



GREENSFELDER '78

By Anne B. Zill

WASHINGTON

NOW THAT THE LATEST SKIRMISH in the battle for women's equality has been won, these guerrilla fighters—in and out of government—are assessing anew both the short and long-term implications of the passage of H.J. 638.

With the 60-to-36 vote in the U.S. Senate on Oct. 5 to extend the state ratification period for the Equal Rights Amendment until June 30, 1982, people favoring ERA are of two minds.

"The passage of this extension Resolution will go down in history as the grossest political misjudgment of all time," declared one staff counsel on Capitol Hill (who thought names were best eliminated from discussion). On the other side, Marie Bass of ERAmerica, a three-year-old public education effort on the issue, said it was the first time that champagne bottles got uncorked in the history of her organization. "Lady Luck seemed to go our way for a change."

The assessment of the majority of women in activist, pro-ERA roles is that this extension vote offered a clear message from Congress and the American people that ERA supporters are simply not going to let this effort die. But there have been rumblings from constitutional experts and feminist theorists that this particular piece of legislation was a step backward given the real needs of the women's movement at this historical juncture.

While jubilant victors with large white ERA NOW banners were shouting in front of the Senate side of the Capitol that extension marked the turning point in the struggle for ERA as well as the political maturing of the women's movement, others were quietly pointing out the inevitability of court battles all the way to the Supreme Court.

"Here is an example," Carol Burris, president of the Women's Lobby, said, "of a failure on the part of women to

ERA wins on Hill States to test bill in clash of wills

perceive and grapple with their real needs now—for equal pay, social security and welfare benefits, etc. which ERA ratification won't bring." Burris, who was one of the principal lobbyists for the original ERA constitutional amendment in the Congress seven years ago, and who reluctantly supports the extension effort herself, is nevertheless concerned about the enormous number of dollars slipping away over the next three and a half years from needed programs for women and into the protracted process of ratification in recalcitrant state legislatures. "Perhaps," mused another nameless feminist, "our society's cultural development leads not only the Congress but the women's movement as well to fail to perceive the extent to which the symbolic import of equal rights is already taken for granted while substantive gain possibilities are ignored."

"Instead of focusing on one bill that raises the specter of unisex bathrooms, we could be passing some legislation to give women real clout in the world." She acknowledges, however, that going public with this message is calling into question the whole value of ERA in 1978, and raises her arms in frustration.

The legal and constitutional questions were more comfortable grounds for congressional activists. Last week saw an Adlai Stevenson (D-IL) amendment (prior to the Senate passage) that would have had the U.S. Congress express no opinion with respect to the effect of any rescinding effort on the part of state legislatures. While it lost 94-to-4 because Birch Bayh's

forces had convinced a majority that a "no amendment" policy was key to extension passage, Stevenson's proposal marked the muted concern of constitutional experts for the resolution's legality.

That legality is questioned on several grounds: first, it is a House Joint Resolution and not exactly a traditional "law" but rather (since it does not get signed by the President) a "sense of the Congress" document without any clear binding legislative authority. Then there is also the matter of its passage by a simple majority of both Houses instead of the two-thirds majority required for constitutional amendments, a fact that makes the extension resolution ripe for court challenge by opponents.

But the major challenge, which promises to go all the way to the Supreme Court, is due on the question of a state's right to rescind its ratification of ERA. "That was the tough political issue," said Barbara Dixon of Bayh's staff. Four states (Idaho, Kentucky, Nebraska and Tennessee) have already done so, making the Garn amendment to allow rescission by states any time after the extension resolution became effective the significant vote in the Senate last week.

Until the night before the vote," reported Dixon, "we weren't sure we were going to defeat him. Why would it be fair to extend the time to say 'yes' without also extending the time to say 'no'?" Bayh had a team of 12 "friendly" senators, including Kennedy, Hatfield, Sarbanes, Leahy and Muriel Humphrey, among others, talking to the six or seven "swing"

Senators until the last moment when the vote came through 55 to 34.

One of those who swung right was Kan-easter Hodges (D-AR) who inserted into the Congressional Record, "If I thought for a minute that family life would stabilize, or religious faith would deepen, or moral standards rise or patriotism flower by defeating ERA I would join the front ranks against it. These trends, however, are the result of forces and directions unrelated to the emancipation of women. ... Suddenly as I rustled with this problem it came to me like a bolt of lightning—this is a simple matter of equality."

Dixon thinks it is unlikely that the Supreme Court will ultimately rule on the rescission question despite the new wrinkle that this resolution is a first-time extension of the ratification period for a constitutional amendment. "They learned," she argues, when they ruled on abortion and got a lot of criticism for it, "that matters of 'social policy' are not deemed within the realm of the Supreme Court's purview."

Whether or not three additional states will ratify ERA before June 30, 1982, remains an open question. Though Ellie Smeal of the National Organization for Women thinks the chances are excellent, others are more cautious. They talk instead of the momentum created by last week's vote that "give us a good shot," "that will help us unite with labor and the churches in the future," "that will keep us all working hard from now on." All the activists agree that the last minute political maneuvering required by a coalition of the AFL-CIO, NOW, NWPC, the United Methodists and Common Cause, offered testimony to the growing political sophistication of women in their ability to play hard-ball, no-compromise politics with the same fierce dedication as their toughest male counterparts. It was a demonstration of equality all right, in the arena of here-and-now politics, not the above-and-beyond. ■

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WORK SKILLS

Future bleak for skilled workers

Throughout America the need for skilled workers is on the decline. Jobs with little skill are on the rise.

By Al Goodman

RON CHECCHI IS PART OF A national dilemma. A 34-year-old butcher at a large Safeway supermarket in San Francisco, Checchi learned his trade after years of apprenticeship to his father, Hugo. Today, Ron Checchi runs pre-cut portions of beef through a saw and reflects on all the intricate butchers' skills he knows and never uses.

"We were once judged by skills, but skills don't matter anymore," he says. "Anybody can be trained in seven or eight months to run meat through the saw."

Across town, Hugo Checchi, 61, still works behind the meat counter for a small independent grocer. And he still carves by hand, with almost surgical precision, the huge carcasses of beef that hang in the meat locker. Hugo says he's more than a butcher; he's also the "public relations man" who sells the meat to his customers.

"Less skills are required in a chain outfit," says Hugo. "They get equal pay, but they know less."

Yet most butchers, these days, are hired by chain stores, not the small independents.

Throughout America, the need for skilled workers is on the decline as jobs requiring little or no skills are on the rise. It is a result of radical and immutable changes occurring in the U.S. economy—changes which some economists and educators predict could lead to massive dissatisfaction and social upheaval across the board of the U.S. labor force.

As American industry continues to automate and export both skilled and unskilled manufacturing jobs, service sector jobs continue to expand and fill the gap. The Congressional Joint Economic Committee predicted earlier this year that by 1985, up to 80 percent of the U.S. workforce would be employed in the service sector, where skill requirements are at a minimum and there are fewer labor unions to protect wages.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that the fastest growing job slots for the years ahead will be for dental hygienists, flight attendants, computer programmers, teachers' aides and realtors—none of which requires a college education. Labor unions point to the increasing demand for secretaries and clerks "where paperwork is shuffled."

While not all service sector employment is unrewarding or underpaid, the statistics show that in general these jobs are characterized by low wages, little or no security or benefits, and little room for career advancement.

And, says Patrick Mason, research director of the California Labor Federation, "There is no incentive to stay on the job." The poor pay and lack of security or incentive has contributed to growing legions of migratory workers, drifting from one poor job to another, from one city to another, unable to put down roots or provide for a family, say economic observers.

Columbia University economist Eli Ginzberg notes that although national weekly earnings averaged \$176 in 1976, the average pay in service jobs was just \$146 and the retail average only \$114. And yet, he says, three out of four new jobs in the past 26 years have been in these categories.

The decline in skill requirements has not only hit the high-skill areas, such as butchers, tool and dye makers and other machinists. Automation has also "de-



How long will it be before they perfect an automatic pizza tosser?

skilled" jobs at the supermarket checkout counters, retail stores and large commercial chains.

Employees at some McDonald's restaurants, for example, now merely have to push cash register buttons marked not by numbers but by pictures of hamburgers or french fries or milkshakes. The machines then do all the computing and tally up the change, an arithmetical task the employee once was expected to perform.

One McDonald's manager explained that it leads to greater efficiency and service to the customer. But, says Chris Pipho, associate director of research for Denver-based Education Commission of the States, "While the manager of McDonald's might go to the Kiwanis and talk about kids not reading or writing, in practice he hasn't done much to help them use those skills."

What has happened, adds Pipho, is that America has "created a lower level of jobs where no reading or writing skills are needed."

The growth of this lower level group, in turn, is a contributing factor to the failure of schools to upgrade, or even maintain, educational achievement, some educators believe.

"In the past, it paid to do well in school to get a better job," said Henry Levin, Stanford University education and economics professor. "Today, there's the feeling that better jobs represent so few, you can't get them anyway."

"I think students are aware that college won't do what it used to do," said Rozanne Weissman, a spokeswoman for the National Education Association, the nation's second largest union. "Teachers

have been telling us about less motivated kids."

This lack of motivation—perhaps the result of the students' own awareness that most jobs are poorly paid and no longer require much in the way of skills—has produced just the sort of job seekers who fit the "lower level caste" of workers. The rate of "functional illiteracy"—not being able to read a newspaper or fill out a job application—is about 13 percent of all 17-year-old high school students (not counting the thousands who drop out annually), according to the federally financed National Assessment of Educational Progress. Functional illiteracy among blacks and Hispanics is believed to be much higher.

And, while there has been some progress made on the functional illiteracy rates, overall educational standards, as reflected by the College Entrance Examination Board, have been steadily declining. Between 1962 and 1976, average scores on the verbal portion of the Scholastic Aptitude Test have declined from 478 to 429, a 12.5 percent drop.

Motivation for education has suffered so badly that many schools are now reporting an average daily absentee rate as high as 25 percent.

Some educators are convinced that the trend in the job market away from jobs requiring skills and education has indirectly helped to lower overall educational standards by easing the pressure on the schools and on the government to improve those standards. In other words, if industry doesn't need skilled workers, why bother to produce skilled students?

"There's a total lack of coordination between schools and the job sector," said

the NEA's Weissman. "It's appalling."

Weissman's observation applied as well to the other end of the educational spectrum, those college graduates who have acquired high skills in order to find satisfying, good paying jobs.

Federal projections indicate a surplus of some 950,000 college graduates in relation to the market for graduates during the current period of 1974-85. The Joint Economic Committee labor study released this year predicts that this "clot" of highly educated graduates "will mean relatively few opportunities for new graduates through the year 2000."

Of course, what is happening is that these educated, skilled graduates are accepting jobs well below their skill levels as salesmen, secretaries and restaurant workers, creating a kind of educated proletariat. But at the same time, they are "bumping down" high school graduates and the less skilled workers who normally fill such jobs into what some economists fear will be a permanent group with virtually no prospects for advancement.

The result is a bleak picture for those at both ends, but especially for the less educated minority youths who are hit hardest by the crunch.

By the end of this century, predicts Stephen Dresch, director of the Demographic Studies Institute in Connecticut, the undermining of the "traditional mechanisms of social and economic advancement" will, if current patterns hold, lead to "fundamental and socially traumatic disruptions."

The inexorable changes now going on, he told the Joint Economic Committee, will leave "very few untouched."

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