been cut away, the gaps between what had been paragraphs held the whole piece together, and at one end was the signature of the sender. But that counted as a letter received, when I was allowed only one every six months."

"At first they cut letters going out of Robben Island in the same way. But now they make it seem as though they have not been censored. They make us rewrite them, leaving out certain sections, and if, after the second or third time, they are not satisfied, they won't send it. But the letters we receive—they just use the scissors."

Years to worry.

In South African jails political prisoners are not permitted to have news of any kind—no newspapers or magazines with news, no letters that contain anything other than personal family matters; no radio. Visits are harshly supervised and any remark other than purely family affairs will terminate the visit. A visitor may not say: There's been an earthquake in Iran, or an election in England, or a new president in the United States. The isolation from the world must be total.

Indries: "It is being deprived of all news, the isolation from world events, that we on the island find very hard to take. And when you're not even allowed to know what is happening to members of your own family...we had years of time to worry..."

Indries' sister Shanti was detained in solitary confinement for more than a year, deprived of sleep and interrogated continuously for three days and nights until she suffered hallucinations; then brought to court as a witness in a case involving Winnie Mandela and others. Shanti refused to testify against her friends, was sent back to jail, but eventually was released and now lives in London.

The Naidoo home in Johannesburg, a rambling old house, was crammed with extended family and political activists. T.N. Naidoo, the father of Indries and Shanti, was an adopted son of Mahatma Gandhi. Ama Naidoo, the mother, looked after young and old, the celebrated, the unknown, of all races. Hospitality was extended to all. Now the house is silent, the family is scattered.



Hilda Bernstein

On Robben Island, a rocky outcrop at the entrance to Capetown's harbor, Mac Mararaj and Indries Naidoo lived in isolation as political prisoners.

The Prisons Act places an obligation on the authorities to keep a prisoner in contact with his family, and the Commandant has power to inform prisoners of what is happening to their families.

Mac: "But they don't inform you. Nelson [Mandela] had a rough time when his wife Winnie was arrested. He knew nothing of the trials; it was nearly two years before she was permitted to visit him again. Last year Walter [Sisulu] asked the Commanding officer for permission to write to his wife to find out if his daughter had been detained. (This was during the children's revolt in Soweto). The answer was: You show me how you got news that your daughter was detained. They wouldn't let the letter go. This can be a killing kind of anxiety. You worry, what has happened to your wife, what has happened to your children. It builds up tremendous tensions."

"When my wife Tim visited me she told me she was leaving the country on an exit permit. I then asked the CO, as she is leaving, please let me combine my next three or four letters (each letter is limited to 500 words) so I can deal with all sorts of problems, misunderstandings between us. He said: Yes, it was okay. I wrote a five-page letter and was assured it had been sent. All those years I believed she had received it and perhaps understood...until I came here. Yes, she had received bits and pieces of my letter, all cut up. She never knew what I had really wanted her to know."

We still said 'we'.

The prisoners on the island are housed in different, separate sections. There are about 40 single-cell prisoners, including all the leading people like Mandela, Sisulu, Mbeki; each cell is seven by seven-and-a-half feet, opening into a yard. Single-cell prisoners may never work near or speak to those kept in the communal cells.

These large cells are in turn divided into sections: one for general prisoners; a separate section for those convicted under the Terrorism Act; another section for prisoners from Namibia, who are not allowed to have any contact with South African prisoners; and now a fourth communal section, for those recently sentenced (there has been a spate of political trials) obviously to prevent the long-term prisoners from hearing news from outside. Mac was in a single-cell, Indries in a communal cell.

Indries: "We were 80 or 90 in a cell built for no more than 25. We tried to maintain the utmost discipline. We formed a committee but this was declared illegal. We were never allowed to speak on behalf of others. When we made a complaint it had to be 'I,' but still we said 'We.' Then they wouldn't listen to us. We never forgot for one moment what was the purpose that had brought us to prison. We came from different organizations, but we had to learn to stand together as prisoners."

Work as punishment.

Long years of isolation on the island could be made endurable only by work and study. But the work in itself was a punishment, and study became a weapon used willfully by the prison authorities.

Mac: "In the single cells our first job was knapping stones with a four-pound hammer. Every day we were taken from our cells into the enclosed yard, and there we sat in the same place week after week. We never saw the outside world, never a blade of grass, just the quadrangle into which our cells led, and a patch of sky. We were spaced out, never permitted to speak."

"We objected to the work, and eventually we were sent to work in the lime quarry, pick and shovel and wheelbarrows. We worked there for eight years, although we had been told it was only for a short time. In the end, the Commissioner gave an undertaking to the Red Cross that he would stop this work; the following year he solemnly informed them that it had been stopped. That was in 1967 and '68—but we were in the quarries until 1973. Then they sent us to a selected place, out of sight of the other prisoners, to collect seaweed, and this alternated with spells in the quarry."

Indries: "For the first five years most of us worked in the quarries. We had to break stones, to fulfill a certain quantity of work each day. If not, we were punished at the weekend by the deprivation of three meals."

"In the first years many of us had this punishment. I for one was never able to fulfill my quota. It was impossible. Others helped me, or I would steal from yesterday's stones. In 1971 the quarries were flooding, they were now below sea level. So we were employed bringing stones from the quarries to the prison yard itself. Quarry work now is supposed to be only a form of punishment."

Restrictions on study.

Study became almost more necessary than food. By a court ruling in 1973, study, together with smoking, games and sport, were regarded as "comforts" or "mere privileges," and not as necessities. This meant they were absolutely at the discretion of the authorities who soon understood the importance of study to their literate prisoners.

For the single-cell men in particular, and the better-educated, study was a total necessity, a means of keeping sane.

But there are arbitrary rules. No post-graduate studies are permitted—a tantalizing restriction on professional men. In the field of undergraduate studies, all law subjects are prohibited, as are science and political science, all foreign languages, even some South African languages.

There are also prohibitions on various types of diplomas, restrictions on some specific colleges, only prescribed (and not "recommended") books permitted, and these often held back for weeks or months or totally. And money for studies may not come from friends in South Africa or abroad, only from the next-of-kin.

All prisoners are in one of four grades, "A" being the highest, "D" the lowest category. In D there are few privileges and one letter may be received and written and one visit, every six months. In C it becomes three months, and so on up the scale. Even murderers are not automatically graded D—but all political prisoners are D; they stay there for years—some for their whole time in prison.

Eventually, after years of protest and struggle, the authorities began to promote them, but then this became a new punishment. The disciplinary rules are complex but there are more than 20 categories of insubordination including dis-

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