

Jack Atkinson 1.

We commenced organizing, building the unions, building, building and building. Here and there, there were some little agreements signed with certain small companies that might be more interested in getting good loggers and good production than they were in whether they had a union on them or not. If they could find a good hooker or a good high rigger they didn't give a damn if he was a union organizer or not, they'd hire him. I'm thinking of the old Lake Logging, and ~~another~~ another place up Courtenay way too, where the same thing happened. Anyhow, then I got involved, as one of the men in Ladysmith here.

They
I can remember organizing the women's auxiliary. (The men) called a meeting of interested women. The men who were leaders in the organization, of course they got their wives to come to this meeting, we contacted all these women. So then you had a nuclei of women who organized the auxiliary. It would be helping in the way that women can help and social functions and providing food or coffee if anything's going on. One of their prime functions would be trying to educate other women whose husbands were union members or weren't union members, it didn't matter which, into trade union thinking and showing them the benefits of the trade union movement to the working people, to themselves and to their children, whereby they could acquire better living conditions, wages, working conditions and safety. In those days safety was a big factor in the organizing of the trade union movement. They'll deny this right and left, but during the war the casualty rates on the B.C. coast logging industry was higher than it was on the front in the war. Now that's hard to take but it was. One out of every three men could expect to be on compensation in his life. One out of every three would be injured and would come on to compensation. Wither seriously otherwise or fatally, One of the things in the development of our union

was to educate women to the unsafe conditions that their husbands were working under and this is some way they can help. In other words, get them to support their husband, ~~and if you want~~, just on an individual ~~basis~~ basis, "Yes, Joe, you're doing the right thing joining the union," instead of raising hell with him for joining the union and ~~also what~~ also what it would cost him in dues and assessments. Because you would be surprised how many women are against their husbands becoming involved, at that time, in trade unions. ~~All~~ All they could see was a picket line, a strike, and nothing to eat for the kids, or debts which would take ^{them} a long ~~time~~ period to pay off, if there was a strike. ~~Their~~ Their function would also be to raise money in various ways, to help support because if we anticipated a strike we would be assessed for a strike fund. That was done during the strike (1946) as well as all the other support, socially. The local functioned with the headquarters in Duncan during the six week strike. The women had a lunch kitchen where they would provide a plain meal for the men who were there on the central committee, because we did have to have a central committee to take care of the strike and form plans.

WOMEN IN INDUSTRY: WARTIME

I'm talking about just this area, because I'm not sure what happened further ~~afield~~ afield, but right here, there was two or three women went to work in a little logging camp there, and the loggers ~~at that time~~ at that time really rebelled at the idea of women being in the woods with them. Because, for one thing, we have our natural functions, don't we, and it was very awkward, we'll say, for them to have to go and find a place to pee out in the bush. And it must have been for the women too. So, they didn't want women then. And women could only function in the woods just in every few places,

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maybe like in those days what we call a whistle punk. Just signalling. They couldn't pack those chokers with the big cables and wrap them around logs and jump up and climb trees and that...no, they couldn't do that. So that just petered out as fast as it petered in, you see. Then, it was tried in the mill. Mr. Humberg, at that time, it was the Victoria Logging Comapny, there was not a shortage of workers at that time. But, he started to bring women, I think it was in the planer mill, not in the big saw mill, I don't think women could have functioned there very well. Nowadays more, because they can drive forklifts and things just as good as a man, now, many of them are doing it right now too. But then it wasn't quite the same. They didn't have fork lifts, it was done by hand. They got jobs in the planer mill and were paid less than their counterparts. Now, I should state this point, that the mill was not organized. And there was discrepancies in the wages being paid to the various people, like Chinese and so on. A young Chinese with thier wife and their family could be working next to you and he'd get less wages. That was rampant in the early days of the mines too. Chinaman was a Chinaman, he got less. He wasn't as good as you, but yet he did the same work. The men in general looked at it as a threat to their position in the mill, a woman's takin' that job. She's gonna get less wages so he'll hire all women, you see. We had a pretty good solidness at the beginning of our organization here at that time. We were told by men from Chemainus, "Now is your chance to organize Chemainus mill." I should tell you this, Chemainus was very much of a company town and alot of the men over there, Mr. Humberg and the superintendents, they were little gods. They couldn't do no wrong. But they weren't all that way. So they said, "Now is your chance." Their position is threatened by women and so you'd better get in here and organize. A meeting was called of a very few interested men workers, saw

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mill workers, in fact it was ~~was~~ at our house. And then another meeting was held in the hall down here, away from Chemainus, you see. An there was a goodly amount of people turned up. So then we tried to rent a hall in Chemainus but the company owned the hall. Nigel Morgan at that time was the Secretary of the International Woodworkers of America District One, that was British Columbia. And he said, "Well we can call a meeting on the school grounds, which is government property and there's no way the company can interfere." So a meeting was organized on the school grounds in Chemainus and boys, they were just there ██████████ solid, the men. And he (Morgan) spoke and from then on a sub-local was organized in Chemainus. They also had a women's auxiliary there. It would be about '42 or '43. The women were just laid off (when the union was organized) or what have you, dropped out, maybe felt that they weren't wanted or that the work was too much. But the thing is, ~~they~~ they didn't rehire any more women. These women, I don't even know who they were, But that was one of the big points in organizing the men was equal pay for equal work. I can remember clearly being in ~~this~~ this Chinaman's house and he had a young wife and three young children. They were right there in the kitchen. And he said, he was a boom man incidentally, he said, "If we were to get the same wages as the white men then they wouldn't hire us. They would prefer to have a white man." And that's when we told them, "This is where your union will stand solidly behind you. If you get fired just because of your race then there will be trouble." But not with these women, it didn't get to that, it was seen as a threat: ~~less~~ lesser wages, And that was true, it was a threat to the men, you see. In a ~~company~~ company town like that you've got to understand that anything goes. A woman who maybe doesn't have a job or just working in the candy store at that time for fifteen dollars a week, a job getting her, let's say, I guess at fifty cents an hour, that looked pretty good. See, that's a lot of money. That was a six day week

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too then. At that time, women generally stayed home with families. There was not many women who worked out at the restaurants, and that was all girls, single mainly. Oh, you might see the odd married woman working but not so much as now. There wouldn't be as many jobs then but also another reason was ~~that~~ they ~~didn't~~ didn't have the equipment in the homes. like automatic washing machines and deep freezers and ~~the~~ vacuum cleaners. They had washing machines alright but they'd be the old hand type which was self-driven. No electric stoves around then, so the women had to ~~do more~~ do more at home, they just couldn't find the same time to go out and work as they do ~~now~~ now.