

ESCAPE FROM DOMESTIC LABOUR? UNIONIZATION OF A NURSING HOME

ESCAPE FROM DOMESTIC LABOUR?
UNIONIZATION OF A NURSING HOME

by

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ABSTRACT

This study is an examination of the process of unionization in a nursing home. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with the employees of Journey's End Nursing Home, Prosperity Point, Nova Scotia. The focus of my research was three-fold. First to develop an understanding of why employee's unionized we examined the labour process and general work conditions prior to unionization. Second we examined the process or how the employee's went about getting unionized. Third we undertook an examination of the results of unionization. The central argument in this thesis is that the employees of Journey's End Nursing Home unionized in order to change the labour process. Specifically they wanted 'out' of what they saw as a domestic labour process. This thesis clearly demonstrates two things: firstly, that these women were employed in a domestic labour process; secondly, that as a result of unionization the labour process has changed.

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Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my Dad and in memory of my Mom -- for always encouraging me, not only to start, but also to finish.

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Chapter One

Introduction and Theoretical Considerations

Nursing homes are precarious institutions. Like other social institutions they are many things. The image of a nursing home at a given moment is influenced by the perspective of the viewer. Erving Goffman (1961:4) offers the following definition. This type of home is an effort by society to offer a replacement for protection and care by the family. The usage of this definition within the literature on nursing homes or a variation of it is common.

Over the last twenty years nursing homes have been studied by a variety of sociologists and gerontologists. (Gubrium,1974; Butler,1975; Baum,1977; Moss and Halamandaris,1977; Schwenger and Gross,1980; Vladeck, 1980; Barrow and Smith,1983; Johnson and Grant,1985) While there is a degree of variance among these studies, all have one thing in common -- they focus on the care of residents. Additionally all of these studies have another thing in common -- they do not examine nursing homes as places of employment. As a consequence of this both the work done and those who do it are hidden from view.

Theoretical Considerations

Throughout the 1980's and into the 1990's the literature

on women and work-related problems has been steadily increasing. While the material in this area develops a broad range of themes, there are two which in terms of the project at hand clearly stand out.

The first of these themes places attention on the linkages between women's paid work experience and their unpaid or domestic work experience (White, 1990; Gannage, 1986; Armstrong and Armstrong, 1984; Balbo, 1980). Pat and Hugh Armstrong in the widely cited book, The Double Ghetto: Canadian Women and Their Segregated Work (1984) undertook a detailed examination of women's location in the Canadian workforce. This work clearly indicates that within the Canadian labour force there is still women's work and men's work (1984:201). They further identify that the majority of women have segregated employment in what are known as female job ghettos. Armstrong and Armstrong draw a direct connection between women's position in the labour force and their domestic responsibilities.

...The nature of women's work in the home and in the labour force reinforces and perpetuates the division of labour by sex. Because women have the primary responsibility for domestic work and are thus undertaking second jobs when they enter the labour force, they are frequently unable to commit themselves fully and continuously to their paid employment. And women's work in the labour force, which is often dull, repetitious, low-paid, and unattractive, does not encourage commitment and permanency. Many women do, however, work outside the home, and most do so because their families require the additional income. As a result of their domestic responsibilities, their economic needs, and their integration into a larger consumption unit, women form a cheap and flexible pool of

labour. (1984:201)

Laura Balbo (1982) offers an explanation of why women are located in female job ghettos. She posits that many of the occupations dominated by women can be identified as human service. In general this work involves many of the tasks and functions women do in households.

The very "feminine qualities" that make women so highly valued in family work explain why they are found in large numbers also in paid work in the service sector. Female skills in relating to other people, in caring for others, in loving, are crucial in both their unpaid family and their paid service work. By socialization, by training, by everyday experience, women are the professionals of servicing. (1982:255)

At the very least this suggests that women, in the service sector of the work force are, in addition to the reasons put forward by Armstrong and Armstrong, also located in female job ghettos precisely because of their past and present experience as domestic labourers.

The second theme which emerges out of the literature on women and work focusses on women's membership and participation in trade unions (Briskin and Yanz, 1983; White, 1980; White, 1990). This material, to a large extent, appears to draw directly on the Armstrong's conceptualization of the double ghetto: many of the factors which place women in job ghettos are also posited as hindering women who wish either to unionize or more fully participate in their trade union. Laurell Ritchie (1983) claims that women's domestic responsibility is a major reason women do not unionize. In

fact the argument that women have domestic responsibilities which either prevent them from organizing or fully participating in unions is common throughout the literature. Charlene Gannage, Double Day Double Bind (1986) uses this argument to explain why women are unable to participate in their trade unions. As was pointed out earlier women's domestic responsibility was also a major reason for being in job ghettos.

In addition to women's domestic responsibilities, the literature in this area suggests many other barriers and problems which women may encounter when attempting to unionize. Trade union leader Grace Hartman (1978) offered several reasons why women have been slow to enter unions. These reasons include women's ignorance about unions and the claim that women's husbands are often opposed to their participation in unions. Trade union organizer Laurell Ritchie (1983) outlines a wide range of problems. Some of the problems outlined include the belief that small workplaces are difficult to organize. Employees often know the owner personally and are encouraged to believe that they are part of "one big happy family". Ritchie also claims that many employers will use sophisticated techniques to oppose workers' attempts to unionize. A final problem outlined by Ritchie is that many unions do not take new organizing seriously. The time and money involved in organizing is seen as a bad investment. Julie White (1980) indicates that the major

problems facing women who wish to unionize are small workplaces and employer opposition. According to White small workplaces may become an impediment to unionization for two reasons. The first has to do with the costs involved. Organizing large numbers of small work places entails prohibitively high costs. The second has to do with the idea that management and workers often have a close relationship in small workplaces. Workers in this situation may feel able to deal with their problems on a personal basis rather than turning to a union for help.

Employer opposition, as White points out, can take many forms. Some of these include firing workers for union activities, transferring workers involved in a union, denying promotions to union sympathizers and hiring anti-union employees to undermine the majority of union members needed to form a union. White views such opposition tactics as largely occurring in larger industries within the private sector.

In her early work (1980) White argued that employers in the public sector had for the most part accepted the existence and role of trade unions. She claimed that this was at least in part because the public sector could offset rising labour costs through increased taxation. However, in the private sector increased labour costs may mean reduced profits. Thus private-sector employers were more likely to oppose workers' attempts to unionize. In her most recent work, Mail and

Female (1990) White's thinking has substantially altered on this point. Similar to Panitch and Swartz (1988), White now recognizes that public sector unions have in recent years been under attack by the state. Panitch and Swartz demonstrate that the state has increasingly resorted to bans on strikes as well as back to work legislation in order to curb the strength of trade unions in the public sector.

It is crucial that we realize that these are problems which workers 'may' encounter when attempting to unionize. It is possible that in specific cases workers may face all or a combination of these problems or few, if any, of them. Cases where these problems do not arise may in fact be the exceptions which 'prove the rule'.

The present study focusses on the unionization experiences of a particular group of female nursing home employees. The issue of domestic labour is of central importance in this study. Unlike other studies which focus on women's responsibility for domestic labour as a barrier to unionizing, in the present study we will argue that getting away from domestic labour was a central reason for unionizing. In a broad sense we are looking at three things -- why they unionized; how they went about unionizing and what unionization has meant for these women.

Borrowing from both the Armstrongs and Balbo, nursing homes can be seen as female human service job ghettos characterized by low wages, little or no room for advancement,

and offering employment which takes full advantage of female qualities and skills. While Balbo proclaims women as the 'professionals' of human service work, most nursing home employees are not afforded this status. Indeed one sociologist, Jackie Howsden (1981), has gone so far as to refer to nursing home employees as "human garbage". Clearly a demeaning label such as this confers anything but professional status on women employed in nursing homes.

Nursing home employees are not simply women; they are unskilled women. Epstein (1971) contended that because women's work is viewed as an extension of work in the home this is used against them in the labour market; they are employed more as women than as workers. This is precisely the manner in which women working in nursing homes are viewed. On the one hand they are hired because they are a source of cheap unskilled labour. But on the other they are hired because of the skills it is assumed they have learned in the domestic unit, so that what we have is skilled labour employed as unskilled labour.

To understand this more clearly we must examine one of the reasons nursing homes were established. Conventional wisdom holds that nursing homes are in operation for the benefit of residents. Nursing homes have also been established to provide an inexpensive alternative to expensive public hospital beds. Incapacitated people require on-going nursing care. Keeping them in hospitals is an expensive

solution. Nursing homes provide a relatively inexpensive alternative. The practice of nursing homes employing cheap domestic labour is one of the reasons they can provide this inexpensive alternative.

The present research indicates that the use of domestically skilled employees in this setting goes far beyond simply employing them. The research reveals that women employed in nursing homes may be working in a variation of a domestic labour process.

The use of such a labour process is not surprising for several reasons. Any labour process is dynamic -- the result of the interaction of the various social agents involved. The women as domestic labourers bring to the nursing home ideas about how things are done. Their understanding of work and relatedly how to do it is based on their experience within a domestic labour process. Their self identity is as domestic labourers. They are not naive, regardless of the work title given by management; they know they are hired for their domestic skill.

Management benefits from using the domestic labour process. It eliminates the need for expensive training; domestic labourers receive their training in the domestic sphere. Skills such as child care, cooking and cleaning which have been developed in the domestic sphere directly correspond to the tasks which must be carried out in the nursing home. Once employees are introduced to the basic routine in the

nursing home, they are ready to work. A characteristic feature found in the domestic labour process is fragmentation (Luxton, 1980) This refers to the ability to undertake a multitude of unconnected tasks simultaneously. Often many of these tasks are not consciously thought of as work. Employing a workforce which will work in this manner allows nursing home administrations to employ fewer staff than would otherwise be necessary. The women can and will perform a multitude of tasks or variety of different tasks that would not even be considered by professionals. Where skilled nurses might do resident care, skilled domestic labourers will do this work plus work in the kitchen, the laundry or wherever they are needed. Women in this context are also able to work with very little direct supervision. Because they are domestic professionals they do what has to be done.

Nursing home employees unionize for a variety of reasons. A very important one which the present research reveals is long-term commitment to the idea of working. Many nursing home employees start work with the belief that this is a temporary situation. But as they realize that their foray into the workforce is likely to be long term or even possibly permanent, their expectations of what they should get out of the job increase.

General dissatisfaction with the labour process and the division of labour within the nursing home is a major reason for unionizing. Use of the domestic labour process appears

to be problematic for two reasons. First, despite being forced by administration to do a multitude of jobs, the women tend to identify with a specific job. Identifying with a specific job leads to resentment of both administration and any work which is not seen as part of that specific job. In this way women who are hired as nurse's aides come to identify with resident care, while at the same time develop a deep resentment towards being required to do such tasks as cooking, house cleaning, laundry, etc.. Similarly, women in other positions such as housekeeping or cooking appear to resent being required to do work with which they do not associate.

The second problem the women see in the labour process and division of labour is the mental and physical exhaustion they experience. Because of the quantity of work and the pace which is required to get it done, they 'burn out'. On the one hand the women are committed to working on a long-term or permanent basis. On the other hand, however, they realize that the manner in which they are required to work makes this commitment harder, if not impossible, to achieve. The women are conscious that any decision to change the labour process rests with administration. Because administration directly benefits from using the domestic labour process, it is not seen by the women as likely to willingly change it. The only viable alternative is to form a union. In this way unionization is seen as a tool by which the women can bring about change in the labour process and subsequently aid them

in achieveing their long-term commitment to working.

Unionization in nursing homes, such as the one on which the present research is based, can have both positive and negative results. On the positive side unionization can bring many positive changes in wages and benefits. It can also result in improved work conditions by helping to bring about changes in the labour process and the division of labour. Unionization also fosters consciousness among workers. This can be seen within the present research in the context of changes in attitudes among the employees.

Unionization in nursing homes may, over the long-term, have negative results for domestic labourers. While no more automatic than the positive results, unionization may be a double-edged sword. The introduction of a complex division of labour with specific job classifications may eliminate one of the major reasons for employing domestic labourers -- precisely the ability to use women for a wide variety of jobs. Due to a lack of power or voice in the decision making process prior to unionization, the employees did what was expected of them. After unionization, with the women unwilling to do the wide variety of tasks and administration no longer able to force them, the appeal of domestic labour to the employer is reduced. The reduced appeal of domestic labour is aided by the increased appeal of the work to other groups. While the groups to whom the work now appeals have much in common with domestic labourers, a significant difference is that they also

have formally recognized skills. Prior to unionization the nursing home administration employed unskilled labour; after unionization, however, new employees are required to have formal training. This, we argue, is precisely because of the increased wages and benefits, as well as, the changes in the division of labour.

The purpose of this thesis is to develop an understanding of why a group of nursing home employees unionized and also to assess the changes which have resulted from unionization.

Chapter Outline

Chapter two consists of a description of the methodology I employed to understand exactly what the reasons were for unionizing. This thesis documents the experiences of the women employed in the nursing home, prior to, during and after unionization, through in-depth, open-ended interviews.

The third chapter provides a detailed examination of the labour process prior to unionization. In effect it provides an in-depth background of the women's work experiences during this period. Among other things it examines why the women work in the nursing home; the qualifications and training required; the hiring process; the content of the work and the relationship between the women and the employer.

Moving to unionization, Chapter Four begins with a look

at the reasons offered by the women which they claim prevented them from unionizing earlier. From this the Chapter moves on to an examination of an incident which pushed the women to unionize. The chapter then goes on to look at the approach taken both to find and join a union. The chapter concludes with an examination of the issues and problems with which the women wanted the union to deal.

Chapter Five re-examines the labour process after unionization. Here we are able both to see the changes and assess the effectiveness of unionization in bringing solutions to the women's workplace problems. In chapter six I offer my conclusions as well as suggestions for further research.

Chapter Two

Methodology

Methodology is basically the approach taken to understand or explain an event or phenomenon. The present study uses the case study method. A case study is particularly useful for examining unionization in a workplace. By focussing on the event we are at the same time able to

cast light on the wider complexities of structural and individual/group determination of action.
(White, 1988:22)

The case study method offers several advantages to researchers. A major advantage is flexibility. Throughout the research, as new information becomes available, the researcher is able to reformulate and redirect the line of questioning. This was particularly important in the present study. Early in the research the idea of unionizing in order to bring about changes in the labour process began to emerge. Because I was using the case study method I was able to pursue this theme in great detail.

The case study method also allows the collection of large volumes of data which at first may appear to have no connection or bearing on the general topic being researched,

but which upon closer analysis may shed light on previously unconsidered factors.

The case study also facilitates the understanding of the subject from the perspective of the insider. In this way the researcher is not simply pursuing what he or she regards as important but in fact what is important to the participants. In the present research I was attempting to uncover and share the meaning(s) the women attached to both the work and the need to unionize. Because I was working directly with the people involved in the "event" I was able to probe their thoughts in order to ferret out their meanings.

There are drawbacks to the case study method. One drawback is the inability to generalize the findings. The researcher must be content to restrict findings to the specific group studied.

Another weakness is the lack of comparability. This problem is intensified by the flexibility of the case study method. Different studies are likely to have been undertaken with significant differences in approach. In simple terms it is highly unlikely that two or more researchers ask exactly the same questions. Because of these differences it is difficult, if not impossible, to compare studies.

Selection of Research Site

Journey's End Nursing Home is located at Prosperity

Point, Nova Scotia. Both the name of the nursing home and the community in which it is located have been fictionalized for the purpose of maintaining confidentiality. This nursing home was chosen for specific reasons.

A central reason for choosing this facility was my familiarity with it. As a former resident of this area I had the good fortune of being acquainted with several employees of the nursing home. I felt that these acquaintances would provide an excellent starting point for the research. In addition I hoped that these women would be able to help me contact other employees.

Through these acquaintances in February, 1989, I arranged a meeting with some members of the union executive. The purpose of this meeting was twofold. Firstly, I was seeking their cooperation in helping me make this research possible. Secondly, I wanted to get a sense how some of these women felt about the idea of taking part in a research project. If they had been totally opposed then it would have made little sense to pursue it further. At this meeting I stressed the fact that what I was proposing was at best tentative. The women were receptive to the idea and indicated that they would be willing to help in any way they could. My impression was that these women wanted to tell their story but had not previously had the opportunity to do so.

Journey's End Nursing Home seemed like an "ideal" site to study why a group of nursing home employees joined a union.

What made this site "ideal" was that the majority of the women employed there at the time this research was carried out were original members of the union. In other words they knew what the work conditions had been like prior to joining the union. Because of this it would be possible to compare the labour process prior to and after unionization.

In addition to the previous point, the fact that unionization had taken place in the recent past meant that there was a good possibility that events connected with this would still be relatively clear. The women at the nursing home unionized in 1987 and the research for this project was done in the summer of 1989.

Another reason for choosing this site has to do with the size of the workforce and the amount of time available in which to carry out the research. The total number of unionized employees, including both full and part-time, was thirty-five. Given that I had approximately three months to carry out the research it seemed reasonable enough to think that I could get an adequate sample.

The final reason for choosing Journey's End Nursing Home as the research site had to do with language. English is the first language of the majority of residents at Prosperity Point. Among the women interviewed all spoke only English. In a larger community language might have been a problem. Additionally because I had lived in this area for a considerable period of time I was familiar with many of the

colloquial expressions used in common conversation. The meaning attached to a colloquial expression often, to a large degree, depends on the context in which it is used. If a researcher is unable to identify these differences it is easy to attach the wrong meaning to a statement.

Description of Methods

Research instruments chosen for the purpose of this research project include semi-structured interviews and secondary sources (e.g. the collective agreement).

Semi-structured Interviews

The semi-structured interview is a valuable research tool for getting at and following up on themes which might be missed by using a more structured interview. The researcher, while setting the general direction of the interview, allows the respondent the opportunity to respond in his or her own manner. In fact the interviews for this project bore more resemblance to casual conversation than more structured interviews.

Interview Guide

The interview guide, for this research, was designed to

allow for the collection of a broad range of data. The questions asked ranged from broadly descriptive to those focusing on specific issues.

The guide was chronologically organized, with the initial questions focusing on the women's backgrounds and personal histories. Questions here ranged from marital status to previous paid employment experience.

The second section of the guide was designed to uncover the reasons why the women accepted employment in the nursing home. In this section questions were also asked pertaining to training and qualifications needed to work in the nursing home.

Extending directly out of the previous section the women were asked about the work they did at the nursing home. Probing questions were continuously used throughout the interviews to both follow up and clarify points made by the women. It was, however, on the topic of work in the nursing home that I began to use it on a constant basis. The probing question was a invaluable aid in getting beyond the surface and allowing the women to open up about not only the details of the work but also their experiences of doing the work.

The next section of the guide focused on unionization. Here the women were asked questions not only about why they joined a union but also about why they had not done so earlier. Questions were asked pertaining to the women's participation in the union. For example the women were asked

whether or not they held an elected or appointed position in the union local and what, if any, problems they had in attending union meetings. They were also asked about whether or not they still needed a union.

The final section of the interview guide contained questions about how unionization changed the workplace. In many cases this resulted in the women repeating points they had made earlier in the interviews. Often times when the women were originally asked about the work at the nursing home their replies had been comparisons between prior to and after unionization. Similarly in answering questions in this section women also brought up examples from the past to indicate changes which have come about through unionization.

For a detailed view of the questions asked in the interview guide see Appendix I (see page 118).

Sample Description and Technique

At the time the research for this project was undertaken there were thirty-five unionized employees all of whom were female at Journey's End Nursing Home. Through contacts at the nursing home, I was able to find out that twenty five of the women had been employed before unionization. Because I wanted to learn about why they unionized and what, if at any, changes have taken place in the labour process as a result of unionization, I felt that it would be best to concentrate on

interviewing this group. However during the course of the research, as the opportunity to interview "newer" employees came, I did so.

In total eighteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with women employed at the nursing home. Fifteen of the interviews were with members of the pre-union group. The selection of interviews was based on a snowball sample. Each person I interviewed was asked for the names of co-workers they thought might consent to an interview. By use of this technique I was able to interview a good mix of employees. The women interviewed represent all the major classifications of employees, including nurse's aides, cooks, dietary aides, housekeepers and laundry workers.

In addition to interviewing employees of the nursing home I also conducted interviews with three other individuals. These individuals included the business agent responsible for all locals of the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway, Transport and General Workers in the Prosperity Point area. Also interviewed were two state officials, the Director of Social Services for the Town of Prosperity Point and a Field Coordinator from the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services. The main purpose of these interviews was to collect information which the employees of the nursing home lacked. As I interviewed the women it became apparent that there were areas in which they possessed little or no knowledge. One such area was the state. The women were largely unaware of

the important role the state plays in the operation of nursing homes in Nova Scotia.

Interview Descriptions

The fact that many of the women were employed on shift work proved to be a problem not only for conducting the interviews but also for setting up appointments. On more than one occasion while attempting to set up an appointment I accidentally woke women from their sleep. Because of the shift work the times during which interviews were conducted ranged from early in the morning to late in the evening.

All but one of the interviews with the women were conducted in their homes. The one which wasn't was conducted at my residence because the respondent felt this was most convenient. The interviews were all conducted at the convenience of the respondents.

Prior to conducting an interview respondents were assured that anything they said would be kept in strict confidence. All respondents were informed of the general purpose of the research. I also requested that they sign an interview consent form.

The other interviews were also conducted at the convenience of the respondents. All three of these interviews took place at the respondent's place of work.

Interviews generally lasted between one and two hours.

All interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to learn why a group of female nursing home employees unionized and what, if any, effect unionization had on the labour process. The intention was to construct as accurately as possible an understanding of the labour process both prior to and after unionization so as to allow us to see changes which may have taken place.

In retrospect the collection of data was at times frustrating but in the end an extremely rewarding experience. The quotes used in this thesis represent typical responses. What I mean by typical is that the majority of respondents offered similar responses. Interviews were repeatedly reviewed in search of patterns of repeated issues.

Chapter Three

The Labour Process Prior to Unionization

Introduction

If you're looking for hard work and a hard job that's the place to go.

Its like looking after your own family, you're with them eight hours a day. You get to know them and their moods. What they like and what they don't like.

These statements display the essence of how the women understand work in the nursing home. It is hard work and it is like housework.

This chapter is intended to do two things. First, it provides a broad view of what working in the nursing home was like prior to unionization. Without a sense of what it was like it is impossible to understand why they unionized. The second purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the link between nursing home labour and domestic labour. Within the nursing home the two forms of labour are intimately connected. We are suggesting that a variation of the domestic labour process existed in the nursing home prior to unionization.

We are also suggesting that these women are employed precisely because of their experiences as domestic labourers.

Sociologists have argued that women's paid work experience is both linked to and often similar to women's domestic experience. (Gannage' 1986; White 1988) Charlene Gannage' claims,

women's work experience is dynamically intertwined with women's family experience. While women are sewing garments at work, their thoughts never leave their family responsibilities. (1986:18)

Jerry White in a study on hospital workers has this to offer.

Many interviewees comment that labour market work is often similar in form to work at home. Strictly speaking this is not true. The two types of work are more a mirror image than an absolute likeness. There are similarities between the household and labour force but the rewards and context for the labour differ. The social context and reward system outside the home are, for many, a reasonable trade-off for the illusory freedom of schedule the housewife appears to have. (1988:83)

Both of these passages are important to the present study.

The women at Journey's End Nursing Home often comment that they think about their children when working. However, unlike Gannage's interviewees, these women do not claim to do so on a constant basis.

Like honestly, sometimes you're too busy. Mostly I think of the kids when me and **** are working the same shift. Like if we are both on backshift then the kids are home alone. Usually we are on opposite shifts so that's not too bad. (Nurse's aide)

As with White's hospital workers, the nursing home employees speak of similarities between paid work and home work. However they do more than just talk about it. They

describe their paid work in terms of domestic work. They rely upon past and present domestic experience. Essentially they use housework and childcare as a yardstick against which paid work experience is measured. This is an important and complex point. These women use domestic experience to determine what is and is not nursing.

I want to do total nursing care. I don't want any house-cleaning, none whatsoever. I don't want to iron. I don't want to sweep a floor. I don't want to empty the garbage. I have enough housekeeping at home. (Nurse's aide)

For the women any tasks associated with the housework aspect of domestic labour are viewed as non-nursing work. Not surprisingly, the women do not think of work in the nursing home in terms of a 'labour process'. They see it in 'black and white'. Using their domestic experience, particular tasks are classified as either housework or nursing. Throughout the interviews the women constantly refer to work in the pre-unionization period as domestic labour.

The only things different about working at home and working in the nursing home were the location and getting paid. Other than that it was the same experience... I don't know exactly how to put it but they were the same. One of the first things that struck me about the nursing home was the shortage of supplies. At home I was used to that, really I guess that was one of the reasons I went to work, so that I could get more things at home. But I never expected that in the nursing home. I figured there would be lots of material to work with there. You know I thought going to work would be a change from what I was always used to, I'd be out of the house doing different things. Sure I was out of the house but I was doing the something --plain old housework. (Nurse's aide)

The importance of this passage is that it indicates just how closely the women identified the work in the nursing home with domestic labour. They were not simply doing similar tasks to those they did or had done in the domestic sphere but in their "eyes" were doing the same work in the nursing home.

Oakley claims that "fragmentation was an expected and accepted quality of housework". She defined fragmentation as,

the experience of work subdivided into a series of unconnected tasks not requiring the worker's full attention (1974:82).

Fragmentation was vital to getting the work done in the nursing home.

Well after lunch is done I would take a few residents to the bathroom. One at a time and take them back to their room. Then I would give the toilet a little scrub. On my way up the hall I'd peak in the rooms. Sometimes there will be dirty clothes or linen that was missed. I'll throw that in the laundry bag. Any empty cups or glasses I'll take and put on the dish cart. If there are any tissues laying around or what have you I put that in the garbage. When I get up front I check and make sure the residents are dry. Any newspapers and magazines laying around you straighten them up. Sometimes shoes and hats are on the floor instead of the shelf, I put them where they belong. Then you go off and check the others. (Nurse's aide)

This passage covers approximately a half hour period. It demonstrates the less than full attention or fragmentary nature of the work. Individually many of the tasks may be relatively small but nonetheless all were part of the work that had to be done. Collectively they amount to a very heavy workload.

According to Jerry White, a major difference between

domestic and paid labour experience is the manner or approach in which the work is done.

Workers in the home are always trying to "get it all done" so they can be flexible for the unexpected. It's a constant juggling act where other family member's schedules impose on the housewife's own supposed free reign.

(White, 1988:141)

The "get it all done approach" was precisely the manner in which the women worked at the nursing home. This accounts for why the women speak of the work in terms of the all-out hectic pace. The women resented having to work in this manner and saw it as an issue with which a union could deal.

The following passages illustrate the "get it all done" approach. They also illustrate some of the problems the women associated with it.

I've known a lot of women who work at home the same way we worked up there, non stop, go go go. God help you if you ever took a break. You always got to be on top of it because you don't know what might happen next. You think your caught up so you sit down to have a cup of tea and bingo someone hollers your name. You don't sit and drink your tea while it is hot. No, you got to get on your feet and go do it. Maybe I 'd do that at home but why should I have to do it up there. When you're looking after twenty some odd people it wears you out. Even at home sometimes I could tell them to wait. But up at the home you couldn't do that. If a resident called you or you seen they needed something, you were expected to hop to it. If you didn't you answered to Mr.*****.

(Nurse's aide)

Only excuse that was ever accepted for not getting all the work done was if residents were sick. Like once in a while they'd all have diarrhea. You'd be out straight changing them and so you would fall behind on other things. But when that passed you had to catch up quick. On those kind of days you wouldn't even get a break. Once you entered that

home you were there till your shift ended. It was pitiful, everybody has got to have breaks.
(Nurse's aide)

These passages are examples of many which describe the "get it all done" approach which was used in the nursing home.

In order to keep the women working in such a manner, the owner-administrator used what Edwards (1979) called simple control.

You did what you were told to do. You know, he would fire a girl right on the spot. The girls were supposed to be thankful he let them work.
(Housekeeper)

The owner-administrator held all power and authority. Fear was the prime motivator used to ensure that the work was done. An indication of the power derived from the women's fear of the owner-administrator is that it worked regardless of whether or not he was actually present in the nursing home.

As far the work went the girls regarded him as always present. Rarely if ever was he there on an evening or backshift. But that didn't mean the girls slackened off, no sir, the work got done just as though he was there. You know even on a backshift when the residents were all in bed and we were all alone there we'd only whisper to one another out of fear that he would somehow hear us. Like most of the girls I figured the walls up there had eyes and ears. Sure as hell if we skipped work he would have found out and then we'd of had to answer for it. (Nurse's aide)

The owner-administrator was seen, by the women, as growing wealthy off their labour.

You couldn't even enjoy a cup of tea in peace. At breaktime he would sit down. Oh how I dreaded that. He'd be shooting off about somethin. His new car or his new house, worst of all vacation. He would

gag a maggot. The big fat slob he got nerve. Us girls doin the work, him headin south. Do you know what I do for mine? Clean the house. Not him. He went to Florida with our money. That burns me.
(Cook)

It was a case of when he said 'jump', they said 'how high'. In the words of one woman " he was a pure bastard".

The owner-administrator operated the nursing home on a simple premise: employ the cheapest source of labour and extract the maximum amount of labour. Women with domestic exuperience were the source of that labour.

A nursing home, because of the nature of the work, requires employees with servicing skills. There is a widely held belief that this type of work is women's work (White 1988). Women seeking employment with only these qualities and skills are a cheap source of labour.

Jerry White points out that,

one of the reasons women accept service work in the hospitals is that measure of satisfaction one gains from doing a good job and being productive in the health process (1988:74).

This is also the case for the women at the nursing home. They want to be nurses and nurse people. However hospital nursing is out of reach. It requires more than "feminine" qualities and skills. Hospitals demand that nursing staff have a certain minimum of formal education. There are no minimum training requirements for employees of nursing homes in Nova Scotia. Because the women at Journey's End Nursing Home want to be nurses but lack the formal training needed to go

elsewhere, they are in a vulnerable position. They are easily exploited by people such as the owner-administrator of this home.

The Employees

The owner-administrator of Journey's End Nursing Home mainly employs women. Presently there are thirty-five unionized employees, all of whom are women. Women are employed because it is assumed they have the experience needed to do the work. It is also assumed that the work is properly that of women.

The women interviewed only recall three men ever being employed. They remember that these men were treated differently. This did not surprise them.

He looks down on women. He figures women should be home looking after the house. To him women are only good for two things, making babies and housework. Who does he think does the work in the nursing home? (Nurse's aide)

The following statement was made in reference to a man who was employed as a nurses' aide.

Him, he had it good. But he was a man. Worked Monday to Friday all dayshift. Only had to work with male residents. He didn't have domestic work. No mopping floors for him. (Nurse's aide)

One of the women recalls, half jokingly, asking the owner-administrator if the man had to mop floors.

When I asked that I was told he is a man and men do not mop floors. (Nurse's aide)

These statements demonstrate the administrator's belief that nursing home work is properly women's work.

The owner-administrator did not employ just any women. An examination of the backgrounds of the women interviewed reveals a general pattern. The vast majority are in their early to late thirties and have been married between ten to twenty years. All but one of the women have children. Fifteen out of seventeen of the women with children did not enter the workforce until the eldest child was between ten to twelve years of age. For most the job was their first paid employment. Most of the women were married between the ages of sixteen and eighteen. Most have little or no high school education. Only one of eighteen interviewed has completed high school.

Reasons Why the Women Want to Work

The women interviewed stated that the job they applied for appealed to them.

I always liked a nursing career.
I always liked to work around sick people and the elderly. I wouldn't have wanted any of the other jobs up there. I could never handle being in the laundry all day. That would drive me insane. You know it would be the same thing with cooking or any of the other jobs. I never liked doing those things at home. There is no way I would ever want to do those things eight hours a day.
(Nurse's aide)

When I heard about the job in the laundry, I figured that was the job for me. The others think I'm crazy. Down in the basement all day doing laundry. But that suits me, I'm mostly by myself, so I got

nobody bothering me. I wouldn't take a nurse's aides job if they offered me all the tea in China. That has got to be the most sickening job there is. They are up to their elbows in piss and shit all day long. I had enough of that when my kids were little. They were my own flesh and blood, and it used to turn my stomach when I had to change them. So I got to tell you this, I was working up the home I guess about a month. One morning I went into work and they were short an aide, for some reason one was going to be late. Well when I got there Mr.***** told me to go help the other aide. I was scared to death, the thought of having to face the residents. Anyway I asked the aide what could I do. She said you know how to change a diaper. Then she took me to this one resident's room, well god almighty the smell was enough to kill a horse. We went in the room, the aide pulled back the sheets, that resident was covered in shit. I got sick to my stomach, it was so repulsive. I made a mad dash for the bathroom where I threw up everything in my stomach. I went back in but I was of little help to the aide. I hope I never have to do that again. Different times since then, I have had to scrub floors or help in the kitchen. But if it's up to me I'll stay in laundry, I like that.

(Laundry worker)

These are typical responses. They indicate that different jobs appeal to different people. These passages also demonstrate that there is a connection between the type of tasks a woman enjoyed in the domestic sphere and the type of job she sought at the nursing home. Those who preferred the childcare side of domestic labour seem to be attracted to nurse's aides jobs.

The women have also chosen to take paid employment for monetary reasons. Not all of the women need the money for the same reason. Therefore we have divided them into three groups.

The first group has only two members. They are single

and required the income to survive. For these women employment at the nursing home was their sole source of income.

There are six women in the second group, all of whom are married. They initially sought employment for only a short period. These women wanted employment because of an economic crisis at home. The crisis was the result of lost income due to the layoff of the husband. Barrett (1980) claims that many women, when confronted with this situation, take similar action.

The following statements were offered by women in this situation.

At that time I was wanting work because my husband
**** was laid off from his job.
(Nurse's aide)

**** was off work. We had money problems. Things got
hard and everything. So I said I'm going to work.
(Laundry worker)

We had just bought a new car. Out of the blue ****
got laid off, no warning nothing. **** made good
money, I didn't need to work. But you know, lets
just say he made it and we spent it. (Nurse's aide)

The women in this group all indicate that prior to the crisis they had no interest in paid employment.

One might expect that the women in this situation would give up paid work when the crisis ended. However none of these women have quit. The women offered reasons why they did not quit.

After **** got back to work I thought about it.
We felt I should keep working a while longer. We
could put a nest egg away in case he gets laid off

again. (Nurse's aide)

We were that far in the hole, I had to work a year just for us to catch up. You know that was the first time in eighteen years of working that **** was laid off. We keep thinking, 'what if'. We don't want to go through that experience again. I never knew what a bill collector was before then. When his unemployment came in, they would be at the front door. It is embarrassing. It was ten dollars for this guy and five dollars for that fellow. We were scared. You always hear people saying don't let them scare you. But when they are at your door threatening to take your things it's a different story. (Nurse's aide)

These statements indicate that the crises had a profound effect on those involved -- so much so that it has altered their views on working. Now they live with the 'what if'.

There are ten women in the third group. All of their married life can be described as living from crisis to crisis. The women in this group claim to have been interested in working long before they actually got employment. They were held back from achieving this goal due to childcare responsibilities. Most of the women in this group feel it is a mother's responsibility to look after children. Luxton and Rosenberg (1986) claim that this is a widely accepted myth. Two of the women cited inadequate childcare facilities as a problem.

We work three shifts around in the nursing home. In this area subsidized daycare is only available in the daytime. If I had to pay a sitter it wouldn't be worthwhile. What you earned you would have to pay out. (Nurse's aide)

The same woman offered the following statement. It reveals aspects of the job that cause childcare problems.

You see when you first start in the nursing home you're on part-time. It's like that for everybody. You could go a few months and only get a couple of shifts a week. All of a sudden you're working everyday. But you never know from one day to the next what you're working. You think you're going to be off and they call at the last minute for you to go to work. You're going to be in trouble if you got to make childcare arrangements on that kind of schedule. (Nurse's aide)

Undoubtably this is why the owner-administrator does not generally hire women with small children.

The economic crisis these women face is not a result of a spouse suddenly getting laid off. They have lived with economic crises all of their married life. Their husbands simply do not earn enough income to keep up with the cost of living. For most of these women their stories are similar. They talk of not being able to make ends meet on one income. Out of necessity they must become what Ferguson and Folbre (1981) call two-income families.

He is a good worker but well, he doesn't make that much money. We get by but that is all. The last couple of years it's been getting real hard. Well I mean today you don't throw any pair of pants on a kid. You don't get ten dollar shoes or a ten dollar pair of pants. It's not like when we were growing up. The kids won't wear them. The kids at school are wearing designer jeans and mine want them too. Teenagers don't wear clothes out, they grow out of them. (Nurse's aide)

With only one income you can't get things done. Like you have to wait. Necessities become luxuries. Before I went to work the washer gave up the bucket. It was beyond fixing. But we couldn't afford a new one. So I did without, sometimes I would wash them by hand. Othertimes if my husband were home he would take me to my mothers so I could do the wash. On low income life is one vicious circle. (Housekeeper)

You're running on a really tight budget, you know.

Always checking prices, scrimping here and there. You go for groceries, you see things that you couldn't get even if you wanted them. Every penny is spoken for on payday. It hurts, its hard. You can't do what you want around the house. You do patching on top of patching. (Cook)

These statements are examples of what we call " life on the edge". These women are members of the working poor. They did not seek paid employment for 'pin money'. Material need was a major reason for taking paid employment. The following statements describe what life is like with two pay cheques.

Well you're making it. We keep up. You might have a little bit extra left when the bills are paid. (Laundry worker)

I got a new chesterfield and chair for the livingroom and new carpets in. We didn't have to put the carpet down ourselves. I had someone from the company come and put them in. New floor covering for the kitchen and I got the kitchen all fixed up. Next I want to get the bathroom remodeled. (Nurse's aide)

From this we can see that the money these women earn is a vital part of the families' total income.

Training

According to Sir William Osler,

...nursing as a practice originated in the dim past where some mother among the cave dwellers cooled the forehead of her sick child with water from the brook...(Osler quoted in Dolan,1968,p.1)

Regardless of whether or not this statement is factual, the significance is that it places the origin of nursing within a household. The statement also indicates that nursing is a

woman's responsibility.

The type of nursing practiced can best be understood by examining hospital nursing in the past rather than the present.

...Nursing proper means, besides giving the medicines and stimulants prescribed, or applying the surgical dressing and other remedies ordered:-
1. The providing proper use of, fresh air, especially at night, that is ventilation, of warmth and coolness. 2. The securing of the health of the sickroom or ward, which includes light, cleanliness of floors and walls, of bed, bedding and utensils. 3. Personal cleanliness of patient and nurse, quiet, variety and cheerfulness. 4. The administering and sometimes preparation of diet (food and drink). (Nightingale quoted in Gammarikow, 1978, pp. 105-106)

These are the basic duties of the nurses' aides at Journeys End Nursing Home. This is a far cry from what is commonly considered to be nursing. Nursing today is largely associated with the hi-tech engineering model of health care (Torrance, 1987). The description given by Nightingale is more likely to be associated with housework.

The women at the nursing home have training. The training they have differs from what is generally associated with nursing. Nurses' training is generally thought of as a two or three year hospital-based program or a university program. The employees of Journeys End Nursing Home have, for the most part, learned their skills at home. Through the roles of wife and mother they have developed the skills needed to work in the nursing home. Skills such as caring, nurturing, counselling, supervision, food preparation,

housework, and childcare are all vital for working in the nursing home. At home these women have trained to become human service workers.

These women have more than domestic experience. They have completed a course. The course the women have taken is called, Care in the Home. This is a general knowledge course. It is simply meant to provide general information to those responsible for health care in private homes. The course has been put together by the Canadian Red Cross Society. At Prosperity Point, it is offered by the Citizen's Service League. Instructors for the course are registered nurses working as volunteers.

The course is designed,

... for members of the family who must take personal responsibility for health in the home... It is not designed to meet the needs of individuals who are preparing for employment in either professional or practical nursing. (Canadian Red Cross Society, 1971, p.iii)

In Nova Scotia there are no guidelines regarding what is or is not sufficient training for employment in nursing homes. Other than employing one registered nurse for a period of eight hours per day, nursing homes can employ anyone. It is commonly understood that the Care in the Home course qualifies a person for this work.

It is not surprising that the majority of people who take this course are women. The course is designed to go hand in hand with domestic experience. Successful completion of this

course requires attending ten, two hour classroom sessions, undergoing an examination and forty hours of practical training in a nursing home. This point is vitally important. It is here that a woman gets the first taste of nursing home work. Also it provides the employer with the opportunity to see if a woman is suited for the work. The following is a description of the forty hours training.

Forty hour girls get three dayshifts plus an evening and a backshift. This is free labour. Whichever aides are on, you follow them around. They show you the routine and introduce you to the residents. Far as the work goes you get the shit jobs. You mop the floors, empty garbage cans, clean the washrooms. You get a lot of the junior girls' work. Oh, they show you how to change a resident. Basically you're a gopher. All he ever asks is how is the forty hour girl making out. (Nurse's aide)

We must be careful not to underestimate the significance of this course, both for those who take it and for owner-administrators of nursing homes such as Journey's End. For those who complete the Care in the Home course there is a graduation ceremony, at which they are given certificates. One of the woman interviewed had the following to say about graduation.

It took me by surprise. I thought we would get our certificates and have a cup of tea. Some of them were rigged out in full nurses' regalia. They had the cape, the hat, shoes, the whole works. They were everything I ever pictured Florence Nightingale to be. They brought their families with them, husband, kids, mom and dad, everyone they knew. People were running around taking pictures. I remember sitting there laughing to myself, what a sight. But you know when I look back on it now I realise that was a big occasion for them. Probably the first time in their life they had graduated from anything. They were proud. It was a dream

come true. They were somebody, they were a nurses' aide.
(Nurse's aide)

This statement provides many valuable insights. Despite the fact that this course is not meant to train nurses' aides, for many that is viewed both as the purpose and result. This is understandable given the background of the women, as well as the fact that nursing homes employ people with this course as nurses' aides. From this statement we can see that when these women go to work in a nursing home it is not only as wives or mothers but as a nurses' aide. Nursing homes provide some of these women with the opportunity to live a "dream". Living the dream at Journey's End required a major trade-off. The women are required to do more than nursing; they must be willing to do general domestic labour. Basically the women were forced to adhere to the owner-administrator's concept of what was a nurses' aide -- someone who does whatever task they were given.

Getting A Job

It may appear as though anyone who wanted to work could get a job at the nursing home. According to Vladeck,

nurses' aides are hired literally off the street. (1980, p.20)

This is not how it was done at Journeys End Nursing Home. The owner-administrator used a simple but effective technique.

He allowed employees to suggest people they knew who might have been interested.

Every woman interviewed was recruited by this method.

My cousin was working there. She used to tell me about the work. She told me that anyone with experience in housework and childcare could handle it. I had been doing that all my life. From talking with her I figured by the time I got hired I knew as much about the place as those who worked there. (Nurse's aide)

This statement offers valuable insights. Before the women ever set foot in the nursing home they knew about the work. They knew what to expect as well as what would be expected from them. Who better than the women doing the work to know if someone was right for the job. Not only were the women recruiting for the employer but they also provided an informal orientation program for potential employees.

In some cases the owner-administrator derived an added benefit from this method of recruitment. Some employees hired in this manner were likely to stay at the work longer.

I was going to quit. I was there about a week I guess. It was the work itself. What it involved and everything. I couldn't handle it. But I stuck it out for my cousin. She had put the word in for me. (Laundry worker)

The implication here is that quitting might have damaged the cousin's relationship with the employer.

While loyalty to a relative or friend may have kept some women from quitting, high turnover of employees was common. Many quit when they found out firsthand what the job involved.

Oh gosh yes, some girls wouldn't last a week. You could bet almost every two to three weeks there would be a girl or two quit. If one quit it seemed like it was automatic there was two more going right behind her. (Nurse's aide)

Others left because of external problems. One of the women worked at the nursing home for a while, then quit, but has since returned. When discussing why she quit offers the following.

The boys were twelve and seven when I first went to the home. The seven year old near went nuts and my husband too. He would cry and cry, it was so hard to go, then he started to do poorly in school. You know, like, it was his way of getting to me. Then my husband, he started to complain. [Of] course he was opposed to my working all along. You know like what was his friends going to think, him with his wife out working. But mostly I think it was his parents, they would say things like, the other boys wives don't work. It really hurts him. This time though I explained it to my son and he's okay now.
(Nurse's aide)

This passage offers several insights which may place pressure on married women working. We see that childrens' problems may be seen as a result of the woman going outside the home to work. The assumption being that had she stayed home the child would not have done badly in school. We also see a child of seven who was well aware of which parent should be at home. Finally we see pressure from the extended family. All of these are external pressures arising outside the workplace, which directly hindered this woman's ability to work.

Support Staff

Employees in this category include domestics, laundry, dietary aides and cooks. When women in these jobs were questioned about training they laughed. They take it for granted that everyone knows where they learned how to do this work.

I been doin wash all my life. Don't need no training to do it. The only difference between washing here and home is the amount. Up there you do it everyday, day in and day out. (Laundry worker)

A domestic offered the following.

House cleaning is something I've done all my life. As far back as I can remember I have been doing housework and I'll be sixty-four this year. So I figure I got the qualifications to do housework. The trick is to know how to do it. You pace yourself. If you go too fast you do more work. Before I got this job I looked after the residents. There you just put your head down and run. But in this job you learn to look busy. Long as you look busy you're left alone. With the aides that is much harder to do. They got bells ringing and residents hollering all the time for something. A lot of times I am expected to help them. But honestly if it is at all possible I try and avoid it by looking busy. The work those girls have to do with all the running, pulling and lifting is deadly. (Housekeeper)

Full-time - Part-time

The nursing home employs both full and part-time employees. All employees start on a part-time basis. The

total number of staff fluctuates. When the research for the present study was conducted there were thirty-five non-management employees.

The maximum number of full-time employees at any given time is sixteen. This is approximately forty-five percent of the workforce. The full-time group is comprised of nine nurses aides, two domestics, two cooks, one dietary aide, one laundry worker and an activity person. Full-time nurses aides worked four on, two off, rotating between day, evening and backshift. All other full-time employees worked dayshift, Monday to Friday.

Part-time was the roughest period for most employees. They were given any shifts not covered by the full-time people. If a full-time employee couldn't make a regularly scheduled shift a part-time employee would be called into work. In cases such as this part-time employees were often called out to work with very little advance notice and occasionally with a shift already in progress. In cases where employees failed to show for a scheduled shift, employees from the previous shift were required to stay, until another worker could be found. Part-time employees were given shifts at the owner's discretion. Part-time employees were also used as relief filling in during summer vacations.

When I started I worked twenty days with only one day off. Got so I was like a chicken with my head cut off. I'd be scheduled for maybe two shifts on and four off. Everyone of them days off I'd get called to work. But mind you, never the same shift. Be a backshift then an evening, on and on. You'd

never say no or you might wait a month for the next shift. No you, didn't ask questions. (Nurse's aide)

Along with being afraid to question the owner-administrator, in the beginning many of the women actually wanted as much work as they could get.

That's what I went there for -- work. We needed the money. You can only work everyday for a little while then it catches up. At first you figure what the hell how hard can old people be to look after. You'd be surprised. After a couple of weeks you realise it ain't no picnic. (Nurse's aide)

The women regarded working in this way as a test.

I think it was a test to see what you were made of. If you could work fifteen or twenty shifts straight he figured you had what it took. (Nurse's aide)

The advantage of being full-time was knowing in advance when they were working. One other advantage was working most of the time with the same person. There were always two aides per shift in the nursing section and full-time worked with full-time. The only time this would change was during vacations or if one was off sick.

The Work

What emerges from the interviews is a picture of an owner-administrator who knew the backgrounds of the women. He was aware of their limited training and education. We see the image of a person who used this knowledge to his advantage.

We were supposed to be thankful for being allowed to do this work. He made us feel guilty when we picked up our pay. The old goat would chew you out in front of staff, residents or visitors just to remind you who the boss was. Five minutes later he would ask for a smoke. There was no telling when he would blow and there still isn't. (Nurse's aide)

The situation made for very uncomfortable work relations. He was the boss and they were his "girls". In other words the owner-administrator was in a position of power and used this power to his advantage.

Mostly all he ever called us was his girls. My girls this and my girls that. We picked that up from him. We use it all the time to refer to other girls. The only time he didn't call you 'girl' was if he wanted something. We had to call him Mr.****, but we are just his girls. (Housekeeper)

The first priority of the owner-administrator was to make a profit. This was accomplished at the expense of both the employees and the residents. Work in the nursing home was labour intensive. There was no technical and very little mechanical equipment. The only items which might be thought of as mechanical were wheelchairs. All lifting had to be done by hand. The number of employees per shift was the absolute minimum two nurses aides for twenty-three elderly residents, most of whom required total personal care. In the residential section there was one nurses aide for twenty residents. These residents were mobile and required minimal assistance. Constant shortages of supplies was the norm rather than the exception.

All the total care residents wore diapers. First we used cloth but the laundry couldn't keep up. So we switched to pampers. So many per shift. We were

always out of them. What were we to do, tell them to stop shitting. The girls used to have to tear flannel sheets for diapers. (nurse's aide)

The women describe working under these conditions as "both physically and mentally demanding". This statement is also an example of a phenomenon known as infantilization. This involves the treatment of nursing home residents as infants. The use of infantilization at Journey's End can be seen as taking advantage of the women's domestic labour experience. The constant shortage of supplies is also characteristic of the situation many women face when doing domestic labour. Precisely they are constantly faced with having to make do and/or improvise. Making diapers from sheets is an example of improvisation.

Nurses aides were not only responsible for resident care. In fact it is surprising that they were not responsible for all the work. Had it been physically possible for them to do the support work such as laundry and cooking, they would likely have been made to do it.

Taber's Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary defines nurses' aide as,

an individual who assists nurses by doing the patient-care procedures that do not require special technical training, such as feeding and bathing patients and by taking temperatures, pulse and respiration.

(1985:1143)

If this is the standard definition of nurses' aide, then the use of it at Journeys End Nursing Home was a misnomer.

The nurses' aides had no job description. Basically they were responsible for any work that support staff did not get done. The following list of duties has been compiled from the interviews. Nurses' aides were responsible for all personal care. Some of the tasks this involved included changing, bed and tub baths, dressing, feeding, shaving, combing hair, trimming nails and giving them medication. Other work included changing the beds, ironing, mending clothes, collecting and removing garbage, sweeping and mopping floors, peeling and cutting vegetables, cleaning feces off laundry, washing walls, cleaning chairs and tables, setting up breakfast trays, pouring juices and cold cereals, washing dishes, cleaning bedpans, cleaning bathtubs and toilet bowls, along with keeping sleeping and common areas tidy. Clearly this work was domestic labour. These tasks were done simultaneously. In other words the nurses' aides would move between tasks.

Work in the nursing home was done around a schedule. The owner-administrator required that all residents eat meals at certain times. Breakfast had to be served between seven-thirty and eight-thirty, dinner between eleven-thirty and twelve thirty and lunch between three-thirty and four-thirty. Along with the schedule for meals all baths had to be completed by eleven a.m. and all residents had to be in bed by eight-thirty p.m.. See Appendix II (page 122) for a

detailed breakdown of each shift.

A price demanded by this type of labour process was the independence of the residents. With a heavy workload and so few doing the work independence was not possible. Residents at Journey's End Nursing Home were treated like infants. Podnieks (1988) calls this infantilization and claims that it is a form of elderly abuse. It was in terms of babies that the employees understood the residents.

They are all like babies. You feed them and you change them. Try and comfort them. You dress them nice. Along with this childcare you also had to get the housework completed at the same time. That's what made the work so blessed hard. If it had just been a matter of looking after the residents, it wouldn't have been so bad. You got twenty-three residents who for the most require total care and at the same time you were expected to do a million other things. (Nurse's aide)

Looking after children was the only experience these women had to compare with the work. The difference with these 'babies' was that they were big and heavy.

From the point of view of the employees there is no malice intended by treating the residents as infants.

The only way the girls can get the work done is by doing that. Most of the residents have aging diseases of one type or another. It saves time and work to do things for them. You know if you let them feed themselves they spill most of it. On themselves and the floor. You got to go get the mop to clean the floor. Then you have to change them. Those things eat up valuable time. If you fall behind then he starts screaming. So its just easier to do it yourself. (Nurse's aide)

This is also an illustration of the effect of the labour

process on infantilization. Sticking to the schedule requires infantilization. Employees must also discipline the residents.

Like if one asks for a drink of water they will all want it. They can't stand the thought of someone getting something they don't. If you take one to the bathroom you have to take them all. So what you do when someone asks you is tell them that's good then they can go to bed. Most change their minds. I hated treating the residents like that. Sometimes I look at the old people and see myself in the future. You know I ask myself will I end up in a situation like their's. It wasn't the girls fault for the way the residents were treated. If anyone was to blame it was Mr.*****. He forced the girls to do what they did. (Nurse's aide)

Again we see infantilization used to get the work done.

The Division of Labour

On paper the division of labour between employees was clear cut. The employees were divided into four classifications. The classifications were domestic, which included housekeepers; laundry workers and dietary aides; nurse's aides; cooks and activity director. In theory employees in each of these classifications were responsible for specific aspects of the work. In practice, however, it did not work out this way. Employees were expected to pitch in and help wherever they were needed.

I don't think there was a single day that all I did was my own work. I 'd be busy mopping and cleaning and I would have to stop what I was doing and have to go help an aide turn a resident or take someone to the bathroom. You know it could be anything really. The laundry girl she might need a hand

folding sheets or they might need help in the kitchen doing something. Generally you did a bit of everything. It was just like at home doing your housework. You start one thing and then you have to stop and do something else. But I can tell you from experience the nurse's aides had it the worst. They were expected to do everything. They were constantly shifting from task to task. One minute they were dressing a resident and the next minute they'd be mopping floors or tidying up. On top of that they had the three shifts seven days a week. On evening and backshift they had to do everything. Things like peel vegetables, iron clothes, mend clothes, make lunch. You name it, if it came up they were expected to do it. On the weekends it was even worse. Except for a cook on dayshift, the aides were the only ones there. They had all the mopping plus do laundry if it was needed. Let me tell you, you could pretty well count on having to do laundry before the weekend was over. There just wasn't enough supplies to get through the weekend without doing laundry. (Housekeeper)

As this lengthy passage points out the women experienced much overlap between classifications while working in the nursing home. Rather than separate job classifications it would have been more appropriate to classify all of the women as general domestic labourers.

Among the women this division of labour was one of, if not the most, disliked aspect of the work. It appears that the division of labour was not an aspect of the work with which the women were familiar prior to taking employment at the nursing home. It may be that their friend or relative neglected to inform them of this practice because of the degree to which it was resented among employees. In other words their friend or relative may have chosen to speak only about those aspects of the work which they personally enjoyed.

Conclusion

The focus of this chapter has been on the labour process prior to unionization. It has been shown that the women employed at the nursing home not only understood this paid work experience in domestic terms -- but they also saw themselves working as domestic labourers.

We also demonstrated that the women resented being used as domestic labourers. This was not how they had originally envisioned working in the nursing home. The only person they saw as deriving any benefit from this situation was the owner-administrator. From their perspective he got the work done using fewer workers than would otherwise have been necessary.

Let's face it he saved a bundle with the girls working like domestics. Every girl was doing the work of at least two. The girls shouldn't have been peeling the vegetables. That should have all been done in the kitchen. But to do that he would have needed more workers. He was well aware that the girls knew how to peel vegetables, so he made us do it. You know if he wanted the floors mopped at night he should have had a domestic scheduled to work. But he would have had to pay them, wouldn't he? No he was a cagey devil. He knew what he was doing and also what he was saving. (Nurse's aide)

Along with all of the exploitation and manipulation which these women suffered at the hands of the owner-administrator, they were also forced to accept minimum wages and benefits. Regardless of how long they had been employed, the women who worked at Journey's End Nursing prior to unionization were

paid, the provincial minimum wage of four dollars per hour. The only benefit was two weeks annual vacation.

The next chapter examines the reasons that led the women to finally join a trade union. One might suspect that given the highly exploitive situation and the poor work conditions the women faced that they would embrace unionization with open arms. However, as we shall demonstrate, for many of the women this was not initially the case. A major problem which had to be overcome was the women's fear of the owner-administrator.

Chapter Four

Unionization

Introduction

The focus of this chapter is on the reasons that led the female employees of Journey's End Nursing Home to join a trade union. In a broad manner we will examine workplace problems and issues. In this way we will do more than simply analyze problems and issues which eventually found their way to the bargaining table. To say that the female employees of Journey's End Nursing Home willingly accepted the conditions under which they worked would be a gross overstatement. Repeatedly throughout the interviews the women expressed the anger and frustration they experienced. From their viewpoint they grudgingly did what they were expected to do.

You know, really what could we do? He ran that place the way he wanted to. You couldn't expect him to change things. As long as the girls did the housework and took what he gave them, he had no reason to change anything. He was doing good, why would he worry about us. (nurse's aide)

In large part the women saw themselves as powerless to alter

the situation. The women talk of viewing themselves as incapable of forming a union, but at the same time recognizing the need to have one. They viewed the owner-administrator as holding absolute control and decision making-power within the nursing home. From this understanding of the workplace the women understood a union as an outside source of power that would challenge the owner-administrator's control. In the women's eyes the owner-administrator would consider employees joining a union as having committed the ultimate act of defiance. Believing that the owner-administrator was revengeful, the women felt union activity would result in being fired.

The women saw a need for someone who could do what they could not: organize a union. It will be shown that the women possessed a wide knowledge of unions. They lacked the knowledge of how to organize a union. The women found such a person, the local business agent for the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway, Transport and General Workers. The women not only found a person who could organize but also somebody capable of standing up to and challenging the owner-administrator's control and decision making power.

As the women speak of the union they now belong to, one of the things a listener can hear is that, in a sense, joining the union involved a switching of allegiances. Prior to the union, the owner-administrator held the women's allegiance through both fear and lack of alternatives. With the union

in place this allegiance shifts to the union business agent. But rather than an allegiance based on fear, the women's allegiance to the business agent is based on trust.

You can count on him, he is a man of his word. He is always ready and willing to listen to our problems. When he tells you to call him anytime of the day or night you know he means it. He is one in a million. If it hadn't been for him the girls never would have gotten unionized. If anyone deserves credit it is him. You know if anyone ever asks me who to see about unionizing I'll know who to tell them to talk to. (Laundry worker)

This passage is typical of most of the women's comments about the union business agent. For many of the women he is a hero. However, a minority of the women do not see him as a hero.

Don't get me wrong I think he did a pretty good job for us. But that's just what it was -- a job. He is paid to get people unionized. Besides that he is slick. He reminds me of some of the door-to-door salesmen that come around to my house. Most of the women from the home were like putty in his hands. Everything he said they soaked it up like it was gospel. I seen it myself, a few of us were talking in the parking lot after a meeting and some of the women couldn't remember a damn thing he said or they heard things that were never mentioned. That's what I mean about him being slick. My own policy is that you have to be careful with such people. If you're not you can get burned. (Nurse's aide)

While passages such as this are not typical, they provide an interesting contrast with the manner in which most of the women see the business agent. This passage also indicates the blind faith many of the women placed in the business agent.

For purposes of clarity this chapter is divided into several sections. The first section of the chapter looks at the community context within which the women unionized. Not

only have the women grown up in, possibly, the most infamous labour town in Nova Scotia but also the majority did so in families in which the father was a member of a trade union. Indeed most of the married women in this study are married to union members who supported their decision to unionize. This section is followed by a brief examination of the union the women joined, the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway, Transport and General Workers.

Despite this context the women, while being interviewed, initially contended that they knew 'nothing' about unions. In section two it will be shown that what women did not know or view themselves as qualified to do was to organize a union.

Section three focuses on an incident at the nursing home which affected all of the employees. It will be argued that this incident generated collective anger among the women and this anger provided the 'spark' needed to push the women towards unionization. This anger allowed the women to overcome fears which had previously hindered any chance of unionizing.

The fourth section looks at the approach taken to finding a union. It will be argued that the women were not interested in forming, but rather in joining, a union.

The fifth section consists of an examination of the issues and problems with which they felt a union should deal. From what the women have to say, it seems that the arrival of the union opened the 'flood gates'. Problems that had long

been whispered about but seldom, if ever, openly discussed were suddenly thrust to the fore. Predictably wages were an issue near the top of the women's lists. Unexpectedly another major issue the women wanted solved dealt more with the labour process. The women were concerned with the approach and the content of the work. For the women the work entailed too much domestic labour. In precise terms the women wanted out of the domestic labour process. They wanted a division of labour that would reflect their job classifications -- one in which they would no longer be used as general domestic labourers.

The Community Context -- Union Background

The women employed at Journey's End Nursing Home were not unaware of the existence of trade unions. All of them had grown up in a community with a long and rich legacy of trade unionism. The fathers of most of the women had been long time trade unionists. Furthermore, of the eighteen women interviewed, seventeen either were or had been married to union members. Many of these women had, during their married lives, experienced and dealt with the hardships of a long strike (Luxton, 1983). According to Luxton,

vast numbers of Canadian women who have never been members of unions have nevertheless very significant relations with the trade union movement. Housewives who are married to trade union members find their daily lives profoundly affected by those unions. (1983:333)

Trade unionism was not new to them -- being a member of one was. The women's experiences as wives of union members undoubtedly provided important knowledge about both the need of unions and their role in the workplace.

In a contemporary sense while there are many unions active, in the Prosperity Point area, it is no longer thought of as a 'hot bed' of trade unionism. With its traditional industrial base all but a thing of the past and plagued with chronically high unemployment it is no longer a community which comes to mind when one thinks of trade unions. Historically, however, the area is steeped in a rich tradition of radical unionism and militant union leaders. The working class folklore of this area abounds with stories of heroic unionists 'standing the gaff' against heartless employers. Such stories are often told at family gatherings and various social events. On a factual level such stories and events have been documented by several social historians (Earle, 1989; Frank, 1985; MacGillivray, 1980). These and many other authors have focussed on the mammoth struggles and conflicts between coal miners and company owners which took place during the first half of the twentieth century.

While many of the women interviewed mentioned that their fathers had been union members, some went into considerable detail about this experience. One woman offered the following statement.

Growing up at home there were two topics at the supper table -- unions and co-operatives. I can

see and hear my father just like it was yesterday. Once we sat down for supper we didn't move until he told us to go. At the table he would preach. Sometimes it was the value of unions for workers. Othertimes he would relive the past, going on and on about strikes in the mines and what it had been like. You know all the time he would tell us never to forget. We were never allowed to question or contradict anything he said. I remember one time one of my older brothers started critising what dad was saying. I think my brother was repeating something a school teacher had told his class. Well my father gave him a backhander that knocked him and the chair over. At that moment I think the rest of us stopped breathing. My father's words are etched in my brain. He looked at my brother and the rest of us and told us there were a lot of things he could accept but if he ever again heard any of us putting down unions he would disown us. I think he would have, he took unions very seriously. As long as I live I'll never forget the stories he told us, I'll take them to the grave with me. (Nurse's aide)

Based on this lengthy passage it is obvious that this woman possessed considerable knowledge of trade unions. In fact all of the women who remember their fathers speaking about unions, recall that the tone of the stories was always positive. In other words the fathers who spoke about trade unions seem to have focussed on what they considered to be the value of unions.

Throughout the interviews the women were asked about their husbands' responses when they learned that the women planned to unionize. With only one exception all claim that the husbands responded favourably. This may at least in part be accounted for by the fact that the husbands were also union members.

My husband had often told me we needed a union up there. I guess I use to pass it off as wishful

thinking. He has been involved in his union local for years. In fact this year we will be attending the international convention of his union. I guess from his involvement I was more than aware of unions. (Nurse's aide)

The woman who offered this statement has been directly involved in the union at the nursing since it began. In fact she was one of the two women that made the initial inquiries about getting unionized.

Another woman claims to have been reluctant about telling her husband about the attempt to unionize.

I was a little bit nervous about it. I guess I figured he might laugh at me. Sure he is a member of a union but I never recall him saying women workers should be unionized. The impression I got from him on different occasions was that unions were for men. Any way one evening I told him about the girls joining a union and to my surprise he didn't laugh. In fact he reacted quite positively about it. I actually felt bad about not telling him about it from the beginning. When I have a union meeting and he is not working, he makes sure that he is home to look after the kids, so that I can get there. (Nurse's aide)

Given what this woman has to say it is completely understandable why she was initially reluctant to inform her husband of the plan to unionize at the nursing home. But more importantly, like most of the women, she indicates having recieved a favourable response about unionizing after discussing it with her spouse. Furthermore the remark about her husband helping to make it possible for her to attend meetings was common throughout the interviews.

Clearly what this section indicates is that the women possessed more knowledge of trade unions than they gave

themselves credit for. It is also important because it illustrates that these women were not confronted with an anti-union response to their plan to unionize.

The Canadian Brotherhood of Railway, Transport and General Workers

The union which the women from the nursing home chose to join was the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway, Transport and General Workers. Within the local area of Prosperity Point this union is well known not only for its involvement with railway and transport workers but also with general workers. Growth in this union has in recent years taken place in the general workers section. Members in this section come from a diverse assortment of workplaces. Some of these workplaces include food processors, fish plants, automobile dealerships, office workers, hospitals, day care centres and nursing homes.

Nationally this union is relatively small, with a total membership of approximately 40,000. According to the representative of this union in the Prosperity Point area, almost half of the membership are in Atlantic Canada. In the province of Nova Scotia it is the fifth largest union and has a membership of approximately 6,500 (MacSween, 1989:212). It is traditionally thought of as a union for men because of its association with railway and transport industries. However at least in Nova Scotia a significant percentage of its

members are women. While figures on the gender composition of the union for the present time are not available, in 1985 there were 5346 members in Nova Scotia; 2322 of these were female. In other words approximately 44 percent of the membership in Nova Scotia were females. According to the union's representative approximately 55 percent of the members in the Prosperity Point area are females. In this context it should not be difficult to understand why the women from Journey's End Nursing Home chose to join the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway, Transport and General Workers.

Thinking But Not Doing

Most of the women interviewed claim to have recognized that a union was needed at the nursing home.

Yes, a lot of girls used to whisper about a union. Especially on backshift, when we were alone. You know, like it was always about what a union could do for the girls, the changes it would make in the place. He [owner- administrator] wouldn't have been able to pull half the shit he got away with, if we had a union. Let's face it everyone knows places with unions are better than those without. Unions take care of their members, don't they?

(nurse's aide)

Like many similar statements offered by other women this one displays an awareness and understanding of unions. But at the same time when asked why they never inquired about unionizing, they claim to have known nothing about unions.

Look it's one thing to talk about something but

actually doing it is another matter. The girls didn't know anything about unions. None of us had ever belonged to one.

Obviously the women are contradicting themselves. Within their common sense understanding of the situation such a contradiction is completely acceptable. Through the community as well as their families the women were aware of both the existence and potential benefits of unions. However they lacked experience both as members of unions and knowledge of how to organize a union. By listening carefully and following up on points, which for them are unconnected, it becomes clear that the women had reasons, other than the lack of knowledge argument, for being reluctant to unionize.

The women make it quite clear that the owner-administrator's method of management played a major part in keeping them away from unions. The owner-administrator used fear to keep the women in line. In the previous chapter it was pointed out that the women fully believed that the owner-administrator made all decisions that affected the nursing home.

That was his nursing home and he ran it the way he wanted. You've got to realise that Mr. ***** was a hateful man. If you crossed him he never forgot and he never forgave. If he ever caught wind that the girls were going to unionize he woulda [sic] fired the workers on the spot. There was only going to be one way of doing things up there and that was his way. (Laundry worker)

Look the girls weren't stupid. Who would ever have thought that he would have allowed a union? He had everything to lose and nothing to gain. Having a union would certainly mean lower money for himself.

None of the girls ever thought he'd give that up. Honestly he was making a fortune up there and for the most part he still is and it was at the expense of the girls. You should see where he lives. Money is no object to him.

(Nurse's aide)

While the owner-administrator did not openly threaten to fire them, the women were afraid that involvement with a union would cost them their jobs. Also important is the idea that the owner-administrator was "making a fortune". All of the women interviewed share this belief. Anything a union could get for them would have to come out of the owner-administrator's pocket. Based on this understanding, the women considered it highly unlikely that he would ever permit a union.

Added to the women's fear of the owner-administrator was the lack of alternative employment.

I couldn't get a job in another nursing home. Most of the girls up there were in the same boat. The other nursing homes around here want women with more training. His was the only one that hired people with the home nursing course. I wasn't crazy about either the pay or the work we had to do. You see so if I got fired where would I go? Myself, and I think the other girls, felt the same way. I couldn't afford to lose my job.

(nurse's aide)

Here also we see a woman indicating the material need to work. Anything which might put her job at risk was a thing to be avoided.

Anna Pollert (1981) in a study of British tobacco factory employees contends that

the shop-floor was fragmented by mistrust and individualism, in spite of the importance of personal friendship and 'mucking in'.(p.181)

This was also a problem at Journey's End Nursing Home. The women had to, in their words, "cover your own ass".

Who could you trust. The walls up there had ears. The way you could be sure something wouldn't get back to him was not to say it. That's how a lot of girls got in shit with him. They'd say something to the wrong person and it would go directly back to him. He was a cagey son of a bitch though. He might be told something today but it might be a week before he calls you in the office about it. By then you might have mentioned it to a dozen different girls. So you never knew for sure who ratted on you. (housekeeper)

It is obvious that a lack of trust, such as that described above, would divide the women. Added to this was the relative isolation of the women from one another and the high turnover of employees.

Sometimes you didn't even know the name of the girl you were working with. When you're full time you work with the same person all the time. Unless one of you is sick, then you work with someone else. I seen myself work with a girl one day and never see her again. Could be that I just never get put with her or she might have quit. It's hard to get to know people in those situations. Really you got to work with a person a while before you get to know them. (nurse's aide)

Along with the isolation in the workplace very few of the women interviewed mention socializing with co-workers outside of work.

In this section we have demonstrated that the women's reluctance to unionize was because of several reasons. Fear, lack of alternative employment, mistrust among the women, and general lack of solidarity all stood in the way of these women

unionizing. In the next section we will examine an incident which allowed the women to overcome these problems.

The Last Straw

The focus in this section is on an incident which provided a catalyst for the women to join a union. Compared to the overall working conditions that the women endured, this incident seems almost insignificant. Thus it is important to see the incident not as a single isolated event but as the 'last straw'. For these women this incident destroyed any hope they might have had of the owner-administrator ever voluntarily initiating change in the workplace for their benefit.

In January, 1987, the women were expecting a raise. The owner-administrator had earlier promised them a 12 cent per hour increase. For the women the promise of a raise signified much more. For them this was a new beginning. They began to see the owner-administrator in a different light. They talked of catching a glimpse of a "person with a heart".

Oh, the girls were excited. A raise, can you imagine! He was going to give us a raise! Like you know that was a first for him. You could feel the excitement at work. Girls that never had a good word for him were going around singing praises for him. They were even apologizing to each other for all the nasty remarks they had ever made about him. I tell ya [sic] it was a sign of big things to come. The 12 cents was just the tip of the iceberg. (nurse's aide)

The promise of a raise gave the employees something about which to be optimistic. Despite all the previous problems and general mistrust of the owner-administrator, the women took him at his word. Taking a person at his or her word was a crucial component of the women's common sense understanding. However the owner-administrator did the unthinkable; he went back on his word and failed to provide the expected raise.

The failure of the owner-administrator to give the women the raise created a backlash of anger, which, when the opportunity was presented, motivated the women to join a union. In the following passages, women describe what not getting the raise meant to them.

Can you imagine? After him giving his word that we would get a raise, he up and changed his mind. That was it for the girls. You don't promise people something and then not deliver. The girls never had much respect for him but with that move he completely turned them against him. The girls should have known better than to trust that prick. Like you just don't go around telling people that you will do this or that and then don't do it. No, he should have kept his mouth shut if he wasn't planning to give us that raise. One thing for sure I bet the miserable son of a bitch often wishes he had kept his word. (laundry worker)

Mad, that's what the girls were, mad as hell, after he did that all you heard at work was f-- this and f-- that. At the best of times, you know, it wasn't a pleasant place to work but when he did that it was downright miserable. You could cut the anger there with a knife, it was that thick. A lot of girls were talking about quitting. I remember one girl suggested to me that all the girls should get together and quit at the same time. (nurse's aide)

It's difficult to put into words. I guess you might say the girls were angry. No that's not really strong enough, let me think, disgusted and

infuriated, yes that better captures it. He had done a lot of rotten things but never anything like that. Like he said some pretty lousy things but they never had that effect. I guess after a while you got immune to it especially if he wasn't after you. He would make the girls mad but after a day or so it would pass. But that raise hit everybody all at once. That time he struck out at all of us. The girls just wouldn't let it pass. Everyday at work it just kept coming up. It wouldn't go away.
(nurse's aide)

All three of these passages describe the anger felt by the women as a result of not getting the raise. The final passage is especially illuminating. Here we are given a clear view of how this incident differed from previous actions by the owner-administrator. This action affected all of the employees. The raise was promised not to one woman or a select few but to all of the women.

While it is clear that this event greatly angered all of the women, for two of the women it was the 'last straw'. The failure of the raise to materialize convinced them that a union was needed. At the same time these women interpreted the widespread anger of their co-workers as evidence that the women would support a union.

He showed his true colours, didn't he? Tell you one thing one minute and the next something different. He expected us to take that just like we took everything else. Well we surprised him. I got involved through my girl friend. We were working together at that time. I think we were on backshift. Anyway the day we were supposed to get the raise we went to work and the girls we were replacing were complaining. I remember plain as day that night. We were having a cup of tea and I asked my girl friend when she thought we get a raise. Fast as anything she shot back 'when hell freezes over'. Then she said the only way we'd ever

get a raise was if we joined a union. I told her she was probably right. Then she said let's do it, let's find a union. I told her I didn't know anything about unions. She said that was okay because she didn't either. She suggested that we keep it secret and just sort of ask around.

(nurse's aide)

The woman who suggested finding a union offered the following.

I don't really know why I suggested it. In a way I guess it was just common sense. It seemed obvious to me that our only hope after not getting that raise was to join a union. Really I didn't know much about unions but I had heard different girls mention them from time to time. Looked to me like no one else planned to do anything about the way things were. At that time a lot of the girls were talking about quitting. Myself I wished I could too but I couldn't. I don't like to admit it but I needed the bit of money I was earning up there. I guess I just wanted to take a look (at a union). You know that way I'd at least have the satisfaction of knowing I looked. Outside of my girl friend I didn't want any one else up there knowing about it really. I couldn't risk him finding out and firing me. What it came down to was if we found a union, great, but if we didn't we could forget about it and he'd (owner-administrator) be none the wiser.

(nurse's aide)

Here we are given a clear view of how this woman understood the situation. Like her co-workers she hints at several problems. A combination of the fear of being fired and the perceived inability of the women to remain silent prompted her to suggest that the best approach was to involve as few of the woman as possible.

Joining A Union

Mary Cornish and Laurell Ritchie (1980) contend that

successful union organizing requires a careful and well thought out plan. Julie White (1980) stresses the need for women workers to explore the alternatives that are available.

Certainly women considering unionization should explore the alternatives that are available. Where more than one union covers a particular type of work or industry it is important to find out about the options. Representatives of unions may be asked to meetings and questioned about the advantages of their unions. Members of other locals of the union under consideration should be asked about the union's services, awareness of women's issues and any other matters of concern. A copy of the union's constitution may be obtained and questions asked about the degree of local autonomy, finances and representation at policy making conventions. There is no perfect union, but there may be one available that has good services, along with a concern for women's issues, or a good local union representative and so on.

(1980: 71-72)

This passage is important to the present study, not because it reflects the approach taken by the employees of Journey's End Nursing Home, but because it is the mirror opposite. Julie White seems to assume that women considering unionization are aware of alternatives. Furthermore there is an assumption that the decision to join a union is a group decision. Her suggestions may contain a great deal of merit. However for workers such as the women at Journey's End Nursing Home internal union control and decision-making power were non-issues.

For them a good union would be one which could solve immediate workplace problems or at least give this impression. These women had no personal experience with trade unions. In fact most of the women interviewed indicate that they had

little or no previous experience in any type of social action or community group. During the interviews, questions about women's issues generally drew blank stares.

Unions are unions, aren't they? What difference would it make what union we joined. Far as I can see they all do the same things - - look after workers. You know they try and get a better deal for workers. There was no time for shopping around. We needed one then and there. There is no way we would have known a good one from a bad one. (nurse's aide)

Here we are given insights into both the women's understanding of unions as well as how they viewed their situation. These women did not differentiate between business unions and social unions. Such concepts were not part of their common sense understanding. The women took a very straight forward approach -- finding a union and joining. The following passage describes how they found the union they joined.

I think it was the day after we didn't get the raise. When I was going off after backshift the incoming girls were complaining about the raise. One of them I had worked with quite a bit. She was hanging her coat up and I was putting mine on. I guess we were chatting and I just casually asked if she knew any union people. She told me the name of a fellow she had heard her brother mention. She didn't know what union he was with or anything. Anyway when I went home I got his phone number out of the phone book. I gave him a call and set up a meeting with him. (nurse's aide)

The union representative whom this woman contacted was asked if her approach was unusual.

No I'm approached like that all the time. Somebody mentions my name to someone and they phone me up. I'm familiar with some of the text books and the approaches to unionizing they advocate. But in my

years of organizing very few ordinary workers use those approaches. Most of the people I meet with are like the women from the nursing home. They know they have problems and usually they don't see themselves as capable of solving them. Sometimes we take it for granted that workers know certain things. In this business that can be a fatal mistake. A lot of workers know little or nothing about workers rights. The ones I meet often don't know that there is a Trade Union Act let alone what's in it. Lets face it most employers are in business to make money. As long as their employees get the work done and the business makes money, they're happy. (Business Agent,C.B.R.T.&G.W.)

This statement suggests that it is common practice for many workers neither to formulate a plan nor 'shop around' when looking for a union to join.

What was the experience of these women meeting with a union representative?

Jesus, I was nervous. I had never done anything like that before. It kind of felt like I was doing something naughty. When I was waiting for him to come, I thought at any minute Mr. **** was going to walk in and say 'I caught ya'. Really if he had I would have died right on the spot. I had all these doubts about what we were doing. Now they seem ridiculous but at that time they were very real. I figured for sure the union rep would laugh at us when we told him about the nursing home. Who would ever believe that, you know. I don't know if I would have believed it, if I hadn't been there. I have to tell you this. We were sitting there waiting and so the phone rang. **** went and answered it. Anyway she came back and said it was for me, said it was Mr.**** from the home and he wanted to talk to me. Well I'll tell you I didn't know what to say. I got all hot and started choking. Then **** started laughing. I knew she was only joking. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. So I laughed. I didn't know what else to do. (nurse's aide)

Here we have a good example of some of the thoughts people

often feel when they confront the unknown. The passage also indicates how far-reaching was the women's fear of the owner-administrator. Despite being a considerable distance from the nursing home, in the privacy of one of the women's home, there was an expectancy of being found out by the owner-administrator.

In the following passages the women from the nursing home describe the actual meeting.

It wasn't anything like we had imagined it would be. He didn't even look like what we had imagined. You know, we thought he would be an older man, with shifty eyes, like some of the fellows you see on television. But he was just an ordinary fellow. We thought he would baffle us with all these difficult questions that we wouldn't even understand, let alone answer. But all I remember him asking was why we wanted a union and what it was like to work in the nursing home. We told him about the raise we never got. All the work we had to do, you know, the housework we were doing even though we were hired to do nursing. He asked us why more of the girls weren't at the meeting. So we told him that a lot of the girls were afraid of Mr.****. They figured they'd be fired if he found out. (nurse's aide)

Well first of all he didn't laugh at us. You know. I don't quite know how to put it but he sort of made us relax. You could tell he was concerned for us. After we answered his questions, he told us about other nursing homes that belonged to his union. A lot of what he said sounded just like ours. He agreed that we needed a union. I was convinced that this was the one for us. He told us that the fear of being fired was a common one but not to worry about. If we had any problems from Mr.***** to give him a call and he'd make sure we were protected. Anyway before he left he gave us union cards and showed us how to fill them out. (nurse's aide)

For these women it was that simple. They met the union representative and told their story. Both parties agreed that

a union was needed and the women were convinced that this representative's union was the one for them. Just as these women had often in the past taken the owner-administrator at his word, they now began the process of taking the union representative at his word. Undoubtably his claim of having organized women in other nursing homes with similar problems went a long way in convincing these women of his ability to help them.

The union representative offered the following comments about the meeting with the women.

I believe, yes, I was approached by two members from that group, who were interested in seeing what a union could do for them. I met those two people at their home. Basically what I tell all groups when I meet them,-- and we talk to a lot of people throughout the year organizing -- my way of organizing may be right, may be wrong. But what I try to tell them is first find out why you are organizing. You know sometimes people organize for the wrong reasons. Sometimes people organize thinking that a union is going to solve all their problems, but that's not the case.

(Business Agent, C.B.R.T. & G.W.)

As an extension of this the union representative was asked whether or not these women were organizing for the right reasons.

I would say so. They seemed to have reasonable expectations. They indicated that there was considerable support in the nursing home for a union. They seemed to have decided that they needed a union. Compared to a lot of the groups I meet with they were level headed. Unlike others they didn't seem to be motivated by a desire to get revenge. Some people figure with a union they can take over, but it doesn't work that way. We attempt to look out for our members' interests but

employers also have rights. It was obvious that those women from the nursing home didn't have a lot of knowledge about unions. But that's part of our job, teaching members about the union. In our union we adhere to the principle of organizing the unorganized, especially the lower classes of workers.

This passage is extremely interesting for at least a couple of reasons. First the union representative brings up the issue of revenge. He claims that the women from the nursing home were not motivated by revenge. However, this is a theme which continuously surfaces in the interviews. Over and over women talk about making the owner-administrator pay for what he did in the past. This would seem to be an obvious contradiction. One possible explanation is that what the women expect from the union and what they accept are two different things. On the one hand they may firmly believe that the union should take the owner-administrator to the 'cleaners'. But on the other they unquestioningly accept what the union representative tells them -- in large part because he is seen as the one with the knowledge.

Another issue which was raised by the union representative concerns the level of support for a union which existed in the nursing home. At the time of this meeting, only the women who met with the union representative were even aware of the meeting. Obviously these women gave the impression that they were representing not only their co-workers but also their interests.

For the women from the nursing home who met with the union representative, little or no thought seems to have been given to the possibility of their co-workers not supporting a union.

Why wouldn't the other girls sign? What better hope of making change did they have. When we got those cards, it was as good as having a union. I guess it's possible the girls might not have signed but that's not something that crossed our minds. You know as soon as we got the cards we went out and signed up four of the girls we figured we could count on. (Nurses' Aide)

In the week following the meeting, twenty employees or sixty percent of the women signed cards. The following passage describes the manner in which most of the women interviewed were approached.

They came to my house. I didn't know what was going on. You know it seemed odd that they were coming to see me. Anyway I invited them in and offered them a cup of tea. We got to talking about the nursing home and what was happening up there. They asked me what I thought about us not getting the raise. I told them it was one of the lousiest things I could ever remember him doing. Right out of the blue one of them asked me what I thought about joining a union. I remember telling them I thought it was a good idea but that I didn't know much about them. Right then and there they put a card and pen in front of me and asked me to sign. Well what could I do, I mean I was on the spot. I was just after saying I thought it was a good idea, so I signed. Before they left they asked me to keep it a secret and told me they'd let me know when the first meeting was. (Domestic Worker)

The majority of women interviewed claim to have been approached in this way. From the interviews it appears that the women were asked what they thought about the idea of a

union and because they responded positively, they were asked to sign. Most of the women do not seem to have asked questions about the union they were joining. This would seem to support the idea that it did not matter what union they joined.

Not all of the women who were approached signed cards. Some of the women took a wait and see approach.

I will tell you why I didn't sign right away. I have got nothing to hide. But I know some of them think I was on Mr.*****'s side. But I wasn't. Up at the home a couple of the girls asked me if I had signed. I said, "signed what"? I didn't know what they were talking about. That was the first I had heard about a union. They hadn't mentioned any names -- just that they had signed cards. Here they were asking me if they could get fired for signing a card. I told them straight out that I didn't know. No one else mentioned the union to me that day. The next day at the home the rumors were flying. One rumor was that Mr.***** was going to fire any one that had signed a card and then another started claiming he was going to close the place down. I'm not kidding when I tell you girls were nervous. There was no one there to tell them any different. They went from cursing him to wondering if they were going to be fired. So when they came to my house I asked questions and didn't get any good answers so I refused to sign. (Nurse's aide)

This passage illustrates more than the reluctance of one woman to sign a union card. Her refusal to sign was not because of opposition to a union. It was based on how she saw co-workers reacting and a lack of information. Many of the women had given little or no thought to possible negative consequences. It was only after the rumors began to circulate that the women began to ask questions. In this way we can see that the act of signing a card was a spur of the moment decision. Signing

a union card offered these women a chance to vent their feeling of anger, without much reflection on the possible consequences of their actions.

Issues, Solutions and Union Support

We must not underestimate the significance of the owner-administrator's failure to provide the raise and the subsequent anger and outrage this action generated among the women. It was this anger which allowed the women to temporarily overcome their fears and motivated them to sign union cards. Beyond this anger, however, other issues existed which the women believed a union could solve. Because of the women's inability to challenge the owner-administrator, problems which had long been suppressed quickly resurfaced.

From the women's recollections of the first general union meeting emerges the image of a group of women more interested in knowing what the union was going to do for them as opposed to the intricacies of organizing a union local.

I was there, most of the girls were. It was a crazy night. The girls were shouting each other down, everyone was talking at the same time. Everyone had a million questions they wanted answered at the same time. Especially about the rumors. I really felt sorry for the union representative. He was trying to explain things but he kept being interrupted. He was saying not to worry about the rumors. That happens everywhere workers decide to unionize. As quick as he said that, a girl would respond with, 'it might be like that in other places but the nursing home was different'. You got to imagine there were about thirty girls there, a lot of them scared they were going to lose their jobs.

The way he put it was: 'had anyone gotten fired and if not why not'. That made sense to a lot of us. So far no one had been fired, so maybe the union could protect us. His bottom line was that as long as the girls supported the union they'd be okay. But if we gave up on the union we'd be on our own. You don't need to be very bright to know what that meant. The thought of facing Mr.***** on our own didn't appeal to us. Lump it or like it, we were in.
(Nurse's aide)

Clearly the women wanted to be reassured that their jobs were safe. It appears that the union representative, using common sense, simply reversed the women's understanding of the situation. If the rumors were true, then why hadn't the owner-administrator acted upon them.

Predictably, beyond the topic of the rumors, monetary issues were at or near the top of most of the women's list of problems. While the issues of wages and benefits were front and center, they were not the only issues raised. According to the women interviewed, there were two other major issues which they wanted solved.

Both of these issues had to do directly with the labour process. The women wanted the union to change both the general approach to the work and they wanted the job content of the classifications to reflect their titles. Precisely what these women wanted was for the union to bring to an end the owner-administrator's practice of using them as domestic labourers. For the women working as domestic labourers in the nursing home was problematic for various reasons. The work was both physically and mentally demanding.

When you left that place at the end of a shift you

didn't go dancing. A lot of days you were lucky if you had enough strength left to get yourself home. It was really exhausting. You had to go full out from the beginning until the end of a shift. You had to either be pretty damm tough or down right crazy to work there day in and day out. I figure most of the girls like myself were a bit of both. You had to be, otherwise you couldn't last. Eventually it would get the better of all of us. A person's body will only take so much wear and tear before it starts to give out. Lots of girls used to quit because they were worn out. That's why having changes made in the way we worked was so important. You see when we joined the union that had to be a priority issue. The girls could have gotten paid all the money in the world but it wouldn't have made a bit of difference because you couldn't last long enough to earn it. That's why the work had to change. (Nurse's aide)

This passage illustrates the the reality of why the women wanted the labour process changed. Working as domestic labourers in the nursing home literally wore women out.

The women also saw working as domestic labourers as a form of unfair treatment.

There is no way on earth the girls should ever have had to work like that. I imagine that slaves received better treatment than what we got up there. The union had to put an end to that practice. The girls figured they were entitled to breaks. But what you have to realize is that the girls, on their own, were in no position to challenge Mr.*****. If I ever had refused to do something because I was on break he'd have made an example of me and fired me on the spot. That man fired girls for looking at him. (Nurse's aide)

Conclusion

This chapter has examined, from the women's perspective, the experience of joining a union. We have shown that

exploitative work conditions were not, in this case, enough to push the women to unionize. The women claimed to have recognized the need for a union. However, there were many problems which kept them from following through on this idea. The women's fear that the owner-administrator would retaliate against them was probably the largest problem that had to be overcome.

The incident which led to unionization in some ways seems almost trivial when compared with a lot of what the women tolerated. However the owner-administrator's failure to give the women the raise he had earlier promised them did serve as the 'last straw'. Unlike many of the owner-administrator's previous actions which involved individual women, this action directly involved all of the women. This incident created such a level of anger that most of the women, when given the opportunity to sign union cards, did not hesitate.

We have also demonstrated that the arrival of the union effectively opened the floodgates on problems in the nursing home. Problems which the women had long suppressed came to the surface. Among these problems was a general dissatisfaction with the way in which they were forced to work. The women saw themselves as being used in a domestic labour process. Not only was the work the same but also the approach. Simply put the women resented this situation. They did not see this as part of the bargain they had made when they took employment at the nursing home. The women saw the

owner-administrator as the only one benefiting from their working as domestic labourers. In place of this arrangement the women wanted a division of labour which would reflect the specific job classification to which they belonged.

The following chapter examines the labour process after unionization. Now that the union is in place the women speak of the nursing home as a completely different place. They claim that the union has made so many changes that there is no comparison between what it was like to work there before unionization and what it is like to work there now. The changes the women talk about can be classified as either formal and informal changes. Formal changes are those which can be verified in the collective agreement. Such verification is impossible in the case of informal changes or those which are the result of 'shop floor' resistance. Despite this lack of verification there is no reason to disbelieve the women's contentions. If the women's claims were fabricated it is highly unlikely that all of the women interviewed would have spoken of similar changes.

Chapter Five

The Labour Process After Unionization

Introduction

Throughout the interviews the women speak of the nursing home in terms of 'then and now'-- 'then' being prior to unionization; 'now' being after unionization. They talk of there being no comparison between the nursing home now with the union in place and what it was like without the union. From their perspective it is almost as though someone waved a 'magic wand' and the workplace suddenly became something it had never been previously.

The initial description of the nursing home after unionization offered by the women is problematic. The picture they paint has a tendency to lull a person into a false sense of reality. Upon closer examination what at first may appear as a 'perfect' workplace is in reality anything but. The owner-administrator has not, as one might be led to believe, 'waved the white flag' and surrendered to the union. Rather he can best be seen as having adapted to unionization.

Prior to unionization the owner-administrator used an assortment of tactics to openly take advantage of the women whenever possible. We have argued previously in this thesis that two of his favourite tactics were fear and intimidation. These were used both to assert control over the workplace and to ensure that the women completed all work that had to be done. With the union in place the owner-administrator has altered, but by no means eliminated, these approaches. Instead they are used in a less open and more subtle manner. As will be shown in this chapter the owner, like the employees, uses both the collective agreement and 'shop floor' tactics in an attempt to reassert his power and control over the workplace.

For the women unionization is very much a learning process. Part of this process is learning the limitations of their collective power. We contend that a major way in which these limits are learned is through practice and experience.

Unionization has led to a process of negotiation and re-negotiation between the women and the owner-administrator. This process takes place both at a formal level (the collective agreement) and an informal or 'shop floor' level. At both levels this process includes conflict and struggle with each party attempting to re-define both its' own and the others' power. Within the nursing home this is a major change. Prior to unionization the women did not negotiate with the owner-administrator -- rather he dictated the way things were

going to be.

In this chapter we will focus on the labour process at Journey's End Nursing Home after unionization. It will be demonstrated that many changes have taken place. The most immediately noticeable are formal changes in the area of wages, sick leave, vacations, breaks and compassionate leave. These are all changes which can be verified through an examination of the collective agreement.

As well as changes in the above mentioned areas, other important formal changes have taken place. Throughout the interviews the women contend that unionization has broken the owner-administrator's absolute control over the labour process. Clearly, as we have pointed out, this has taken place. The owner-administrator's absolute control has been replaced by a process of negotiation. The women report that the owner-administrator no longer uses a heavy handed, arbitrary approach in matters which concern them. They cite formal changes such as the grievance procedure which is now in place to deal with certain problems which come up in the workplace. Along with this procedure, the women are quick to point out that under the collective agreement they have a say in formulating work schedules. Prior to unionization no grievance procedure existed at the nursing home. The owner-administrator did not consult with the women; instead he made arbitrary decisions that were presented to them on a take it or leave it basis. These changes are important because they

illustrate that, in certain aspects of the labour process, the owner-administrator's absolute control has been broken.

Now that the union is in place and a collective agreement has been signed the general attitude of the women, in terms of working in the nursing home, has also changed. Prior to unionizing the women literally worked in fear of the owner-administrator. They did what was expected of them and did not challenge the owner-administrator. With the union in place this fear has been greatly reduced, though not completely eliminated, through recognition of their collective power. The women claim that everything which concerns them or the work they do comes under union scrutiny.

Possibly the most important changes the women claim have taken place are in the area of the labour process dealing with both the approach to work and job content. The women view the union as giving them a voice in decisions concerning the division of labour in the nursing home. In essence the women talk of a form of shared control between the union and the owner-administrator over the approach to doing the work and the content of the work. One would suspect that an important matter, such as this, would be clearly outlined in the collective agreement. However the collective agreement provides no support for the women's contention that such an arrangement exists. In fact if only the collective agreement is considered then control over the division of labour is solely in the hands of the owner-administrator. It is

necessary, however, to understand these changes as informal changes. They are the result of the conflict, struggle, negotiation and re-negotiation between the women and the owner-administrator over control on the 'shop floor'.

Throughout this thesis we have argued that the female employees of Journey's End Nursing Home were engaged in a variation of the domestic labour process in a paid work setting. The women resented both the approach and content of the work. We also argued that the women's dissatisfaction with the domestic labour process was a major reason for unionizing. Throughout the interviews the women make it very clear that both the approach to working and the content of the work have, as a result of unionization, been changed.

Like the women's change in attitude, changes in the approach and content of work cannot be verified through an examination of the collective agreement. The reason why these changes are not contained in the collective agreement is because they are not results of the collective bargaining process. Instead, the women, acting on the advice of the union representative, put these changes in place. As was pointed out in chapter four, during the unionization process the union representative advised the women to slowdown and do only as much work as they could manage at a comfortable pace. Not only did the women slowdown but they also stopped doing work which they considered to be outside their own job classification.

For the women the significance of these changes went beyond the changes themselves. For the first time they had exercised their collective power to make changes in the workplace. This indicated that the owner-administrator was losing both power and control. Effectively they had broken the owner-administrator's absolute control of both the workplace and the labour process.

The Collective Agreement-- Monetary Gains

Prior to unionization the employees of Journey's End Nursing Home received the minimum monetary rewards allowable under Nova Scotia's labour laws. They were paid the minimum wage, which at that time was four dollars an hour. Regardless of how long the women had worked at the nursing home, they all received the same wages. As was pointed out in Chapter Four, voluntary raises on the owner-administrator's part were non-existent. The only way the women ever got a raise was if the state increased the minimum wage.

Like wages, other benefits such as vacations and holidays were also the minimum allowable under the province's labour laws. Employees with one or more years' service received two weeks annual vacation with pay. Other benefits such as paid sick days or compassionate leave were non-existent.

Wages

The collective agreement reached between the union and the owner-administrator indicates that the women made substantive gains in both wages and benefits. The collective agreement was signed on December 8, 1987. It was a three year agreement retroactive on wages only to January 1, 1987. The union and the owner-administrator agreed that the January 1, 1987 wage rate would be set at \$6.00 per hour for all classifications. This meant that the women would receive \$2.00 per hour retroactive increase for every hour worked in 1987.

Effective January 1, 1988 the rates of pay by classification would be as follows.

Housekeepers, laundry workers, and dietary aides	\$7.00
Nurse's aides	\$7.25
Cooks	\$7.50
Activity director	\$7.75

(source: collective agreement between Journey's End Nursing Home and C.B.R.T. & G.W., Local 620)

In the final year of the agreement, beginning January 1, 1989, the following rates of pay came into effect.

Housekeepers, laundry workers and dietary aides	\$7.35
Nurse's aides	\$7.61
Cooks	\$7.88

Activity Director

\$8.14

(source: collective agreement between Journey's End Nursing Home and the C.B.R.T. & G.W., Local 620)

The above figures indicate that as a result of unionization wages have increased dramatically. For some people, despite the increases, the women's wages might still seem low. However when put into the local context, these wages appear quite good for this area. In 1987, the year in which the women unionized, the per capita income for this area averaged below \$8500. At the same time incomes in this area were about 35% below the national mean. (deRoche and deRoche, 1987:2)

Vacations and Holidays

Prior to unionization employees with one or more years service received two weeks vacation with pay. Under the collective agreement the length of vacations were changed to reflect years of service. Employees with up to two years service would get two weeks with pay. For those with between two and seven years service the length of vacation was increased to three weeks with pay. Employees with eight or more years service would be entitled to four weeks annual vacation.

Prior to unionization the only difference between a statutory holiday and a regular day of work was that those working the holiday received time and a half for the shift.

If a girls regular day off happened to be a holiday she didn't get no extra days off. All you got was the extra half day's pay if you worked a full shift. The reason I say a full shift is because of this. Suppose tomorrow was the holiday and I was on backshift tonight. He wouldn't pay me overtime for the hour between 11 o'clock and midnight. Instead I would get overtime for seven hours. Whoever worked the next backshift would get overtime for the first hour. That's the way he did it.

Under the collective agreement the owner-administrator's practice in this area was radically changed.

If an employee's normal work day falls on a holiday that person receives regular pay for the day plus another day off with pay. In cases where a holiday occurs during an employees' vacation period they receive an additional day's vacation. When an employee's regular day off is a holiday, that employee gets another working day off with pay.

In the case of Christmas and New Year's day employees now receive either one or the other off. First choice is given according to seniority. Prior to unionization these shifts were worked by the women regularly scheduled. Often times women would end up working both days.

Sick Leave and Other Types Of Leave

Prior to unionization the owner-administrator frowned upon employees being absent from regularly scheduled work. It made little difference whether or not they had a legitimate reason.

Before we joined the union, girls practically had to

beg to get time off without pay. Even at that he might or he might not give it to you, depending on the mood he was in that day. If he did give you the time off he never let you forget about it. The first time he needed something he would throw in your face that he had let you go early because you had a doctor's appointment or what ever the case might have been. One thing he used to do all the time was if a girl was off sick for a day or two he'd make her work her regularly scheduled days off. You didn't get a choice. You either did it or he was liable to fire you right on the spot. Most girls would put up with coming to work sick rather than deal with him. He wouldn't even let girls switch with each other if they needed time off. That was suggested to him a couple of times but he wouldn't hear tell of it. You worked when you were told to or else you didn't work there. (Laundry worker)

Under the collective agreement all employees in the bargaining unit now have sick days. The women no longer have to "beg" for time off due to sickness, medical appointments, as well as deaths and funerals.

All employees are entitled to sick leave at the rate of one day for every twenty-two shifts worked. Sick leave is accumulative to a maximum of thirty-five days. Along with sick leave the women are entitled to up to twenty-four hours of paid leave per year for medical appointments which cannot be scheduled for regular days off. In addition to these forms of leave, if a death occurs in the immediate family the women are entitled to six days compassionate leave with pay.

While the improvements in the area of wages and benefits may be far from ideal, they are a welcome change from what the women had previously.

Look if anyone tells you they were not happy with the deal the union got us they're lying. Every girl up there was as happy as a pig in shit. Almost twice the pay, better vacations, sick days and to top it off two bucks an hour retroactive. In one cheque I got half a year's pay. You know the girls would have taken more if the union could have gotten it. I mean that's human nature. If you compare what the girls get now to what they got before, there is just no comparison.

(Housekeeper)

This passage is for the most part typical of the women's responses. They were pleased with the agreement.

Changes in the Division of Labour

In this section we will examine the women's contention that unionization has resulted in major changes in both the approach to doing the work and the content of the work. Essentially the women claim that the division of labour in the nursing home has been altered, for the better, as a result of unionization. The fundamental importance of these changes for women is that with them they no longer see themselves as domestic labourers. We have argued throughout this thesis that prior to unionization the women were used as domestic labourers in a variation of the domestic labour process.

As part of our analysis of the labour process prior to unionization, in Chapter Three we looked at both the backgrounds of the women and the various reasons why they had originally sought paid employment at the nursing home. We saw

that there was no single reason. However among the many reasons given, a common one was the desire to be a nurse. The ability of these women to be nurses was limited by a lack of formal training. The majority of institutions employing 'nurses' required training as a prerequisite for employment. Journey's End Nursing Home was an exception to this 'rule'. Women could get employment here as 'nurses' with little formal training. The only formal training was a course which required attending ten, three hour sessions in a course known as Care in the Home. Though not designed to train people for paid employment, it had in fact taken on that purpose. However the employment these women could get came with strings attached. In return for being employed as 'nurses', they had to accept a heavy load of domestic tasks. These women were domestic nurses. At best, the women grudgingly accepted this arrangement. They saw no viable alternative.

We also argued that the use of women with little more than domestic skill was not the result of chance. It was the result of design. As Balbo (1982) points out it is a widely known and accepted fact that women are the providers of human services in our society. The bulk of the work in the nursing home is just that --- human service work. Employing women with mainly domestic labour skills and experience offered the owner-administrator benefits which would have been difficult, if not impossible, to extract from other sources of labour.

These women were more than a competent and capable workforce. They were a source of cheap labour because they lacked formally recognized skills. Yet precisely because they possessed a wide range of domestic skills they could be used interchangeably for a wide range of tasks. For example, nurse's aides could and would, if necessary, fill other positions (such as laundry) if needed, and vice versa. Domestic labourers also required little or no supervision. For the most part the employees of Journey's End Nursing Home supervised themselves. They knew what work had to be done and they did it. There was an added advantage to employing domestic nurses --- they were easily replaceable. But arguably the greatest advantage these women offered as employees was the approach to working which they brought with them. This approach was what Jerry White (1988) calls the "get it all done approach". It is an approach commonly associated with the domestic labour process. Workers in a paid labour context generally have predefined limits on the amount done per shift. At the nursing home this was not the case. The workload varied from shift to shift and day to day. Additional tasks that came up were added to an already heavy workload. The women strived to get everything done each and every shift. Like domestic labourers they had to constantly be prepared for the unexpected. A commonly used practice among domestic labourers is fragmentation. Fragmentation -- the ability to do several unrelated tasks at the same time -

- was a must in the nursing home.

On a good day, in order to get everything done, the girls had to walk swiftly. But let me tell you, on a bad day the girls never stopped running. If the girls had ever tried doing tasks one at a time, nothing ever would have gotten done. You didn't think about it, you just did it. With the way he had us working, all we were was glorified housekeepers. Minding house and looking after babies. It might sound cruel but that's all the residents are up there -- a bunch of overgrown babies. You can take it from me that with the work the girls had to do, there were a lot more bad days than good days. (Nurse's Aide)

The previous point was one of the major reasons the women felt they needed a union.

You couldn't work the way the girls did up there for long. Really from the time you started a shift until the time it ended you were running. The girls were expected to get all the work done. Honestly, though, that was an impossible task. You see it was like housework, it was never all done. Just when you think you're going to get caught up, something else that needed to be done popped up. It's a vicious circle, the harder you work the more you wear yourself out. Working like that catches up to you. You end up exhausted and without the union the only thing a girl could do was quit. There was no one else to turn to. The girls couldn't go to Mr.***** and ask him to change it. He'd have laughed in our faces and told us to stop complaining and get back to work. He used to tell the girls they should be thankful they were allowed to work there. He was always going on about the stack of applications he had from people looking for work. What could the girls do? If they wanted to work they had to meet his expectations and trying to do that meant you wore yourself out. (nurse's aide)

This passage brings out one of the major problems the women had with the work -- the pace. The owner-administrator's high expectations literally forced the women to take the 'get-it-all- done' approach.

The women saw themselves as the victims of this approach and the owner-administrator as the benefactor. Changing this system or approach to working was not seen as something that could easily be done. Like all other aspects of the labour process the women saw this approach to working as being in place because it was of benefit to the owner-administrator.

He had it made, didn't he? The girls were foolish enough to do the work and he sat back and reaped the rewards of their efforts. When I look back now it seems so ridiculous that the girls took it for as long as they did. You know, it was never him that left there at the end of the day dragging his arse. I am not kidding when I say he got the work of two or three people out of each of us. Look at the money that saved him. That money paid for his trips to Florida and those fancy cars he drives. It was bad enough that he treated the girls the way he did but on top of that he used to flaunt it in our faces. If anything, he should have been thanking the girls. They paid for everything he got out of that place. There is no way in god's world he would ever have changed things on his own. There was no advantage in it for him; he had nothing to gain. That's one of the big reasons the girls needed the union. The way they worked had to change.

(Housekeeper)

The women saw the owner-administrator as monetarily benefitting from the grueling pace at which they worked. The savings accrued by this means translated into a better quality of life for the owner-administrator. A quality of life that would, from the women's perspective, be unattainable without the labour process used at the nursing home.

For the women changing the labour process by altering both the approach to and the content of work has been one of the major achievements of unionization.

No it's not anything like it used to be. The girls don't have to maintain that all out pace anymore. The approach is much more relaxed. The girls only do as much as they can. Like before the girls were lucky if they got a coffee break. A lot of times if you did get one it was cut short because you had to go and do something. Now we get two, fifteen minute breaks and the girls make sure they get every second of it. Anything that comes up now during break it can wait. It's the same thing with lunch break. With the union the pay and the benefits are much better and don't get me wrong those things are important. But myself I don't think they are as important as the changes to the work. You know, wages could have tripled but if the way the girls were forced to work had stayed the same they'd have been no better off in the long run. What good would the money be if you were burned out and in the end had to quit because you just couldn't physically do it anymore. Do you see what I mean?

(nurse's aide)

This is the women's belief that unionization brought an end to the 'get-it-all-done' approach. Since unionizing, the women have slowed down from the pace at which they had previously worked.

The other aspect of the work which the women wanted changed was what they refer to as the content of the work. While we are treating this as separate from the previous point, in reality both are closely connected. In sociological terms this is generally referred to as the division of labour. The women wanted spelled out which work belonged to the various job classifications. Though it is not directly stated in the interviews, basically the women appear to be referring to job descriptions. Before unionization the various job classifications used at the nursing home such as nurse's

aides, housekeeping staff, cooks and dietary aides meant very little in terms of the division of labour. In reality the classifications were nothing more than titles. As one listens to the women speak about this problem, it becomes obvious that they should all have been included in one classification --- general domestic labour. While this was an issue which ultimately affected all of the employees, its backers were largely nurse's aides who had three reasons for wanting this changed.

Look at the work the girls were doing. He had us doing everybody elses' work plus our own. That wasn't fair. Oh sure sometimes he made them help us but that wasn't enough. Just taking care of the residents was hard enough. Don't worry they could keep two girls going steady trying to meet their needs. But on top of that we had a load of housework to do. In between resident care the girls had an endless assortment of other work which they were expected to get done. Because of all the things we had to do that's why we were wearing out. The work is still hard, the residents haven't gotten any lighter. You know the residents and their personal care hasn't changed. But now at least the girls are able to concentrate on them. Before the girls had to rush through the care work because there were a lot of other things they had to do -- like peeling the vegetables. By rights that should have been done by kitchen staff all along. Mopping floors, gathering up the garbage, washing walls and general housework --- those things should all have been done by domestics. That's what they were there for. (nurse's aide)

Here we see the first of the reasons for wanting the division of labour changed. The nurse's aides saw themselves as being forced to do work which they did not regard as rightly theirs.

The second reason the nurse's aides wanted the division of labour changed was because they viewed being required to

do housework as demeaning. All of the work in the nursing home could be considered domestic work. But what we see here is the women differentiating between what is and is not domestic labour.

Lets face it, girls that went to work there as nurse's aides didn't go there to do housework. If it were housework the girls wanted they could stay home. There is no shortage of cooking, cleaning and washing clothes at home. The girls and I agree that what we should be doing is resident care or if you want to think of it another way --- nursing. That's what the girls were hired for and that's why they went there. You take a trip to a hospital or another nursing home around here -- you won't see nurse's aides anywhere doing the type of things we had to do. They don't have to do those things because they got a union that takes care of them. The girls up (at) the home didn't have the luxury of a union to protect them. So they had to do what he told them. I got friends that work in other places. They used to laugh when I'd tell them what it was like up there. If a union could do that for them why couldn't it do the same thing for us? It's sort of funny but when I first went up there I didn't really think that much about the work. But later on when I'd talk about it with my friends, I started to realise that what the girls were doing was plain old housework. That's when my eyes opened. (Nurse's aide)

This passage is an excellent illustration of how the nurse's aides saw the work they did as demeaning. At the same time it points out one aspect of what having a union meant to the women. A union would protect the women and ensure that they only had to do the work which they saw as rightfully theirs.

The third reason the women wanted changes made in this area was because the work was mentally and physically

exhausting. This point is extremely important because it illustrates the women's recognition that while improvements in wages and benefits were important, without changes in the labour process, the women would not likely have been around long enough to reap the benefits.

We lost a lot of good people up there because of the workload. Before we joined the union I was ready to quit. It's not that I wanted to, you know I really needed the money. But I was burning out. Lots of girls burned out and then they quit. Look if we had gotten twenty dollars an hour and if the work had stayed the same, that place would still be going through girls like crazy. When you try and walk but your legs keep giving out, you can't very well work. Put it this way before the union, when your shift finished and you went home every part of your body ached. When you came back the next day you still ached. You never had enough time off for your body to recover. (Nurse's aide)

This passage vividly brings out the women's awareness of why physically changes in the labour process were needed.

The women speak of many changes in both the approach and the division of labour which they regard as resulting from unionization.

There is simply no comparison between the way the home was and the way it is now. The union made sure of that and they are going to continue to make sure it never goes back to that again. Now that the union is there the workload is much lighter for everyone, not just the nurse's aides. You know some of the other girls figured us aides were trying to lighten our load at their expense. That was never the intent and it never happened. If anything the owner's expectations have gone down. He knows that he is not the only one with a say up there anymore. He has got to contend with the union. If he could have stopped the girls from slowing down you can bet he would have done it. I'll tell you how that slowing down has cost him. Before the union there were only two aides per shift in our section. That was twenty-three residents between them. But since

the girls slowed down he has had to increase the staff. The work wasn't getting done so he had no choice but to get more help. Now on dayshift there are two eight hour girls plus a five hour girl working from seven until noon. On the evening shift there are two fulltime girls plus a four hour girl from four until eight. It is that way now seven days a week. That is just in our section. It's the same thing all through the home. Take domestic and laundry for example. Used to be one girl in each of those jobs just five days a week. Not anymore. Now there is a domestic on eight hours a day, seven days a week. Otherwise that work wouldn't get done. If the aides don't do it there is no one else. So he has got to have more help. Down in the laundry there used to be one fulltime girl Monday to Friday. If the aides ran out of linen and towels on the weekends they had to run down and wash a load. With the slowdown the girls didn't have time for that anymore. It's gotten so there is hardly enough time to take care of the residents even with the extra help. So anyway now there is an eight hour girl and a four hour girl in laundry Monday to Friday, as well as an eight hour girl on weekends. If there weren't, the residents would have to lay in the dirty sheets, the girls wouldn't have any other choice. [Without a weekend laundry worker the nurse's aides would run out of linen. G.S.] So you see things really have changed since the girls joined the union. (nurse's aide)

As this lengthy passage points out changes have taken place since the women joined the union. As we listen to the women speak we cannot help but sense the satisfaction with the changes.

The best thing about working up there now is that we don't have to run around like a bunch of chickens with their heads cut off. If something doesn't get done it goes to the next shift. That never happened before. If work piled up you increased your speed. Even with the new pace, the work is still hard. But at least now you don't crawl home exhausted.

(Nurse's aide)

For the women the union is responsible for these changes.

They continuously allude to the idea that the union has broken the owner-administrator's control over the division of labour. In the next section we will examine the issue of control. We will attempt to unravel the women's understanding of this complex issue. As well we will attempt to assess the women's claim that the union now shares that control with the owner-administrator.

Control of the Division of Labour

The question of who controls the division of labour is a deep-rooted problem. Throughout the interviews the general response of the women is that prior to unionization the owner-administrator had absolute control. However, unionization is seen as having altered this situation. For the women control is now shared between the owner-administrator and the union.

You see before the girls joined the union he used to make all the decisions. That was his nursing home and he ran it his way and for his own benefit. Nobody could challenge him. If any of the girls didn't like what he wanted they had one choice---quit. Really I guess you could say he was a heavy handed prick. Sometimes I'm sure he went out of his way to be miserable because he had all the power. The girls were no threat to him. All we were was a bunch of stupid women. Well I tell you the girls surprised him. He didn't know what happened when we joined the union. I think he figured the girls had always put up with his bullshit and always would. He got a surprise didn't he? The union has put him in his place. With the union there, it's really a case of his power being reduced. Look at the changes that have taken place since the girls joined the union. None of those things would ever have happened without the union. The girls had no choice in the way they worked and

they had no say about what work they would and wouldn't do. Because there was no benefit for him in changing the way the work got done. He only did things which benefitted him. Us joining that union has cost him dearly and it's going to continue to cost him. (nurse's aide)

This passage brings out several of the women's ideas relating to the role of the union. The basis of their understanding appears to hinge on three ideas. The first idea is that they were the only ones who stood to benefit from joining a union. The second is that joining the union has meant a reduction in the owner-administrator's control. Related to this is the idea that what now exists is a form of shared control between the union and the owner-administrator.

First we will examine the women's understanding of who benefits from a union. This idea is a direct extension of the women's common sense understanding of how the business side of the nursing home works. For the women the nursing home was a very lucrative business for the owner-administrator. They knew this was so because they experienced it on a daily basis. The women saw the owner-administrator living what they considered to be a lavish lifestyle. For them the only explanation was that the nursing home was a "gold mine". The following is one of many passages which illustrate this belief.

You didn't have to be any genius to know what was happening up there. You know really that's the one thing the girls understood. Look the girls did the work and he collected the rewards. The place was a gold mine for him. Not only did he pay us the lowest possible wage but he was also getting the

work of three people out of everyone of us. The money he saved from the way the girls worked all went into his pocket. You know if he could have gotten by with less workers he would have because it would have meant more money for him. The only thing better than what was going on would have been if the old people could have looked after themselves. Then he wouldn't have had to pay anyone. You should have seen him on payday. He practically used to cry. His lifestyle required a lot of money. You can't live the way he does without making big money. It's impossible. All the girls need to do is look at how they live. They don't make big money so they can't have that fancy lifestyle. Doesn't that make sense to you? The man not only had one thirty thousand dollar car, but two. You imagine that's sixty thousand dollars for cars alone. On top of that he turned around and bought a house in the most expensive area on this island. That house cost almost two hundred thousand dollars. Picture what the payments on that would be every month. There is no one that will ever convince us that he wasn't making it. But you know, I truly hope the bastard enjoyed it while he could because the girls are going to take it back now. He is going to get his come uppance now that the girls joined a union. (laundry worker)

All fifteen of the women interviewed who were employed prior to unionization offered comments similar to the one above. The women compared their wages and lifestyle with how they perceived the owner-administrator to be living. In this way they concluded that the nursing home was a virtual 'gold mine' for the owner-administrator. In this context joining the union meant that the owner-administrator would be forced to give up more of the 'gold' and at the same time force him to accept a lower standard of living. This idea is problematic because the women assume that the owner-administrator's lifestyle is completely dependent upon the nursing home. It

is entirely possible that there may be other factors contributing to his lifestyle of which they are not aware. However, the women do not even consider alternative possibilities.

While the previous point may contain merit we see as more plausible the women's belief that the owner-administrator's power has been sharply reduced as a result of unionization. The women use two examples to express their understanding of this. In their 'eyes' he would never have willingly consented to sharing more of the "gold". Along with this the women saw unionization as offering no benefits to the owner-administrator. From their perspective he was in fact going to lose. Therefore they could expect him to oppose the union. However from the women's perspective the owner-administrator did not vigorously unionization. This was interpreted by the women not as the result of a change of attitude on his part but rather as an indication of the power of the union. The women saw the union as a source of power which the owner-administrator was unable to challenge.

You don't think for a minute that he would ever have let the union in if he could have stopped it, do you? You know sometimes at the home he tells us the union was the best thing that ever happened. When I hear him say that I feel like telling him to give us a break. What else would you expect that man to say? The last thing he would acknowledge is that the union beat him. He knows just as well as the girls do that there was nothing he could do once the union got rolling. When the girls started to slowdown and he didn't fight it, it was pretty obvious that there was nothing he could do. The girls are watching him like hawks now. If he ever tries to pull anything like the shit he used to,

the union will come down on him with both feet.
Don't worry. He watches his p's and q's
now. (nurse's aide)

What we see here is one of the ways in which the women understand that the owner-administrator's control and power was reduced by the union.

The second understanding the women have of this break in the owner-administrator's power and control has directly to do with the changes they made in the labour process. This change is also mentioned in the previous passage. Reference is made to the fact that when the women slowed down, the owner-administrator failed to contest the changes. For the women this marks the first time they were able to use their collective power.

Negotiation and Re-negotiation

Earlier in this chapter it was pointed out that as result of unionization there is now a process of negotiation and re-negotiation which takes place on a continual basis at the nursing home. It is played out on both formal and informal levels. While these levels may be used separately, they often are intertwined. It is within these negotiations that the women are often confronted with the limits of their power.

Throughout the interviews the women offer comments which indicate these limits of power and also subtle changes in the

owner-administrator's approach to dealing with employees. A nurse's aide who was also a member of the union executive offered the following comments.

Mr. ***** called me into his office one day. I didn't have a clue about why he wanted to see me. Anyway when I got to his office the shop steward was there. Mr.***** told me that he had been going over my file and had noticed that I had been missing a lot of time lately. I was shocked. In the previous year I think I had missed three shifts and only because of some family problems I had. I told this to Mr.***** and said you must be mistaken. He claimed it was no mistake that it was right there in my file. He turned to the shop steward ***** and told her to tell me. She agreed with him. My own shop steward agreed with the boss. Mr.***** went on and on about the seriousness of this problem and how there were others on staff who would like to have more shifts. I figured he was going to fire me. But after going on and he told me he would let me off this time with a verbal warning. First chance I got I called our union representative and told him what happened. He told me not to worry, that he would straighten it out and get back to me. Well I guess he did because within an hour of my call, I was called back into Mr.***** office again. This time only the union representative and Mr.***** were there. Mr.***** apologized to me for what he had done and claimed that it had all been a misunderstanding. I took his apology and went back to work. But there is no doubt in my mind that all he was doing was trying to intimidate me.(Nurse's aide)

While there is no doubt that what the above passage describes is a form of intimidation it does however differ from the approach used by the owner-administrator prior to unionization. Prior to unionization incidents such as this commonly took place in front of both employees and residents of the nursing home. At least with the union in place these meetings now take place in the privacy of the owner-

administrator's office. Not only did the owner-administrator meet with the person in question but also made sure that the shop steward was present. From the above passage it appears that the shop steward was used not to aid the person in question but rather to confirm the owner-administrator's accusations.

Perhaps the best illustration of learning the limits of the union's power were expressed by the Chairperson of the health and safety committee.

Before the union the girls never had plastic gloves to wear when working around the residents. Our committee negotiated with management over this issue. It was agreed that management would supply the gloves. Well we got the gloves but they were useless. When you put them on they ripped. The committee went back to management about this and it was agreed that we would get surgical gloves. In the meantime we kept using the old ones. Then one day, one of the girls asked me when we were getting the new gloves. I told her it would be when they arrived. She told me they were in the storeroom. Well I blew my stack. I charged into Mr.***** office and demanded that the girls get the new gloves. I told him if we didn't get the gloves the girls were walking out there and then. He told me I had better call the union representative first. In fact he picked up the phone and dialed the number. Anyway I told the union representative what was going on. He said whatever you do don't walk out. He also told me to apologize to Mr.***** for my actions and go back to work. I learned right there and then that there are a lot of things we can't do.(Nurse's aide)

The above passage illustrates how the women learn the limitations of the union's power by practice and experience.

While the previous points may be seen as ways in which management continues to exercise power in the nursing home

there are other examples which come out in the interviews. Since the arrival of the union the owner-administrator has established a policy under which he allows employees to take a week off work without pay. This policy is administered solely by the owner-administrator.

Let me tell you about this thing he has started where a girl can get a week off without pay. To be honest I'm not sure why the union hasn't kicked up a stink about it. In order to get that week off you have to kiss his butt. He decides who gets it and who doesn't. It does not matter what your reason is. The only thing that matters is if he thinks you should get it. I asked for a week off. He said he would think it over. When I asked him about it again he said there were no girls to take my shifts. The very next day the girl who works with me asked for a week off and got it. That rotten prick did that to get back at me for something else. That thing is going to have the girls fighting with one another. (Nurse's aide)

It appears obvious from this passage that the owner-administrator's main purpose in putting this policy in place is to divide the women.

One other point which illustrates a change in the owner-administrator's approach to exerting control and power in the nursing home can be seen in the hiring policy. Prior to unionization the owner-administrator had for the most part hired friends of employees. With unionization not only did this practice stop, but the type of employee hired changed. Rather than recruit women with only domestic skills, as had been the case in the past, the owner-administrator began to recruit formally trained personnel.

The women have mixed responses in terms of the

significance of this change. There are three types of responses.

The first group, which represents the majority of women interviewed, do not see this change as problematic.

That doesn't affect us, we have seniority. Anyone he hires now has to start at the bottom of the list. So you see, he can hire whoever he wants but we're safe. Besides whoever he hires has to do the same work as the rest of us. (Nurse's aide)

This response is typical of the manner in which the majority of women see it. They have seniority, so they are safe.

The second group is not bothered by this change but see it quite differently.

Sure he changed his hiring policy. Personally it doesn't matter to me. I figure I'll have a job there till I'm ready to leave. It might not be the job I got now but that don't matter. I'll do whatever I have to as long as I get paid. Only a fool would ever have believed that things weren't going to change after we unionized. With the money he pays now, he is not going to hire anymore women like us. When he hired us we were all he could get and we took the work because it was all we could get. Something you should know about people is that they have short memories. You see if the nursing home had been unionized, we'd never have gotten hired in the first place. (Nurse's aide)

Clearly the women in this group see the change in hiring policy as 'natural'. While the passage above singles out increased wages as the main reason for this change, increased benefits and improved work conditions are factors which others in this group mention.

The third group of women are clearly bothered by the changes in hiring policy.

Do you know that before the union came in I used to

cook breakfast. I was the breakfast cook up there. Not any more though. He (owner-administrator) came to me one day and told me that I couldn't do it anymore. I was told that I would strictly be a dietary aide. He replaced me with one who came from the cooking school... I watch her. She doesn't do anything that I didn't... Even the new dietary aides are trained before he hires them. How safe is my job? Sure I mentioned it to the shop steward a couple of times but nothing was done about it. What did they care, it didn't affect them. Wait and see when they get demoted, you'll be able to hear the screaming all the way down town. Little old me will be having the last laugh. (Dietary aide)

This passage provides a concrete example of how the changes in hiring policy have already affected the work done by one woman. It is also significant because it indicates that unionization has not resolved a problem which existed prior to it. Precisely this has to do with seeing problems as affecting individuals as opposed to the collective. In the past when the owner-administrator rode rough shod over one or two of the women, it did not result in collective action. Collective action, as was shown in Chapter 4, resulted from an event which affected all of the employees. In the above case there was no collective action because the collective did not see it as affecting them.

The changes in hiring policy should not be thought of as inevitable. They do however seem to reflect the widely held belief in our society that you get what you pay for.

It is questionable as to how much security the seniority list provides for the women. The woman above who was demoted is at the very top of the seniority list. When it was decided

that to be a cook required having formal training, being at the top of the seniority list did not save her job. In fact, if we couple the hiring policy with the management's rights clause contained in the collective agreement, it is obvious that administration can create new job classifications whenever it wants. Under the collective agreement those with seniority may apply for jobs in a new classification, but only if they are qualified. If, for example, administration decides that only Certified Nurse's Aides should do resident care and creates a new classification to reflect that decision, then most nurse's aides are not going to meet the qualifications needed.

Finally changes in the hiring policy have brought an end to a practice in the nursing home which pre-dates the women joining the union. Until the change in policy it was fairly common for employees to move from one job to another as openings became available. Now however because the owner-administrator requires that people filling job vacancies possess formal qualifications there will be much less internal movement among the employees.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have focussed on changes which have taken place in the labour process as a result of unionization. Clearly major improvements have taken place. These

improvements are most noticeable in the area of wages and benefits. Prior to unionizing these women received four dollars per hour; benefits were virtually non-existent. Through the collective agreement these women now have sick leave, better vacations, compassionate leave, etc.

While these changes are important, unionization has also changed the relationship between the women and the owner-administrator. Prior to unionization the women saw themselves as having no say in anything that went on at the nursing home. The owner-administrator held absolute control and decision making power. Before the union was in place the owner-administrator disciplined employees as he saw fit. He figuratively raked the women over the 'coals' whenever he felt like it. Employees who dared to question his authority often times were fired on the spot. Under the collective agreement there is now a formal grievance procedure in place to deal with problems as they arise.

These changes are important and indicate that the owner-administrator's absolute control over the decision making processes at the nursing home have been broken. This is extremely important in terms of the labour process because the women have through use of their collective power been able to make changes in both the approach and content of the work.

Finally it has been shown in this chapter that in spite of the changes which have taken place it one would be mistaken

to view the nursing home as completely changed. In fact much of the antagonism which existed prior to unionization still exists with the union in place. This antagonism is part of the struggle and conflict between the women and the owner-administrator that are negotiated and renegotiated both formally and informally on a day to day basis.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

Introduction

At the beginning of this thesis, in chapter one, we outlined the purpose as threefold. Firstly, we wanted to find out why the women wanted a union. In other words what were the problems in the work place. This was accomplished by examining the labour process prior to unionization.

Secondly, this case study was undertaken to find out how the employees of a nursing home went about unionizing. In doing this we were able to show the women's experiences -- including their hopes, fears and misgivings.

Thirdly, having looked at why the women wanted a union and how they went about joining one, we shifted our attention to an examination of the results of unionization. In other words what changes took place as a result of unionization.

The Findings

If this case study has shown anything it is that women

working in the nursing home were the immediate beneficiaries of unionization. Within a year of being refused a 12 cent per hour increase in wages, they received a \$2.00 per hour raise. Along with the increase in wages they had also made other substantial gains. For the first time they were entitled to sick days, improved vacations, compassionate leave, etc.. Unionization has given the women a formal grievance procedure which means they no longer have to accept the one sided authoritarian approach which the owner-administrator used in the past. The process of unionizing and getting a collective agreement in place has resulted in changed attitudes among the women. Where the women may have been acceptingly passive prior to unionizing there is now a general sense of defiance among them.

This research has also shown that, at least in this case, the day to day exploitative work conditions and employer mistreatment did not initially lead the women to unionize. We argued that this was because these conditions and treatment were experienced on an individual basis. The decision to unionize resulted from an action on the owner-administrator's part which affected all of the employees. In other words a problem experienced by the collective resulted in collective action.

Another finding of this case study was that prior to unionization the women employed at Journey's End Nursing Home had been employed in a variation of the domestic labour

process. This was surprising because it was totally unexpected. Given the nature of the work we had expected that the women might mention similarities between their paid work and domestic work experiences. Jerry White (1988) in his study of hospital employees noted that several women drew parallels between the work in both spheres.

However, this particular group of women understood their paid work experience as much more than just similar to their domestic experience. In interview after interview, they claimed that not only what work they were doing but also how they were doing it was basically the same as the work they did at home prior to taking paid employment. The only differences the women noted were that for this work they were paid and they did it outside their home. The women claimed that one of the reasons they wanted the union was to deal with this problem. Interestingly, of the three women interviewed who were not at the nursing home prior to unionization, none of them thought of their paid work and domestic labour experience as being the same.

For the women there were several reasons for wanting the labour process changed. One was because working in this manner resulted in burn out for the women. The women recognized that without changes in the labour process, improved wages and benefits would have been of little value. As was shown in both chapters four and five, this problem was not solved through the collective bargaining process. Rather

it came to an end through a work slowdown suggested to the women by the union representative.

Suggestions For Further Research

More research is necessary to determine the extent to which the domestic labour process, which is mainly associated with the private sphere, is used in the sphere of paid employment. Was the use of it at Journey's End Nursing Home simply an isolated case.

Another area which requires research is the role of the state in nursing homes. The present research has not examined the role of the state. It would be especially interesting to examine the role of the state in the areas of funding and regulating nursing homes.

Finally, one further area in which research might prove interesting is the relationship between unionization and employers' demands for better qualified employees. The present research indicates that, at least in nursing homes, unionization may result in the employer seeking employees with formally recognized skills.

APPENDIX IInterview Guide For Employees

Employees Background:

1. What is your marital status? If married how long?
2. Do you have children? If yes, how many and what are there ages?

Getting a Job:

3. How did you get your job?
4. Did you know anyone that worked there?
5. Was this particular nursing home your first choice as a place of employment?
6. What qualifications were needed in order to gain employment at the nursing home?
7. Was it necessary to have previous experience?
8. Did you have previous experience in this type of work?

Training:

9. Did you take the home nursing course?
10. What was your purpose in taking this course?
11. How or from whom did you find out about this course?
12. Is that course designed for employment purposes?
13. Can you give me examples of what is taught in that course?
14. Was the subject matter new to you?
15. Is there a practical component attached to this course?
16. Where can a person complete the practical component?
Are there other places where it can be done?
17. What does the practical component involve?
18. Did you get paid for this work?

The Job:

19. Were you employed at the nursing home prior to unionization?
20. What was your job?
21. What did that involve?
22. Can you describe a typical shift?
23. Was the work the same on all shifts?
24. Who supervised your work?
25. Did you have much contact with your employer?
26. Were you a full or part-time employee?

27. How many hours per week were you working? Did you have a say in the hours you worked?
28. How much were you paid? Did you receive raises on a regular basis?
29. What benefits did you receive for working at the nursing home?
30. How many weeks of annual vacation did you get? Did the number of weeks vary depending on how long you had been employed?
31. What other type of benefits did you receive? For example were you entitled to sick days?
32. If you had problems with or complaints about the work was there a procedure in place for dealing with them?
33. How would you describe working at the nursing at that time? Was it a good place to work?

The Union:

34. Is there a union at the nursing home now?
35. Are you a member of the union?
36. Were you in favour of joining a union?
37. Was a union needed at the nursing home? Why or why not?
38. Had you ever been a member of a union?

39. If married, is your husband a member of a union?
40. What union did you join? Why that particular union?
41. Was the decision to unionize, a group decision? In otherwords, did the employees meet as a group and decide to join a union?
42. When and how did you find out about the plan to unionize?
43. Can you describe the way in which you were approached to sign a union card?
44. Are you active in the union?
45. Are you a member of the excutive? If not would you like to be?
46. Are you a member of a committee? If not would you like to be?
47. Do you attend the meetings?
48. Do you have any problem attending meetings?
49. How was it decided what would be negotiated in the contract talks?
50. Is the union executive open and approachable?
51. If you have a problem does the union deal with it?
52. Did management oppose unionization?
53. Now that the union has been in place for awhile do you still think it is needed?

Working With The Union In Place:

54. Has working in the nursing home changed since joining the union? If yes, in what ways?
55. Do you still have the same job?
56. Can you describe a typical shift with the union in place? How is that different from before the union?
57. Are your hours of work the same?
58. How much are you paid now?
59. Have benefits improved as a result of unionization? What benefits do you have now?
60. Has unionization affected your relationship with your employer? Does he treat you any differently?
61. Now that the nursing home is unionized is there a grievance procedure in place to deal with problems?
62. Where do you think the money came from to cover the increased cost of wages and benefits?
63. Have you noticed any other changes at the nursing home since joining the union? Have the employer's hiring practices changed?
64. In your opinion have you and your co-workers benefited from joining a union?

APPENDIX II

This appendix was, at my request, written by an employee of the nursing home. At her request the author will remain anonymous. Effectively this person has, based on her experience, recreated examples of a typical day or three shift period at the nursing home. The woman who wrote this appendix had, at the time of the research, been employed there as a nurse's aide for approximately five years. It is my hope in placing this appendix here that it will assist readers in seeing how the work day at the nursing home has changed as a result of unionization.

The following are samples of a three shift period in the nursing home. Both samples include a day, afternoon and backshift. In other words the samples represent one day in the nursing home. Sample one depicts a typical day prior to unionization. Sample two is a description of a typical day following unionization. It should be noted that the samples are not actual but typical days.

Sample One

6:45 A.M. Come into work and get report from 11-7 shift. Now our shift begins. We hated this part because we knew what

laid ahead immediately. One aide gave out the diabetic needles. The other aide had to go upstairs and start with this one particular resident, Jack. Jack would fight something awful, hitting girls, holding on to the bedrails, clutching the bedsheets, kicking and spitting at you. He would have peed the bed, all over the floor and shit his pants. That's not so bad but he puts his hands in it and smears that shit everywhere. Well by the time I got the basin of water from the bathroom across the hall, the other aide would join me. We would shake our heads then start in. Next thing you know the phone is ringing or maybe it's Mac ringing for the pan. Often it would be both. One girl runs for the phone, the other downstairs to put Mac on the bed pan.

Who would I meet in the hall? The cook, saying breakfast is ready. Well I would tell her that we weren't. She would light into me and tell me that we were messing up her day and putting her behind. She would tell me that she planned to report us. I would tell her to go ahead, I don't really care. Here we are up to our eyeballs in piss and shit and she is worrying about falling behind. She really wouldn't report us. Because she knew she probably would have caught shit for not helping us catch up. Cook or no cook, she was supposed to pitch in. I would leave her there and go empty the bedpan, tidy Mac's bed and then head back up stairs. Both of us would finish getting Jack cleaned up, change his bed and put him back in it. All this time there is another resident in the

room with Jack shouting " Oh God the stink of shit, that man should be shot".

By the time we got finished with Jack other residents are hollering for breakfast. We would have to run around and get all the residents either rolled up in bed or seated next to their beds and put their bibs on for them. Then we start giving out the trays. The cook is hollering again for us to get the lead out. You're going just as fast as you can, you got a tray in each hand. We'd get about half the breakfasts out and the bells would start ringing. You go answer the bell and ask what's wrong and a resident would say something like 'I need two sugars but you only gave me one'. Both of us are in a sweat; we haven't stopped since we arrived and we are ready to pull our hair out and it's only ten to eight. It's no different than if you had a bunch of babies or small children at home and they get up at the same time. Everyday it is chaos. By the time we get the meals out and the cook is happy we still have eight residents to feed. They are feeders and can't feed themselves. All the time we are feeding them which is not more than a half hour; we are also answering bells and gathering up dirty dishes.

We are supposed to gather all the dishes but most of the time there are residents who haven't finished drinking their tea. We let them keep it and then after when we get a chance we gather those cups up and hide them until lunch time. The dishwasher would go right off the handle if we arrived with

dishes after she had finished the others.

If we were lucky we'd sneak in about a ten minute break at this time -- be around 8:30 a.m.. I mean if we ever got caught doing that we'd be fired. But honestly after the first hour and a half there you had to have a couple of minutes to get yourself back together.

After that we go from room to room and pick a patient each. First we get out the clothes they will wear. There is not much to choose from. So we rob Peter to pay Paul. This means we will take something from another resident's room and put it on the resident with little or nothing in their drawer. This happens all the time. Then we get a basin of water, go to the linen closet and get towels, washcloths and pampers. Then we go to the socks box to get either nylons, knee highs or socks for the residents to wear. Everyday we end up with odd socks or knee highs in the box. You don't throw them out because eventually something that either matches or is close will show up. It's no different than at home. Often times after I washed the clothes there would be odd socks with no mate.

Once we got everything ready then we could wash and dress the residents. Room after room we would go through the same thing. The whole time bells are ringing. It's a wonder that in between answering bells we could remember what it was we had been doing. A lot of these residents are like snotty, saucy kids. They all want to be first washed. Different days

you start with different ones, hoping that will make them happy but it never works. Here we are trying to get the residents up and there is this one lady, Sid, she rings her bell every morning and every time it is the same thing; she wants her feet rubbed with vaseline. You tell her you're busy and she'll look at you and say 'good enough then I'll shit the bed and tell the boss you wouldn't take me to the bathroom'. The only thing you can do is say go ahead, do as you please. Room after room the residents are full of shit. Mind you they were like that when we fed them but feeding got priority. The smell is enough to gag a horse. We are literally covered in it and the boss arrives and tells us to hurry up because he can't stand the smell. He would stomp up the hall and tell the R.N. who has also arrived around the same time to get us moving. It's not like we couldn't hear them, they were only a few feet away. The R.N. would come down looking all prim and proper, not a hair out of place. She would tell us that Sid was a mess and that there was a puddle on the floor under Jack. We always had to pretend that this was news to us. Then she would say so and so has company coming so make sure you fix them up nice. Put a little ribbon in their hair and some perfume on them and tidy their room up. It's like at home when you know you got company coming, so you throw the mess in the closet and spray the place with deodorizer.

Now it comes down to who has the stomach to get Mac off the bedpan. Man, you have never experienced an odor so foul

or a sight so unsightly. Generally we agree that if one of us gets Mac today then it is the other's turn tomorrow. This period from 9-10:30 is probably the worst part of the day. Here we got both the R.N. and the boss hollering so and so is dirty, so and so needs to go to the bathroom. One is saying one thing and the other something else. You can't stop because there is nowhere to hide. You try and catch your breath and get a cold drink of water and one of the residents would see you. Then they all want water.

Before launch we had to get the laundry scrubbed and sorted, then take it to the basement for the laundry lady. After that we gather up all the garbage. At these times we work together. It gives us a few brief moments to talk. Often times we would ask each other why we were doing this. You know like what's wrong with us, was this some sort of punishment we had to endure for past sins. We had to do this kind of shit at home-- here we were supposed to be nurses.

By the time we are finished with the laundry and garbage it is time for lunch. Setting up for lunch is basically the same routine as breakfast -- with the exception being that most residents are not in bed. So we get 3-4 card tables set up and place each resident in a certain place. Some residents must be kept apart because they fight like cats and dogs, throw their food at each other and eat off one another's plates. Again they're like children; you got to keep them apart and try and be an impartial referee.

We start feeding the residents. We feed several residents at one time while constantly keeping an eye on the others. They all need supervision, just like my kids. One diabetic resident refuses to feed herself, even though she is capable and from time to time feeds herself. So we play games with her, like if she eats all her lunch we will call her daughter and let her talk to her. That usually works. Or we tell her that if she eats everything she can be first to go to the bathroom. She likes that and it generally works. Really it is no different than what we often do with kids--bribe them. But sometimes nothing works. She will either throw the food on the floor or put it on somebody else's plate and try and tell us she ate it all. You're busy trying to get her to eat as well as the resident next to her. We'll see B.B. sticking Gurdy with a fork because Gurdy is trying to steal the bread off of B.B.'s plate. These two both love to eat and pity help anyone who even reaches across their trays. M.M. is gagging and threatening to throw up because because she is watching Joe's nose running down to his chin. Each time he takes a spoonful of food he is eating this stuff, running from his nose. Everyday someone yells out to leave him alone, he is having his "greens". At times it is really gross. I hate mealtimes because you have got to have eyes in the back of your head. On top of that you can never concentrate on just one thing. You are constantly having to do other things and run here and there for this and that.

When everyone has finished eating we collect the trays. Up and down the hall we go collecting the trays. When you're doing it, it seems like it will never end. We gather all the trays together in one area. We scrape all the leftover food into a garbage bucket. Any leftover liquid is dumped into a slop bucket. At home that would get poured down the sink. But here we don't have that luxury. With this done the dishes have to be carried over to the kitchen for the dishwasher. Sometimes she'll come and get them.

With lunch done and out of the way, we start taking residents to the bathroom. We put them on the toilet, then we wash their face and hands. Some of the residents are put in bed for a nap. The others are seated in the solarium. We quickly go around and clean off the tables, fold them up and put them away. If any food or drink has been spilled on the floor we have to get the mop and bucket and clean it up.

Now it is our turn to have lunch. It's about 12:30 and after 5 and 1/2 hours this is the first real break we'll get. One girl goes to lunch and the other covers the floor. The girl who stays on the floor will try and get the male residents shaved, cut finger and toe nails, clean up the utility room, wash out bedpans, clean up bathrooms and tidy up any messy areas. At this time the girl on the floor also has to set up trays for the afternoon snack.

By the time those things are done the first girl is back from lunch. We only get a half hour for lunch. It is now

time to put the Queen to bed. The queen is a resident who goes to bed each afternoon at the same time. It will take one girl almost the entire half hour to get her settled. With the Queen everything has to be just so. Her clothes have to all be neatly folded and put in their proper place. She has to be arranged just so in her bed. Her television must be turned on. Oh it is nerve wracking. Myself I prefer second lunch because the Queen will drive you crazy. While the girl is busy fussing with her, bells are ringing and residents are hollering, but you can't answer them. If you could just put her in bed and be done with her, you could catch up on some of the other work. That is what makes it so frustrating. You know that while your taking care of the queen, the others are making a mess and wetting themselves. In other words they are making more work for us. It is a vicious, never ending circle.

When the girl on second lunch gets back to the floor we start to change and put other residents to bed. Most of them are soaked. You have to change their clothes, wipe them off and put dry pads on them. The wet clothes have to be gathered up and taken to the laundry. Any wet pads and garbage laying about has to be collected and taken to the garbage room in the basement. We have to wash off the wheelchairs. There is always food from lunch stuck to them.

Normally by this time the girls on the next shift are in and ours is over. We give them a report and get out the door

as quick as possible. When the evening shift starts most of the residents are in the same place they were when we arrived at quarter to seven that morning-- bed.

On evening shift we had to be there at 2:45 to get the report. Mind you we weren't paid for those fifteen minutes. Evening shift starts with getting the residents ready for supper. We have to get the card tables out and set up. Those residents who sit up to eat have to be gotten out of bed. With most of them that means changing them again -- taking off their wet clothes and pads, changing their beds, etc.. As with day shift those residents who remain in bed for meals must be sat up in bed. Every mealtime the cook is always ready before we are. She'll be there in the hallway moaning and muttering about us being slow. You feel like grabbing her by the head and beating her off the wall. If the boss happens along the cook will make out to him like she was just about to lend us a hand.

By the time we get the residents ready the trays are put out as fast as possible. If breakfast and lunch goes fast, supper is even faster. This is the one mealtime when the boss is present for the whole time. We are in one place trying to feed the feeders and he is in another hollering that so and so is throwing food at someone else or whatever. So depending on what is for supper, we either shove it or pour it into them. There is no choice in this for us. The boss expects the two of us to be everywhere at the sametime. What could

we do? You can't be everywhere at the sametime and because you can't, work is piling up. Residents who can feed themselves are spilling most of it on themselves. The feeders are liable to either knock it on the floor or into their bed. Every evening shift you want to scream. You know at home with my own kids I would feed them one at a time to avoid this mess but at the nursing home we weren't allowed to do that. It didn't matter if you cut down on the work load by doing them one at a time. No sir, he wanted all twenty-four fed within an hour. It was not him that had to go around after supper and change the residents and the beds again. If you dared to complain he would at best laugh at you. At worse he tells you if you didn't like it leave.

Right after the supper dishes are cleared away. We start putting residents to bed. Most residents are in bed for the night by 4:30 p.m.. That means moving quickly. After supper we have to take them to the washroom, at least those who haven't done their business in their pants. No use taking them to the bathroom. You just clean them where they are. Change their beds and put a dry pad and night clothes on them. Generally there are 5-6 residents who stay up til 8-8:30. These ones are taken to the bathroom, tidied up and then seated in the solarium, in front of the television.

Four thirty is a happy time for us because the boss and the R.N. both go home. Around 5 o'clock both of us will take a supper break.

After supper one of us will go around and give out medications. The other sets up the trays for the evening snack. That means putting cups and glasses on trays, depending on what a particular resident drinks. Evening snack time can be a real pain in the arse because the snack is usually a piece of toast. That means that the girl setting up the trays has to make it. Lets face it the cooks are long gone by snack time, it's just the two of us. So if I set up the trays I'll make the toast. Once I get it made I'll start giving them out. By the time the trays are out, both us, the other girl will be done medications, start collecting the trays and positioning the residents in bed for the night. The dirty snack dishes have have to be taken to the kitchen and washed, dried and put away.

While one of us is off doing this the other starts to mop floors. All the resident's rooms must be mopped as well as the hallways and common areas. After this we have to re-stock the bathrooms with toilet paper, pampers, soap, wash clothes and towels. Prior to doing this however, if necessary, which is usually the case, we have to clean the bathrooms, scrub the toilets, basins, bath tubs and showers.

By 8 o'clock it is time to start putting those who are still up to bed. This is usually lots of fun. One fellow we call J.J. is a fighter. There is nothing he does without fighting. Getting him in bed is always an ordeal. He punches and kicks at the girls. If he manages to get a hold of you,

you'll know it. It feels like he is going to tear the flesh off of you. We never do him alone, it is always two girls. When we finally get him into bed he doesn't stop. If we turn our backs for a second he tries to get out of bed. He has to be posied [strapped or tied to the bed, G.S.] into the bed. Simply put that means we tie him to the bed. By the time we get the last of the residents to bed, we take a break for a cup of tea.

After break we will do a check generally that involves changing some of the residents and taking others to the washroom. With the check done we then turn our attention to cleaning the solarium. That involves tidying up and mopping the floor. By that time it is 10 p.m. and it is time to sit down and write a report for the next shift. Once the report is written, both of us check the place over once more making sure everything is clean and tidy. After this we do one more quick check and change any residents that might be dirty. By the time we are finished the girls on the backshift have arrived and like housewives we are ready to go to bed, but instead we still have to go home.

The 10:45 p.m. backshift (11-7) girls arrive for work. Like the previous two shifts the first task is to read the report from the previous shift. Once the 3-11 girls have left we lock the exit doors. Then we go from room to room checking on all the patients to make sure they are in bed and are alive. This is important because occasionally you find one

dead. If someone dies it is important to know as soon as possible when it happened. If the previous shift failed to do the last check or hadn't looked close enough it could easily be a couple of hours between the time a person dies and the time we realize what has happened. The problems begin when the doctor starts asking questions. One thing the boss here likes is for the girls to have nice, neat answers for questions. I guess if we don't know what time something happens, that reflects badly on the boss and the nursing home. Having a good image and making a good impression are important at the nursing home. Once we have done the check we turn our attention to the work that has to be done.

The first part, probably about half the shift, is devoted almost entirely to housework. The two main tasks that had to be done were iron the clothes and peel the vegetables.

Before we get at that we try to size up how much there is to do. I guess that's not really necessary because for the most part we have to do it all. What it does is allow us to determine how fast we have to be.

All the laundry to be ironed. Some of that stuff is from other days. It looks like it was balled up wet and stuffed in a closet. Each piece is nothing but massive wrinkles. Practically every item that comes up from laundry had to be ironed. That includes sheets, bedspreads, pillow cases, curtains, all the resident's clothes and on and on. The only things not ironed are socks, underwear, towels and wash

cloths. When I say ironed I don't mean with commercial equipment either, no sir, we are using the same items we would have at home-- a simple electric iron and ironing board. With the large items one of us would iron and the other would fold and put away. On average we would spend about two hours a night ironing.

After the ironing was done we would turn our attention to peeling the vegetables. That is one hell of a lousy job. The cook would put the vegetables in buckets. The number of buckets would vary depending on what they were cooking the the next day. You could always count on at least three five gallon buckets of potatoes. They had to be hand washed, peeled and cut up. Washing them and cutting them up wasn't bad. It was peeling the jackets off that would drive you crazy. You had to be careful not to cut into the potato when you were doing it. The cook and the boss also had a pretty good idea how much finished product there should be. If you weren't close then they got after you about peeling too much off. After we got done with the potatoes then we had to do the carrots and turnips or whatever else was on the go.

The whole time that the ironing and vegetables are being done we are also answering bells as they ring, along with hourly checks. With the vegetables and ironing done we can then turn to getting the breakfast trays set up for the dayshift girls. Often there is mending and sewing that has to be done on backshift. Personally I never do that because,

to be honest, I don't know how. It is just one of the many things the boss assumes we know how to do because we are women. But I don't know anything about sewing zippers into pants and such things.

Generally about 4 a.m. we take our half hour lunch break. After that we start getting residents up. On backshift we were expected to get 9 residents washed and dressed before the dayshift girls came in. What we do is wash, change and dress the residents but generally we don't actually get them out of bed. After we wash and dress them we lay them back in bed. The dayshift girls will either sit them in their chairs or roll them up in bed at breakfast time.

Once those residents are done we then gather up the dirty laundry and garbage. If a washroom needs to be cleaned we do it. The trick is for every shift to try and have everything done for the next shift. Keeping things that way required all out effort on each shift.

Sample Two

An immediate difference in a day's work at the nursing home now that we are unionized is that we don't have to be there 15 minutes early anymore. Now we start dayshift at 7 a.m.. When we arrive at 7 the backshift girls are waiting at the door to leave. Just like before we had the union one girl gives the diabetics their needles and the other heads up

stairs to start getting residents up. But a big difference is with fighters like Mickey. We don't take the shit off him anymore like we used to. If he starts fighting or giving us a hard time we tell him fine stay where you are and move on to the next. We don't put up with abusive residents like we did in the past. In fact the union has helped us to get rid of troublesome residents. We don't work there to get beat around like punching bags. We've had a few residents who thought that's what we were but they are gone, mostly I think to the mental hospital. Once we get the rest of the residents upstairs washed, dressed and downstairs for breakfast we go back to see if Mickey wants to get up. Most of the time he does what we ask of him and he is no more problem. But if he don't mind his manners, he'll find himself waking up in Dartmouth like the other ones.

By the time we get Mickey downstairs, the cook will be there with breakfast. All she does now is put it in the bowls or on the plates, then disappears back to the kitchen. At 8 o'clock the 8-12 girl arrives. Having a third girl really helps to reduce our work. While we go about feeding the feeders and checking on those feeding themselves, she is able to start washing and changing those who are through eating.

While the amount of washing and changing is no less than before, at least now we can concentrate on those tasks. After breakfast we simply collect the trays of dirty dishes and put them on the cart. Instead of us taking them to the kitchen

now the dishwasher comes and takes them. We still have to fold up the card tables and put them away but we no longer have to mop up anything spilled on the floor. The domestic takes care of that. When we are ready to put the tables away, we let her know so she can be ready with the mop. These changes might not seem like much but over the course of a shift it really makes a big difference. I suppose the biggest thing is being clear of the housework. The residents haven't changed. Most are still covered in shit when we go to do them. But now we simply clean them and change them. Before when we got the residents changed we then had to run around and collect all the dirty clothes, soiled linen and garbage. We don't do that anymore with the clothes and linen. The 4 hour girl in laundry gathers that up. Whatever garbage there is we just throw in the buckets. The domestic is responsible for gathering it up whenever she gets a chance. Depending on how busy she is, some days the garbage buckets get pretty full before she empties them. Honestly at first these changes took a bit of getting used to, not the reduced workload but the smell. Because we don't haul the laundry and garbage away anymore the smell of piss and shit lingers in the air much longer. Once you realize that it is not your problem, though, you get used to it.

On dayshift the other big change is not having to clean the bathrooms, the resident's rooms or mop the floors. Looking back it is hard to imagine how we ever got so much

done. Now at 10 a.m. we take our morning break. During that 15 minutes all hell can break loose but we are not moving. Our contract provides for that break. We are entitled to it and we take it. After break we'll finish off any tub baths that have to be done. All residents have to get a tub bath or a shower at least once a week. With this done we then simply go about checking on the residents. If they are wet or dirty we'll change them or they might want a drink of water or something. We'll get that for them. We do this until about 11:25. Then we get set up for lunch at 11:30. Lunch is really a breeze now with the extra girl. Once we get the trays out, it is simply a matter of one of us supervising those that feed themselves, while the other two do the feeders. Lunch is finished and the dirty dishes are stacked for the dishwasher by about 11:50. At noon the 4 hour girl goes home.

From noon to 12:30 we'll take residents to the bathroom and put them in bed for their naps. At 12:30 one of us takes lunch break. The other stays behind to watch the residents. Depending on whether she feels like it or not she might cut finger and toe nails or she might wash and set one of the residents hair. The second girl takes lunch from 1 to 1:30. The girl on the floor at this point gives out the afternoon drinks, gathers up the dirty glasses and puts them in the hall for the dishwasher.

From 1:30 till about 2 o'clock or a little after we take

the rest of the residents, who have a nap, to the bathroom and put them in bed. When this is finished we take our 15 minute afternoon break. After that we check on the residents to make sure they are comfortable and dry. At about 2:45 we sit down and write the report for the evening shift.

A couple of things I should mention that are different now are the boss and the R.N.. Before the union on day shift they used to give us trouble. In someways that's putting it mildly. A lot of times they used to tell us to do different things. One would say do this and they would come along and say do something else. Now they pretty much leave us alone. Sometimes one or the other will come and tell us so and so needs this or that when you have a minute. But that's a lot different than in the past when they used to demand that we do everything at once.

The other difference is that because we have less to do we get a chance to talk to the residents. I know myself that I have actually become friends with some of them. Some of the ones that used to give us a hard time are quite likable now.

Before when you finished a shift you were ready to go home and die. Most days you were so tired and sore you felt like you needed help just to get out the door. Now you might be tired but you are no longer exhausted. Instead of going home and either chewing the face off the kids or collapsing on the couch, I am able to at least be civil to my family members.

On three to eleven we go in for the report. Report only takes about five minutes now compared to the fifteen it took when it was on our time. It's amazing how things change.

With report over we start taking residents to the bathroom and put their night clothes on them. This makes it easier later in the shift. Supper has been changed from 3:30 to 4:00 o'clock for the feeders and not until 4:30 for the rest of the residents. It is unbelievable how much easier this is compared to before. We can feed the feeders at a relaxed pace.

There is also a four hour girl who comes in from 4:30 to 8:30. Just like on dayshift having an extra body really cuts the load down. Having her at four thirty means one of us can supervise the residents while they feed themselves and the other two can be getting the feeders settled in bed. By 5:30 all the residents that go to bed early are in bed and the others are watching television. At that point we take our first 15 minute break. Sometimes we'll take an extra 5 or 10 minutes, because there is really not a whole lot left to do. After break we check the residents and pass out the evening snack. Because we haven't got as much to do now we can let the residents take their time with eating the snack. By the time the snack dishes are cleared away one of the 8 hour girls will take supper break. The two of us who remain on the floor will keep an eye on those watching t.v. and go around to see what we can do for the others. Sometimes we'll take a

resident whose skin is drying out and rub them down with oil or cream.

When the first girl gets back from supper then the other goes for hers. While the second girl has supper, the first gives out medications. It's about 8 o'clock when the second girl gets back. Then the three of us put the residents who have stayed up to bed.

After that is done the 4 hour girl goes home and we'll sit down and have a cup of tea. About 9 o'clock we go around and check the residents. At the sametime we put any garbage that is laying around in the buckets, so the domestic can gather it up the next day. It's the same thing with dirty clothes and linen. We throw that in the bags for the laundry people. I should also mention that we check the utility room and washrooms for dirty wash clothes and towels. If there are any clean supplies in the closet we'll put them out for the nextshift. What we don't do is scrub the floors or the washrooms. That is domestics' work, not ours. If the hallways or common areas are dirty they'll have to wait till the next day to get done.

Around 10 o'clock we take our second break. After that we do report and one last check on the residents. You know, there are not half as many bells or residents hollering like there used to be. I guess that's because we get around to them quicker now. Really I guess sometimes they were pretty uncomfortable laying in a wet pad because we were busy moppng

floors or running to the basement with garbage. So you see it's not only better for us now but the residents also benefit.

The backshift (11-7) comes in exactly at eleven. The 3-11 girls say hello give them the keys and leave. The 11-7 shift is totally different now. We have all we can do now just to stay awake.

After we read the report we do a check of all the residents. Then we start putting the laundry away. Before we ironed it first, now we fold it up and put it away. In the past this took at least two hours and often longer. Now at best we spend an hour on it. Ironing that stuff never made any sense anyway. Because after it was ironed it got all wrinkled when it was shoved in the closets.

When the laundry is put away we do another check on the residents. We use a lot more pads now because we do a lot more checks.

Another big difference is that we don't peel vegetables anymore. The health inspector put a stop to that. He felt it was an unsanitary practice.

Backshift is down right boring now but at the sametime there is no way we would ever want it back the way it was. At any point during the night that we feel like, we set up the breakfast trays. At best that takes 10 minutes.

Between 4:30 and 5:00 a.m. we start to wash and dress residents. This is done at a much more relaxed pace than

before. About 6:30 we write up report and wait for the dayshift girls to arrive. When they get here we go home.

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