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The Afrikaner Women Of The Garment Workers Union, 1918-1939

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The Dutch Reformed Church, therefore, only established a social service organisation, the 'Armesorgraad', as late as 1937. In 1939 under the auspices of the 'Armesorgraad', the 'Fabriekwerksters Welvaart Vereniging' (Factory Workers Benevolent Society) was founded exclusively for the benefit of white female factory workers.[6]

One concrete example of the DRC's reticence towards impoverished working Afrikaners comes from the garment workers' files. In 1927 the widowed Mrs Helena Pretorius addressed a request to Ds. W. Nicol, the minister of the Irene Dutch Reformed Church in Johannesburg, "om ons te help sodat ons kan kos kry" (to help us to get food). However, Ds. Nicol neither replied nor visited the family.[7] Johanna Breytenbach also trenchantly described this relationship between the church and its white working-class parishioners when she once asked a meeting in Vrededorp,

> Has there ever been an Afrikaner or even a Minister of the Dutch Reformed Church who has come forward to try and better the conditions of the garment workers as Solly Sachs has done?[8]

When recently asked the same question, Mrs Herman, an informant, replied,

> Nee, hoe sou hulle?... watter vroue (organisasies)? watter kerke?..jy't nie kos om te eet nie, maar daar's niemand wat vir jou iets kan doen nie. Dit was 'n swaar tyd gewees... vir almal ... Elkeen (was) vir homself gewees.
> (No, how could they?.... which women's (organisations)...which churches?...you don't have food to eat, but there is nobody who can do anything for you. It was a difficult time... for everyone... each one (was) for himself...)[9]

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[6] Ibid., pp.37-38. See also, CAD, VWN 601. Letter, J.H. van Rooyen to Secretary of Social Welfare, Pretoria, Application for Assistance, 24.7.1939. Garment workers addressed the social workers of the FWV as the 'kerkvrou' (church woman), even though several of these workers had been canvassed from the ranks of the factory workers themselves. This was the case with Mrs B. and Miss Lenie van der Merwe. Interviews 27 and 28.

[7] GWU, Bca 3. Commission of Inquiry, Statement to be submitted by H. Pretorius, 1948.

[8] Ibid. Commission of Inquiry, Statement to be submitted by J. Breytenbach, 1948.

[9] Interview 13.

Often working people were loath to make use of relief facilities, however meagre, provided by the state, church and welfare. It was observed of poverty-stricken families in America, both in the eighteenth and early twentieth century, that some people would rather starve than avail themselves of charity. In the late twenties, a contemporary observer noted that some American families "nearly starved rather than seek charity from social agencies".[10] It would seem that similar sentiments were expressed by some garment workers in need. Mrs D. Barlin of Judith's Paarl articulated her desire for economic independence very clearly,

> I do not ask for charity, but just work where I can keep myself and my family.[11]

In the absence of formal support provided for urban workers, and because of a reluctance on their part to depend on charity, more informal aid was sometimes forthcoming from fellow workers in the community. In a study of working-class communities in the East End of London, Ross found that, in the absence of state support, the neighbourhood itself became the 'safety net' for many working-class families,

> Aid in emergencies such as major illnesses and evictions, was routinized in women's culture, as were some forms of resistance, protecting the streets from authorities, for example, or harassing court officials during evictions. Collectively women were instrumental in organising ties between households, thereby facilitating the creation of shared working-class values and identities.[12]

Traces of similar ties within white working-class communities on the Rand appear to be in evidence. For example Mrs Nel, when questioned on this subject, recounted how she and a neighbour once took soup and dumplings to some farmer families who were camping in their wagons on

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[10] F. Strickler, 'Affluence for Whom?', p.303. For an example of the attitude of Bostonian working women to the distribution of alms during the colonial period, see G. B. Nash, 'The Failure of Factory Work in Colonial Boston', in D. Leab ed., *Labour History Reader*, p.48.

[11] GWU, Bcd 4.1.1. Letter, D. Barlin, Judith's Paarl to S. Sachs, 3.3.1930.

[12] E. Ross, 'Survival Networks', p.5.

an open field in Brixton whilst trying to sell their crop of peaches to the people in the area.[13] Police records of the early thirties provide a further example. For three years Mrs Swanie, then newly widowed and in much distress, was helped by policemen in her area.[14]

Recently urbanised Afrikaners, although they could hardly afford it, seemed to have been kindly-disposed towards destitute fellow migrants. Ds. J.D. van Niekerk of the DRC Langlaagte found in an investigation of the working girls in Langlaagte and Industria, that sometimes young girls were accommodated by kindly people who, at 12/- per week,

> dit onmoontlik kan bekostig om meisies teen daardie prys te huisves, maar doen dit uit jammerte.
> (could barely afford to accommodate girls at that price, but do it out of pity.)[15]

Garment workers who migrated to the city without their families also relied heavily on the help of kindly-disposed relatives for their survival in the urban environment. In an investigation of work and family relationships in industrial Manchester in the United States of America, Hareven found that,

> In a regime of insecurity where kin assistance was the only continuing source of support, family culture by necessity dictated that family considerations, needs and ties guide and control most individual decisions.[16]

Mrs Spangenberg, Mrs Britten and Mrs Ae. were fortunate to have kin to whom to come in Johannesburg. Not only were they accommodated, but they

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[13] Interview 19.

[14] CAD, JUS 593. Letter, Sub-Inspector S.P.R. Fourie to the District Commandant, Boksburg, September 1932. He maintained that Sergeants Steyn and Naude were the people who kept her and her family alive. That Mrs Swanepoel was widowed and had children under 21 to support is most probably true, for she was the only person eligible to vote at No. 7 Broad Street, Germiston. Voters' Rolls, Germiston 1931.

[15] CAD, VWN 468. Letter Ds. J.D. van Niekerk, to M.P. Mr A. Fourie, 5.2.1935.

[16] T. Hareven, *Family Time and Industrial Time: The Relationship between Family and Work in a New England Industrial Community*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982, p.109.

were cared for by their relatives and family.[17] Mrs and Mr Vosloo were taken in by her husband's aged uncle and blind aunt, and in later years the Vosloos also accommodated young relatives newly arrived in the city.[18]

In addition, garment workers often used kin and friendship networks to find employment. They seem to have followed strategies similar to those used by American industrial workers. Hareven observed that,

> The Amoskeag recruited its workers through family and kinship ties and encouraged their placement in the workrooms in family clusters. It often relied on relatives to socialise and discipline family members in the factory setting and to assist them in learning work processes.[19]

Mrs Harmse and Mrs Lingenfelder found their jobs through a sister and sister-in-law respectively, while Mrs Bosch accompanied a cousin, who lived with them, when she applied for work.[20] Mrs G., for her part, found a job through a friend who prodded her to action by saying that she was too scared to go, while Mrs Deysel went job-hunting with a friend. Miss O'Reilley explained how she found her job,

> I thought I've got to get into the world, and show myself something else, so a girl I knew...she said...there is a job going, one of the girls was getting married, but take a testimonial with you...[21]

Other women, like Mrs Spangenberg and Mrs Labuschagne, did the round of factories in search of employment on their own.[22]

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17 Interviews 1, 2 and 26.

18 Interview 33.

19 T. Hareven, *Family Time*, p.62.

20 Interviews 12, 18 and 2. At first Mrs Bosch was not believed to be sixteen, the legal employable age, for she was still dressed in short socks, as was customary for young girls at the time.

21 Interviews 11 and 20. It would seem that the testimonial was instrumental in getting her the job.

22 Interviews 26, 16 and 7.

However, in recently established communities, such as those on the Witwatersrand during the early part of the twentieth century, such support from kin and friendship networks was not always available and could not be depended upon. Many garment workers then turned to the GWU for assistance in times of hardship and economic need. The GWU recognised the needs and hardships of the garment workers. As Mr H.Lee, a member of the CEC, remarked to the executive in 1929,

> The union uplifted the Dutch girls, as no one else is prepared to assist them....[23]

The women were well aware of the interest and involvement of the union in their lives, for, as Hester de Wet maintained, "no one cared about us, except the union." She echoed the sentiments of Anna Scheepers, Hester Cornelius and Helena Pretorius.[24]

However, trade unions do not usually become intimately involved in the lives of their members or take on a wide range of welfare functions in response to the demands of their membership.[25] In this chapter the largely successful efforts of garment workers to secure help from the GWU and the union's efforts to provide extended welfare facilities will be examined. The clothing strikes of the late twenties and early thirties, as stimulus which set into motion this trend in the activities of the GWU, will be briefly examined. The development of the GWU and the changing nature of its Central Executive Committee (hereafter CEC) will then be analysed. The composition of the CEC was crucial, for its sympathetic response to the demands of the garment workers depended heavily on the people who occupied executive positions in the CEC. Finally, the nature of the demands made on the union will be analysed to see to what extent they compelled the union to extend its activities beyond the narrow

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[23] GWU, Aaa 1. 18th Meeting CEC WTA, 22.7.1929.

[24] GWU, Bca 3. Commission of Inquiry, Statements to be submitted by H. de Wet, A. Scheepers, H. Pretorius, H. Cornelius, 1948.

[25] W.E.J. McCarthy, *Trade Unions*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970, ch. 1.

boundaries of trade unionism into gender-specific areas of operation to suit the needs of its constituents. These areas included employment, housing, health, personal welfare and leisure activities.

The Strikes in the Clothing Industry, 1918-1932

The union took on a wide range of welfare functions largely as a result of the strikes which plagued the clothing industry in the late twenties and culminated in two general strikes in 1931 and 1932. While the strikes during the twenties were relatively successful, they were not the exhausting trials of strength that occurred in 1931 and 1932. These latter strikes required the full support of the garment workers, and almost inevitably increased their involvement in the union and its activities. This in turn changed them from docile, easily led workers as described by Pollak in 1931, into active trade unionists praised by Sachs after the 1932 strike. He maintained that,

> ...we had a large nucleus of real good fighters, and the bosses had to mobilise all the available mounted and foot police when our Hell's Angels, mostly from S. Malk's let loose....[26]

During the period after the close of the First World War, until 1922, a series of strikes plagued the clothing industry. These strikes increasingly involved the women who were employed in these tailoring enterprises. For example, in May 1919 some fourteen women, tailoresses and machinists, as opposed to ten white men and four blacks, came out on strike at Ben Pickles & Co.[27] In October of that year the strike at Messrs Henochsbergs & Co., railway contractors, involved 88 women and

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[26] GWU, Bcc 2.1. Solly Sachs's letter to one Julius, 12.4.1933. Likewise, during the recent British mineworkers strike, the wives of these miners participated in the strike and underwent a marked transformation from 'nice inoffensive girls' to political activists. *The Guardian*, 'When Women turned into Warriors', March 4, 1985, p.10.

[27] GWU, Aab 1.45. Information on strikes, Department of Labour, 28.6.1919.

only 24 men[28] and during the 1920 tailors' strike the presence of the women was equally felt.[29] During the early twenties the number of women employed in the clothing industry increased considerably, from 525 in 1915/16 to more than a thousand in 1922/23. (See Table 8 and chapter 2.) In 1922, the year of the Rand Revolt, during strikes which occurred again at Ben Pickles & Co., some 47 female workers received strike pay, although much less than the amounts paid out to the 74 men involved.[30]

Not much information is available on industrial relations in the clothing industry until the latter part of the twenties when a series of successful strikes took place during 1928 and 1929.[31] Rank and file garment workers participated wholeheartedly in the 1928 strike, which took place at a time of reasonable economic prosperity. Then the *Rand Daily Mail*, in a very positive approach to the strike, clearly romanticised the strikers. Their spokeswoman was described as a tall, fair-haired striker, "....with dashing eyes and bubbling over with indignation". She vehemently condemned their working conditions and quoted Thomas Hood's 'The Song of the Shirt'.[32] The success of these strikes inspired the garment workers

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[28] GWU, Aab 1.157. Circular of Secretary of WTA, Johannesburg, 16.10.1919. The wages of the women ranged from 14/2 to £2.10.0 per week. The *Rand Daily Mail* in their coverage of the strike some months later commented on the plight of the women employed there. GWU, Aab 1.116. *Rand Daily Mail*, 'A Split in the Ranks', 16.12.1919.

[29] CAD, JUS 288. Letter A.E. Tigger to Secretary, South African Police, 1920? See also SAP 40. Industrial Unrest, Johannesburg, Tailors' Strike 22/23.1.1920. GWU. Aab 1.157. Once again, by means of the WTA pamphlet of 24.1.1920, the threat of prostitution was brought to the attention of the general public.

[30] GWU, Aab 1.158 and Aab 1.159. The men received one to two pounds strike pay each while the women were paid ten to fifteen shillings each. See relevant information on the strike at Ben Pickles & Co.

[31] See *Rand Daily Mail*, May 1928, and illustrations nos.16-20.

[32] She exclaimed: "It is not the Song of the Shirt but the Song of the Trousers, stitch, stitch, stitch, morning, noon and night -- and I have done it for two years for 25s. a week and I am not going to do it any longer. I'm a human being". *Rand Daily Mail*, '200 Indignant Girls', 21.5.1928. GWU, Bcf 1.2. *Garment Worker, Quarterly Bulletin*, March 1929. The entire poem 'The Song of the Shirt' was published in the *Garment Worker*, December 1929. The poem was translated into by N. Beets, entitled 'Die Lied van die Hemp'. *KW/GW*, May/June 1942, p.2.

with the necessary confidence to engage in two more general strikes in 1931 and 1932, during the heart of the Depression. However, these strikes were of a very different order. They were better organised, and more general than the previous strikes, but at the same time more bitter because of the proposed wage cuts which in turn would bring about more suffering in the lives of the garment workers. The 1931 strike, in protest against a proposed slackening of the ratio between skilled and unskilled labour in the factories and a threatened wage reduction, achieved partial success. The ratio was lowered but the workers were able to avert the reduction in wages, a threat which was to become reality in 1932.[33]

In comparison with the strikes of the late twenties, major differences are discernable in, especially, the suffering resulting from the 1931 and 1932 strikes. By 1931, the position had changed considerably, for the effects of the Depression had become increasingly severe. Then a young striker with a small child and a mother to support, still suffered deprivation two months after the strike had ended, even though strike pay of 12/6 per week had been paid by the union, "She was not yet straight and they were speaking of another (strike)", Pollak observed in 1931.[34] Others also suffered during the 1931 strike,

> Dit het maar swaar gegaan. Mens moet niks als (sic) pap en 'n beetje skaap vleis eet, en met leere maag by die fabriek gaan staan om die scabs uit te haal. En dan was daar baie groot poliesmans. (sic)
> (Things were not easy One had to eat nothing but porridge and a little mutton, and on an empty stomach go to stand at the factory to take out the scabs. And then there were many big policemen.)[35]

The strikers' view of the strikes was also coloured by their degree of deprivation at home. In 1931, a garment worker, possibly not as des-

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[33] GWU, Dac 2.1. Letter, S. Sachs to chairman of TUCSA, 23.8.1932.

[34] H Pollak, *Women*, Addendum, p.58.

[35] Ibid., p.60.

titute and dependent on her wages, declared : "The strike was grand. I'm sorry it did not last longer. Gee, it was real fine".[36]

Another general strike broke out in October 1932 in protest against a proposed 25% reduction in wages. It lasted until November 1932 and was eventually broken with violence and mounted police action, causing much bitterness amongst the strikers. Mounted police were used in an assault on women striking and demonstrating at the Germiston Clothing Factory on 22 and 23 August 1932.[37] Mrs Spangenberg, an informant who participated in the 1932 strike as a very young girl, maintained that she considered the strike to be an adventure and at the time did not interest herself in its politics. She also remembered the excitement of the event and how Johanna Cornelius stabbed a horse with a pair of scissors during a charge of mounted police on striking garment workers in Germiston.[38]

This strike differed considerably from the 1931 strike, for it took place amidst steadily deteriorating economic conditions and increased male unemployment, which meant that families were more reliant on the earnings of female members who were garment workers. In view of these circumstances the strike had a polarising effect on the garment workers. First, due to these circumstances, a large number of garment workers scabbed. Mrs Bosch, the one garment worker interviewed for this study who admitted that she had scabbed, recounted how she accompanied an orphaned cousin who was living with the Bosch family back to work. This relative, Mrs

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[36] Ibid., p.61.

[37] GWU, Dac 2.5. See, for example, letter of protest to Minister of Justice, South African Trades and Labour Council, Minutes Executive Committee, 23.8.1932, stressing the "unwarranted attacks by police upon garment workers....." Note the Department of Labour's official comment on the strike, "...tempers became frayed, the strikers came into conflict with the police and the dispute lasted days longer than it would have done, had there been no pending parliamentary by-election." UG 37-1933, Department of Labour, *Annual Report* 1933, p.6. For a full account of this by-election see, J. Lewis, 'The Germiston By-Election'.

[38] Interview 26.

Bosch maintained, felt obliged to return to work, most probably in order to earn her keep.[39] Other garment workers who were interviewed and who commented on the strike in retrospect denied having gone on strike and only admitted to "going down to see what was going on", but not to have marched with other strikers.[40]

These girls who went back to work, although driven by their particular circumstances, were not kindly looked upon: "Ons het gekeer dat 'die brandsiek' nie in the fabriek moet inkom nie", said Mrs Helena Pretorius. (We prevented the scabs from entering the factory).[41] She called the scabs 'die brandsiek', a literal translation of the word 'scab', the correct translation being 'onderkruipers', epitomising the strikers' opinion of the scabs. Sheep became diseased with 'brandsiek' - but the scabs had not contracted the disease, they *were* the disease. In 1941 the Garment Worker/Klerewerker published the Striker's Song which elaborated on the theme of the 'brandsiek':

Wat maak die brandsiek daar 2x
Die brandsiek ruik na vrotte vis
Die mense dink dis die Railway bus
O, wat maak die brandsiek daar?
(What are the scabs doing there? 2x
The scabs smell of rotten fish
People think 'tis the Railway bus
O, what are the scabs doing there?)[42]

Nevertheless, it would seem that despite the presence of scabs, the 1932 strike also nurtured a much more committed and hardened class conscious

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[39] Interview 2.

[40] Interview 2, also Interviews 9, 12 and 16. See also A. Portelli, 'The Peculiarities of Oral History', *History Workshop Journal,* no. 12, Autumn 1981, p.2. "The organisation of the narrative....reveals a great deal of the speakers' relationship to their own history". In this case it would seem that, in retrospect, striking and scabbing have become somewhat taboo.

[41] GWU, Bca 3. Commission of Inquiry, Statement to be submitted by Mrs Helena Pretorius, 1948.

[42] *GW/KW*, 'Stakerslied', May/June 1941, p.7. This song was composed to the tune of a well-known Afrikaans folk song called 'Wat maak Oom Kalie daar?'

core of women strikers; Sachs's "Hell's Angels of S. Malk's". In 1939 a garment worker correspondent recalled the role played by the workers of S.Malk's,

> S.Malk's was die eerste fabriek wat uitgestap het en ons ander fabrieke se werkers het na hulle opgekyk as ons leiers. Ons het altyd meer moed gehad as ons piketstaan (sic), as daar maar net 'n S.Malk's werker by ons was.
> (S. Malk was the first factory which walked out and the workers of our other factories looked up to them as our leaders. We always had more courage when we picketed if a worker from S. Malk's was with us.)[43]

Nevertheless, these determined efforts of garment workers and their heroic stance on behalf of fellow workers and on behalf of the union demanded considerable sacrifice on the part of those women involved. Mrs Helena Pretorius and Ettie Erasmus were employed at S.Malk's. The former was a widow with two children and Ettie fainted when she was baton-charged by policemen in 1932. It was not easy to be a "Hell's Angel from S.Malk's".[44]

The failure of the 1932 strike plunged the garment workers into immense hardships. Wages were down 10% and the union was all but defeated. Early in 1934 it began to reorganise and to revive the solidarity generated by the strike. However, this experience of defeat and the capacity to weather it, was central to the development of a more conscious unionism and more extended union activity. In February 1934 a detailed Program of Work outlining a detailed strategy for the work, social, political, educational and cultural lives of the garment workers was drawn up. It was proposed to publish a pamphlet both in English and in Afrikaans, explaining the necessity of a trade union to garment workers, to establish

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[43] *GW/KW*, 'S. Malk se werkers lei', December 1939, p.7. cf. Illustration 20.

[44] GWU, Bca 3. Commission of Inquiry, Statement to be submitted Mrs H. Pretorius, 1948. Inquiry, 1948. Industrial relations in the clothing industry during the remainder of the thirties were more harmonious, with no further major strikes occurring. In May 1943, though, a lock-out took place in which some 7 000 workers were locked out in an attempt to curb their wage demands. GWU, Ccb 3.1. Letter, S. Sachs to Minister of Justice, Pretoria, 12.5.1943.

worker cadres for the education of the workers in trade union matters and to set up training classes one evening per week. A library was to be established to make available the most important books dealing with the working-class movement.[45] The 1934 Program of Work also stated that "the social life of the workers would be taken in hand by the union more energetically".[46] Consequently, during the late thirties, physical culture classes were held on Tuesdays and Thursdays, the hiking club left the union offices at 8 am on Sunday mornings and the sports section offered basketball and dancing. In 1935 the introduction of hockey and stage craft was also being considered.[47]

During the twenties, women workers in the Witwatersrand clothing industry, both in the tailoring and factory sections, numerically exceeded the male workers in the body of striking workers in the industry. As their participation in the strikes in the clothing industry increased, so did their assertiveness and knowledge of the functioning of trade union activities. During the strikes of 1931 and 1932 these striking women became the backbone of the strikes and emerged as confident and seasoned trade unionists, as opposed to those women who in many cases scabbed and returned to work because of economic necessity.

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[45] GWU, Bcf 1. Program of Work for 1934, S. Sachs to CEC GWU, 2.2.1934. In time the library was extended to include more popular novels, in both English and Afrikaans, and branches were established in Germiston, Fordsburg and Potchefstroom. GWU, Baa 1. 19th meeting CEC GWU, 14.2.1940.

[46] GWU, Bcf 1. Program of Work for 1934, 2.2.1934.

[47] GWU, Bbc 1.52. GWU to Miss Mavis Sharples, 6.3.1935. During the early forties this initiative resulted in the production of a number of plays by the garment workers. cf. E. Brink, 'Plays, Poetry and Production: The Literature of the Garment Workers', *South African Labour Bulletin*, vol. 9, no.8 , July 1984. See Illustration 13.

The Development of the Garment Workers Union

The trade union organisation of the labour force employed in the clothing industry had its roots in both Europe and Great Britain in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.[48] This tradition of organisation was imported to the Reef by male master tailors who migrated to the Witwatersrand from Eastern and Western Europe. From the turn of the century they commenced to organise themselves into a trade union and in 1909 the Witwatersrand Tailors Association (hereafter WTA) was established as a trade union for the skilled tailoring section of the Witwatersrand clothing industry.[49]

During and after the First World War factory production of clothes took off. The bulk of the labour in the factories was carried out by recently urbanised Afrikaner women rather than skilled tailors. In 1925 the WTA executive, in an effort to strengthen its membership after their defeat in strikes during 1922, decided to allow these Afrikaner women to become members. Subsequently female garment workers were organised into a factory section within the union, as opposed to a bespoke section which represented the skilled tailors. Although the bespoke section retained an authoritative voice in the union, its membership steadily declined in comparison to the rapid growth of the factory section.[49]

At first the WTA executive mainly looked after the interests of the members of the bespoke section. However, from 1926 the union slowly started to stimulate trade union interest amongst its female membership.

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[48] For the position of women in British trade unions in the 1910's and 1920's, see B. Drake, *Women in Trade Unions*, London: Virago Press, 1984, reprinted publication of 1920, published by the British Labour Research Department, p.141.

[49] J. Lewis, *Industrialisation*, p.59.

[50] L. Witz, 'Servant', pp.20-24 and J. Lewis, *Industrialisation*, pp.59-60. This section relies on Witz and Lewis for most of its information. See also table 8.

Under the guidance of Solly Sachs who became General Secretary of the Union in 1928, this process gained momentum. During the late twenties several constitutional measures were adopted, and in 1930 the name of the union was changed to the Garment Workers' Union to reflect the changed nature of the union membership. At first the GWU suffered severe setbacks, especially during the 1932 strike. However, in 1934 a program of reorganisation was initiated and when the master tailors formed the Tailoring Workers Industrial Union, the factory and bespoke sections of the union finally split.[51]

During this period significant changes occurred in the composition of the CEC of the GWU. At first the CEC consisted entirely of male candidates. When the WTA registered as a trade union in 1924, Mr S. Galber was chairman and C.F. Glass was general secretary and the CEC consisted of thirteen men. In 1928, when Sachs was appointed as general secretary, Mr H. Lee was elected chairman of, once again, an all-male CEC. However, in 1929 Mrs Hugo and Mrs Myers were elected to the committees of the factory and bespoke sections of the GWU, and five women were noted as 'alternates' for the factory section.

The position remained virtually the same for 1930 and 1931, when the CEC consisted of seven and eleven men respectively. In 1932, the year of the general strike, Mrs M. McNaughton was elected as vice-president and three women, Mrs K. Goodman, Mrs J. Botha, and Mrs G. Booysens, were elected as members of the CEC. Mrs G. van Rooyen briefly became the first female president of the union in 1933, while Johanna Cornelius became a member of the CEC and president the following year. Hester Cornelius and five other women were elected onto the CEC in 1934, the year of the

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[51] In 1937 the closed shop agreedment, held in abeyance since 1932, was reinstated. At the time attempts by emerging Afrikaner nationalism to gain control of the union by means of its subsidiary, the Nasionale Raad van Trustees also took place. cf L. Witz, 'Servant' ch.5 and B.M. Touyzs, 'White Labour'.

split between the bespoke and factory sections of the GWU.[52] From 1933 male and female representation on the CEC began to even out, and became more representative of the composition of the rank and file membership, to the extent that in 1937 the elected CEC consisted of 25 females and 8 males. This trend was maintained for the rest of the thirties and into the forties. During these years the female representatives on the CEC remained fairly constant and the names of Mrs G. van Rooyen, Mary Proudfoot, Corrie Gatzke (Mrs Lategan), C. Brownbridge, Ray Adler, Rose de Freitas, the Cornelius sisters, Dulcie Hartwell and Anna Scheepers regularly appeared in the minutes of meetings.[53]

In a recent interview, Mrs Lategan, a former CEC member, outlined the general attitude of these trade union executives,

> Daar was onder ons en onder die leiers 'n groot drang om mense te help.....kyk daar is so baie arm klerewerkers, jy't nou net gevoel jy moet help -- jy moet help, jy moet luister, jy moet help waar jy kan.
> (There was amongst us and amongst the leaders a great urge to help the people.....look, there were so many poor garment workers, you felt you had to help, you must help, you must listen, you must help where you can.)[54]

Miss O'Reilley, a former shop steward, remembered,

> Dr Anna worked, the late Johanna, Sannie, they were all working in factories and could understand what people were going through. That is where they got it from, that feeling of what they had to do for their workers.[55]

Mrs Pa. echoed these words, while Mrs Spangenberg added,

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[52] CAD, ARB 710. General Secretary WTA and GWU to Registrar of Trade Unions and Employee Organisations, Pretoria, 9.4.1924, 11.11.1928, 4.9.1929, 24.2.1930, 5.3.1931, 24.2.1932, 3.1.1933, 21.11.1933, 19.2.1934, 18.1.1935, 31.1.1936, 4.3.1937. In 1938 Anna Scheepers became the president of the GWU, a position she held until 1984. Simultaneously, Johanna Cornelius became national organiser and her sister Hester became secretary of the Germiston branch.

[53] GWU, Baa 1. See, for example, meetings of the CEC, 20.9.1939. Then 19 of the 23 members present were women, 13.5.1940 (19 of 24), 21.8.40 (14 of 19), 27.6.42 (14 of 17). For attendance of these women see also Minutes Meetings CEC, 4.8.1936, 21.8.1936, 29.1.1937, and 28.2.1940.

[54] Interview 17.

[55] Interview 20. cf. Interviews 5 and 12.

split between the bespoke and factory sections of the GWU.[52] From 1933 male and female representation on the CEC began to even out, and became more representative of the composition of the rank and file membership, to the extent that in 1937 the elected CEC consisted of 25 females and 8 males. This trend was maintained for the rest of the thirties and into the forties. During these years the female representatives on the CEC remained fairly constant and the names of Mrs G. van Rooyen, Mary Proudfoot, Corrie Gatzke (Mr Lategan), C. Brownbridge, Ray Adler, Rose de Freitas, the Cornelius sisters, Dulcie Hartwell and Anna Scheepers regularly appeared in the minutes of meetings.[53]

In a recent interview, Mrs Lategan, a former CEC member, outlined the general attitude of these trade union executives,

> Daar was onder ons en onder die leiers 'n groot drang om mense te help.....kyk daar is so baie arm klerewerkers, jy't nou net gevoel jy moet help -- jy moet help, jy moet luister, jy moet help waar jy kan.
> (There was amongst us and amongst the leaders a great urge to help the people.....look, there were so many poor garment workers, you felt you had to help, you must help, you must listen, you must help where you can.)[54]

Miss O'Reilley, a former shop steward, remembered,

> Dr Anna worked, the late Johanna, Sannie, they were all working in factories and could understand what people were going through. That is where they got it from, that feeling of what they had to do for their workers.[55]

Mrs Pa. echoed these words, while Mrs Spangenberg added,

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[52] CAD, ARB 710. General Secretary WTA and GWU to Registrar of Trade Unions and Employee Organisations, Pretoria, 9.4.1924, 11.11.1928, 4.9.1929, 24.2.1930, 5.3.1931, 24.2.1932, 3.1.1933, 21.11.1933, 19.2.1934, 18.1.1935, 31.1.1936, 4.3.1937. In 1938 Anna Scheepers became the president of the GWU, a position she held until 1984. Simultaneously, Johanna Cornelius became national organiser and her sister Hester became secretary of the Germiston branch.

[53] GWU, Baa 1. See, for example, meetings of the CEC, 20.9.1939. Then 19 of the 23 members present were women, 13.5.1940 (19 of 24), 21.8.40 (14 of 19), 27.6.42 (14 of 17). For attendance of these women see also Minutes Meetings CEC, 4.8.1936, 21.8.1936, 29.1.1937, and 28.2.1940.

[54] Interview 17.

[55] Interview 20. cf. Interviews 5 and 12.

> Jy kan op hulle staatmaak dat as jy iets nodig het, moet jy hulle gevra het en sou almal saamhelp..... omdat hulle weet wat was swaarkry. Hulle het self van die plaas af gekom, omdat hulle swaargekry het.
> (You could depend on them that if you needed something, you had to ask them and everyone would have helped together, because they knew what hardship was. They themselves came from the farm, because they had suffered.)[56]

It is striking how many of the informants interviewed for this study experienced the friendly hand of the union. Mrs C. once asked for and received a blanket, Mrs Harmse was helped to pay her rent and Miss O'Reilley was helped during an illness.[57] In a recent interview Anna Scheepers briefly summarised the efforts of the CEC to help fellow garment workers,

> Meeste van ons werkers het van die platteland af gekom, en daar was geen heenkome nie en dis snaaks hoe hulle geleer het. Partykeer was hulle op die stasie hierso en hulle weet nou nie herwaarts of derwaarts nie... maar as hulle met die unie in aanraking kom sal ons hulle gaan haal en kos gee en vir hulle werk probeer kry en vir hulle losies kry en so aan...dit was deel van ons plig om die minderbevoorregte mense te help.
> (Most of our workers came from the country and there was nowhere to go and it is strange how they learnt. Sometimes they were on the station here and they do not know which way to turn....but if they contact the union we will fetch them, give them food, try to find work for them, find lodgings for them and so on....It was part of our duty to help the under-privileged people.)[58]

The composition of the CEC of the GWU therefore gradually changed from a male-dominated executive to a stable body of mainly women. After the mid-thirties its composition remained by and large homogeneous, a development which enabled the CEC to conceptualise and implement the changes they felt were needed to best serve the interests of their predominantly female constituency. The credo of the GWU, as formulated by Anna Scheepers, was the result of a fundamental change which took place not only in the composition of the CEC of the GWU, but also in its formulation of and approach to the problems which confronted its members.

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[56] Interview 26. GWU, Bca 4. Commission of Inquiry, Evidence A. Scheepers, and S. Sachs, pp.2260 and 985.

[57] Interviews 5, 12 and 20.

[58] Interview 35.

In turn, rank and file members increasingly identified with the CEC which they had elected and availed themselves of the opportunity to appeal for aid and assistance from the union when dire need drove them to the brink of destitution.

The Socio-economic Function of the GWU

Rank and file garment workers approached the union with a large variety of demands and requests, which over time differed considerably in nature and intensity. During the depth of the Depression in 1930 and in the midst of the strikes in the clothing industry, the myriad of requests of unemployed garment workers made the CEC aware of their plight. In April 1930 Sachs wrote to the Minister of Labour, maintaining that some 600 women and 120 male garment workers had lost their jobs, and that the condition of the workers, especially that of the women, verged on absolute destitution. They were going hungry and were threatened with eviction from their homes.[59]

Early in that year a Distress Fund was founded by the union to help these garment workers in need by providing relief in the form of food parcels. In March 1930, the Fund began purchasing groceries to distribute amongst needy garment workers. In April £102.9.10 was spent on groceries comprising items such as 47 10lbs bags of flour, 45 5lb bags of sugar, rice, soap, tea, coffee, jam, milk and canned fish.[60] In addition, Mrs M.E. du Plessis, for example, received aid from the Distress Fund, and her daughter was informed about possible employment. Miss M. Pietersen was sent to the doctor, and Mrs McCary was given 72 shirts to do as outwork,

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[59] GWU, Bcd 4.1.1. Letter, General Secretary GWU to Minister of Labour, Pretoria, 3.4.1930.

[60] Ibid. Unemployment Distress Fund. Income Levies from Members and Factories were £11.3.9. Order to Gundelfinger Ltd., 9.3.1930. A dance held in March 1930 netted a profit of £15.14.6. for the fund. 29.3.1930.

even though it was maintained that she made a mess of each one.[61] The request of Mrs D. Barlin of Judith's Paarl for employment was typical. After her husband had died in 1928, she had kept the family by means of a little shop, "until I lost every penny I have (sic)", and had no alternative but to go out to work.[62] Although on request the GWU could find no employment for Miss S. du Toit,[63] the CEC sent Miss N. Commen and Miss A. van Rensburg, of Belgravia and Vrededorp respectively, tram tickets to enable them to come into the union offices to enquire about employment.[64]

After the Depression the GWU continued to process requests for employment submitted by prospective garment workers. It also eased the transition of numerous prospective young garment workers from the rural areas into industrial employment. In mid-1937 Mrs J.J. Kruger of P.O. Wegdraai, Prieska District, wrote to the GWU to ask for employment for her daughter who was "goed met naald- en masjienwerk" (good with needle and machine work). The latter duly arrived from Prieska in July 1937, to take up employment at the Pearl Factory.[65]

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[61] Ibid. Distress Fund, April 1930.

[62] Ibid. Letter, D. Barlin, Judith's Paarl to S. Sachs, 3.3.1930.

[63] Ibid. Letter, S. du Toit, Bloemfontein, to GWU, 6.6.1930.

[64] Ibid. Enquiries of A. van Rensburg, Vrededorp, 7.7.1930 and 9.7.1930 and N. Commen, Belgravia 26.3.1930. See also correspondence from B. Helper, L. Schuman , L. Baumgardt, Hugo, Jackson, Lichter, etc. Miss T. Newman and Miss Y. Schneiders of Kensington and Judith's Paarl were told to call at Matz in Main Street for jobs as buttonhole hands, and Mrs M. Gamble at Messrs Glaser and Meisel and also Talekinsky's for a job as a tailoress. The union also gave references to Miss S.A. Scallen, an allround tailoress, and Alice Niewback, a tailoress with six years experience. As a result of the Depression many male garment workers also enquired after jobs.

[65] GWU, Bcd 2.1. She was accommodated in the Harmonie Hostel. The balance of 16/6 due for her accommodation, was paid by the union. Correspondence, GWU and Mrs Kruger, 19.6.1937. As early as January 1935 Sarah Delport from Mispa, P.O. Migdol, wrote to the union to find employment in the clothing industry. Miss. K. Augustyn from Sternham, Prieksa, also found her first employment and accommodation through the union which obtained lodgings for her with private individuals.

These young recruits such as Miss Kruger, all received a long letter from the union explaining working conditions in the industry. They were told that lodgings were difficult to find but the union would try to find them accommodation with private people, usually at 12/- per week. They were warned that the first three months in the trade were not easy as they could earn little, but "dan is u oor die ergste" (then the worst will be over), and earnings would improve. Union contributions would be subtracted from their wages and 3/- per week was necessary for the tramfare. Finally, they were consoled with the thought that they would retain about 4/- per week for clothes and other necessities. Girls were instructed to send a telegram of their time of arrival and were given instructions to wait on one of the benches of the platform until someone spoke to them by name.[66] In these letters of instruction Anna Scheepers, then president of the union, promised numerous applicants,

> ek sal self op Johannesburg stasie wees of anders sal ek iemand stuur om u daar te ontmoet.
> (I will be at Johannesburg station myself or else I will send someone to meet you there.)[67]

Thus, under the watchful eye of the union Miss G. Vermeulen, Kitty Nel, Loyal Human, Jacoba Snyman, and E.M. von Abo, all from the Prieska district, migrated to the city to take up employment in the clothing industry.[68]

Therefore, the GWU not only heeded demands for employment of its members, but extended aid to prospective garment workers as well. These women approached the union confident that they would be welcomed and that every effort would be made to solve their problems and grant their requests.

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[66] Ibid. Correspondence, GWU with e_ F. Miller and G. Vermeulen, August 1937.

[67] Ibid. See e.g. letter, H. Karsten, Saalskop via Prieska, 18.8.1937.

[68] Ibid. It would seem as if they had all responded to an advertisement. In addition, in June 1937 the CEC was also asked to help find suitable employment and accommodation for Miss T.E. Heunis, a garment worker recently arrived from King Willamstown. GWU, Baa 1. 21st meeting CEC GWU, 29.6.1937.

Health

In addition to employment, in health-related issues the GWU offered not only the usual facilities such as a Medical Aid Society, but they were persuaded by the demands of their membership to extend their efforts into areas which intimately affected the lives of their female members. These included issues such as confinement allowances and help with tuberculosis cases.

During the late twenties a Medical Aid Society (hereafter MAS) was established to provide free medical attention and medicines to garment workers. The MAS operated successfully throughout the thirties, with Dr Finger and Dr Rabson appointed as doctors for the MAS. Garment workers seemed to be satisfied with these services, although at times complaints were levelled against the doctors. During the forties a panel of specialists were appointed as well. Dr Halperine was appointed as gynaecologist and the services of an ear, nose and throat specialist were acquired as well.[69] In addition, the GWU took up the cause of women who had difficulties in procuring their confinement allowances from the state and aided terminally ill members, in particular those who had contracted tuberculosis.

From early 1932, the GWU actively concerned itself with women who in terms of the regulations of the state confinement allowances did not qualify for an allowance, but were still in need of assistance. According to these regulations, applicants had to have nine consecutive months service prior to the date of application for the allowance and applications had to be made within 21 days of leaving work. The average joint

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[69] GWU, Baa 1. 24th meeting CEC GWU, 29.7.1937. GWU, Bcd 9.2.1. 40th meeting Germiston Branch, 4.10.1944.

income of the parents of the child could not exceed three pounds per week.[70]

The inventory compiled by the GWU during 1932 and 1933 of cases of hardship suffered by women giving birth, gives some indication of the circumstances of these women. In most cases these women were disqualified from these allowances because at some stage in the nine months prior to the birth of the child, the joint earnings of husband and wife exceeded the stipulated three pounds per week maximum. The garment worker would not be granted her allowance even if this limit was exceeded for only a short period by the temporary employment of her spouse. For example, Aletta Zeeman from Braamfontein, employed at Ministers at £3 per week, was refused her allowance because her husband had earned 25/- per week for two months prior to the time she had left her job. It was not taken into account that he had been without permanent employment for the previous three years (probably due to the Depression). His temporary employment therefore promptly disqualified her for the grant. Mrs Zeeman had another child to support and had to help her father whose wage of £15 per month had to keep a family of eighteen, of whom six were babies under four years.[71]

Joint wages of both spouses invariably pushed the income of garment workers over the stipulated maximum of three pounds per week. Mrs Betty Wright's husband earned £1.17.7 as opposed to her wage of £2.10.0 per week, with which they had to support his aged mother and crippled sister

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[70] GWU, Bcd 4.1. *The Star*, 'The State and Mothers', 15.11.1937 and Memo submitted by the GWU to Minister of Labour re confinement allowances for working women. See also CAD, ARB 2013. Circular to Divisional Inspectors of Labour, re Confinement Allowances, 1941. Pollak also remarked at the time that these restrictions excluded a large number of garment workers. H. Pollak, 'Women Workers in Witwatersrand Industries', *South African Journal of Economics*, I, 1933, p.63.

[71] GWU, Bcd 4.1.1. Applications of Distressing Cases refused during 1932, re Confinement Allowances granted according to the Factories Act, sec. 18. See also the cases of Christina Gouws, Irene Altertus, and Johanna Stockenstrom. Also those of married women such as Anna Cilliers van Wyk, Eunice Sellers, Bertha Sourgen and Susan Anderson.

as well. Gysina Pienaar, who had given birth to a stillborn child, was also refused a grant because she had earned £2.5.0, much more than her husband. His job paid only £1.16.0 per week and lasted only a short while. In her case the union, after several refusals, succeeded in obtaining the confinement allowance.[72]

Throughout the thirties the union regularly corresponded with the Department of Labour on behalf of women who, for various reasons, were denied their confinement allowances. At times, as in the case of Mrs Doris Raath, who was granted her allowance as a "special case", their efforts would bear fruit.[73] She was also given a grant of two pounds when she appealed to the union, "now we are in very poor circumstances".[74] Her husband was a handyman and could no longer support them as he had lost his job, and Mrs Raath was not able to work either. A similar, but less successful correspondence was conducted on behalf of Susan Hiepner, Ada Botha and Ria Marx, whose husbands were all bootmakers. Mr Marx was out of work for an entire year and Mr Hiepner out of work for 14 months.[75] In most cases the correspondence for each case grew to several letters, with the union repeatedly appealing on behalf of the women.

In 1939 the CEC also sent a deputation to the Minister of Labour concerning bureaucratic obstacles to obtaining confinement allowances for

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[72] Ibid. In 1934 the South African League of Women Voters (successor to the Women's Enfranchisement League which disbanded in 1930 when white women received the vote) was officially asked to investigate 3 024 similar cases of hardship with regard to confinement allowances. Letter, Honorary Secretary, J. Puteland to S. Sachs, 8.3.1934. Solly Sachs also wrote to the Secretary for Labour to protest against the way in which the allocation of confinement allowances was handled. Correspondence, S. Sachs and Secretary for Labour, April/May 1934.

[73] Ibid. Correspondence, GWU and Department of Labour, March and June 1935.

[74] GWU, Bbc 1.23. Letter, Mrs Raath to GWU, 31.3.1935

[75] Ibid. The shoe manufacturing industry seemed to have gone through slack times from 1935-1938. See correspondence, S. Sachs and Secretary for Labour re Mrs Hiepner December 1935 - June 1936, re Mrs Botha September 1937. Affidavit, Mrs Marx, 12.8.1938.

workers. Mr W. Madeley, then Minister of Labour, promised to see to the matter.[76] The matter was still unresolved in 1943 when the Financial Committee of the GWU suggested to the CEC that women who had been refused grants, should be given grants from a fund to which employers would also be requested to contribute.[77]

The CEC was also concerned with what they considered to be the high incidence of tuberculosis amongst garment workers, which they believed was caused by the bad working conditions in the factories.[78] In 1937 the CEC, following the admission of a member to a TB sanatorium, discussed the creation of a fund for workers with TB to which both employers and employees would contribute.[79]

1939 seemed to have been a very bad year for fatalities due to TB amongst garment workers. The MOH of Germiston noted that about half of the cases of pulmonary TB in that year consisted of young female garment workers.[80] At the time when Miss Susie Ross died, other garment workers such as Miss Gravet, Miss Van Coller, Miss H. Botha, and Miss L. Hoffman were being treated at the same sanatorium.[81] When Miss Botha died shortly afterwards, Hester Cornelius was deputised to see to funeral arrangements, the costs of which were borne by the GWU and MAS.[82] Miss Van Coller, who had received a two pound grant in 1939, died in April 1942,

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[76] GWU, Baa 1. 3rd meeting CEC GWU, 27.9.1939. The deputation consisted of Johanna Cornelius, Anna Scheepers, Dulcie Hartwell and Mr M. Sarovich.

[77] GWU, Bab 1.1. 5th meeting Financial Committee, 1.3.1943.

[78] *KW/GW*, 'Tuberkulose in Germiston', April 1939, p.11.

[79] GWU, Baa 1. 6th meeting CEC GWU, 18.10.1937.

[80] CAD, ARB 2017. *The Star*, 'Safeguarding the Health of Factory Workers', 16.1.1940.

[81] *KW/GW*, 'Germiston Nuus', November 1939, p.7. Money due to Miss S. Ross from the MAS was given to her parents. GWU, Baa 1. 9th meeting CEC GWU, 8.11.1939.

[82] GWU, Baa 1. 10th meeting CEC GWU, 15.11.1939.

after a protracted illness of two and half years. Miss Jessie Oosthuizen, also a TB sufferer, who had to recuperate at the coast, was voted a share in the profits of the dance for the Union Guard, held in June.[83]

It would, therefore, seem that the GWU adapted the usual medical aid assistance as instituted by trade unions to cope with the more gender-specific demands of their constituents. The rather arbitrary endowment of state confinement allowances and consequent deprivation which this caused in the lives of garment workers stimulate the CEC to negotiate extensively with the state departments involved. In addition, they also tried to help such women from union resources, as well as extending help to young women who were stricken with tuberculosis after working in the industry for a few years.

Personal Welfare

Garment workers not only approached the union on work-related issues such as employment, accommodation and health, but took more personal problems to the executive as well. Scores of women appealed to the union for grants when personal circumstances forced them to seek relief outside the home. These grants, and the way in which they were allotted, serve as a good illustration of the way in which the GWU went beyond the call of duty as a trade union to fulfil the needs of these workers as women.

Already in the late twenties the garment workers, when in dire need, turned to the union. At first from about 1929, they came to the union for loans to tide them over an illness, as in the case of Mrs Jean Ghent, or unemployment, as in the case of Dolly Emerson, who were both given some assistance to tide them over.[84] When Mrs Annie Hodes and Mrs C. Le

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[83] GWU, Bbc 9.2.1. Joint meeting CEC GWU and GWU Guard, Germiston Branch, 21.6.1939. It was also suggested that funds be collected for TB sufferers at the factories, cf. *KW/GW*, May/June 1942.

[84] GWU, Aab 1.16. Correspondence, Mrs J. Ghent and Dolly Emerson with

Grange turned to the union for a loan to pay bills, the WTA responded that they could not help them as the constitution of the WTA made no provision for relief to members.[85]

During the thirties applications to the GWU were more successful. Trade union officials became more responsive to the needs and requirements of garment workers. In time they became almost maternal figures, as could be seen in the play 'Trial of the 22', in which Betty, the trade unionist, is described as having a kindly face and being not so young anymore. Again, in the short story 'Pure Goud'(Pure Gold), the trade unionist addresses a new member in very maternal terms to assure her that the union never becomes angry with its members.[86] Mrs Spangenberg identified a similar episode where Mrs Swanie, a dignified white-haired trade union official, used to reprimand them, also addressing them as "my kinders..." (my children...).[87] Mrs V. added that Mrs Swanie was always listened to for she was a "very sensible and good woman".[88]

Some union members appealed for grants in cases when they themselves were ill and could either not obtain any, or insufficient aid from the MAS.[89] In addition, Miss G. Rech, Miss Annetta Buys and Miss Anna Smit also successfully appealed for grants to enable them to go on holiday or recuperate at home after an illness.[90] Finally, when garment workers were the sole breadwinners in the home, or when their husbands were

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WTA, October and December 1929. GWU, Cca 2.2. Letter to secretary of the MAS.

85 GWU, Aab 1.16. Correspondence with the WTA, March 1929.

86 E. Brink, 'Plays'.

87 Interview 26.

88 Interview 32.

89 GWU, Baa 1. 2nd meeting CEC GWU, 20.9.1939. See e.g. the cases of Misses B. Webster and A. van Wyk, 9th meeting CEC GWU, 9.11.1939 and L. Green, 16th meeting CEC GWU, 16.1.1940.

90 Ibid. 2nd and 3rd meetings CEC GWU, 23.2.1937 and 20.9.1939.

sickly, personal illness meant destitution and they frequently would request aid. In 1937 Mrs M.J.C. Dickson was in need of assistance when both she and her husband were ill. Her family depended solely on her for their support.[91] Mrs A. Penny, who was involved in an accident at City Clothing, and Kathleen Kruger, whose baby was ill and whose husband was unemployed, found themselves in a similar predicament and were granted £2 and £1.10.0 respectively.[92] Mrs Korsten, who had four minor children and an invalid husband, was also tided over with a grant when she appealed to the union in 1941.[93]

Very often a garment worker appealed to the union for aid when she and her family were in need of financial assistance. In 1932, for example, Jacoba Legrange, who was "die sorg van die huis" (the breadwinner of the house), appealed for money and received 12/6 relief.[94] In 1937 Mrs Du Preez appealed to the union for a pension on the grounds that she was too old to work and had two invalid sons to support. She received a monthly grant of a guinea, and two CEC members, Tokkie du Plooy and Mrs Kriek, were deputised to see her.[95] An exceptional case of an anonymous fifteen-year-old girl employed at the Germiston Clothing Factory, who was the sole support of her invalid father and five brothers and sisters, came to the attention of the GWU. She received a pound from the union without having applied for a grant.[96]

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91 Ibid. 6th meeting CEC GWU, 29.9.1939.

92 Ibid. 23rd and 36th meetings CEC GWU, 15.3.1940 and 12.6.1940. Likewise, Mrs Margaret Brown and Mrs M. Venter approached the union when their husbands fell ill and they experienced hard times. cf. GWU, Bbc 9.2.1. 12th meeting Germiston Branch, 11.8.1943.

93 GWU, Baa 1. Letter, Mrs Korsten to GWU, 6.9.1941.

94 GWU, Cca 2.2. Application for relief, J. Legrange, 16.2.1932. Mrs Cecelia Scott of Jeppe and Miss Marie du Preez of Bez Valley, who had been in the industry since 1932 were both helped by the union in 1939 and 1940, respectively. GWU, Baa 1. 6th and 36th meetings CEC GWU, 18.19.1939 and 12.6.1940.

95 GWU, Baa 1. 4th meeting CEC GWU, 28.2.1937.

96 GWU, Bbc 9.2.1. 17th meeting Germiston Branch GWU, 3.7.1939.

Women not only approached the union for their personal needs, but also on behalf of less fortunate fellow women workers. Women who were not necessarily ill, but whom union members felt were in need of rest or recuperation, were also given grants "...in appreciation of loyalty to the factory", as was the case with Mrs de Kock of Juvenile Clothing. Miss Webster, a fellow worker, appealed to the CEC to set aside some money to send Mrs de Kock on a holiday, for which the employers and employees had already donated twelve pounds.[97] Sophie Meyer, whose husband was unemployed and who was in "dire circumstances", was also given a grant to tide her over, in recognition of "excellent and loyal services".[98] Workers at the Acme Clothing Factory also felt that a colleague, Mrs Potgieter, earned too little after too long and wanted the union to circulate a collection list in her favour. However, their appeal was unsuccessful because the CEC felt that it could not circulate a list for collection in the factory, as this would set a precedent. Instead Miss G. Haywood, a member of the CEC, but acting in her personal capacity, offered a cushion to be raffled to collect the necessary money.[99]

This concern for fellow workers also resulted in twenty pounds being collected at the New York Clothing Factory in Germiston towards an operation to restore the eyesight of Miss Byleveldt, who was going blind. Likewise, workers at Supreme Shirts in Germiston collected money for a fellow workers who had to leave the factory because of epilepsy.[100]

Length of employment in the clothing industry was often considered an important factor in favour of women who appealed for grants. For instance, when Mrs A. Van Wyk, a member since 1927, Mrs Ethel Joseph, a member since

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[97] GWU, Baa 1. 8th meeting CEC GWU, 1.11.1939.

[98] Ibid. 45th meeting CEC GWU, 14.8.1940.

[99] GWU, Bbc 9.2.1. 25th meeting Germiston Branch GWU, 28.8.1939.

[100] Ibid. 14th, 40th and 41st meetings Germiston Branch GWU, 5.6.1939, October 1944.

1928 and Mrs Green, in the trade since 1929, applied for grants in 1939, they were careful to record their length of service in the industry.[101] A second-generation garment worker, Gwen Fourie, who was unemployed and whose mother was an old, but unemployed and ill member of the union, was given a final 15/- in July 1940.[102] Length of loyal service, therefore, seemed to be a consideration. When Miss Elsie Gericke's application for money to visit her father, who was ill in Cape Town, was turned down, it was stated that she was not an old member and her records at the unemployment office had not been good.[103]

In addition, male enrolment in the army during the Second World War temporarily put many women in financial straits, for whereas their husbands had formerly received wages weekly, the army paid families on a monthly basis. Some time therefore elapsed between salary payments, calling for short-term assistance as was the case with Mrs Laura Werner and Mildred Lambeton.[104]

It is clear that garment workers often appealed to the union when personal circumstances drove them to the brink of destitution. They were often helped out with grants of one to two and at times three pounds to tide them over their difficulties. At times garment workers would repeatedly appeal for aid, which would be granted, but terminated eventually.[105] However, they could be sure that their requests, if not made too often, would be considered sympathetically.

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[101] GWU, Baa 1. 9th, 11th and 13th meetings CEC GWU, November, December 1939.

[102] Ibid. 39th and 40th meetings CEC GWU, July 1940.

[103] Ibid. 41st meeting CEC GWU, 17.7.1940. Miss R. Augustyn's request was, likewise, turned down. 13th meeting CEC GWU, 6.12.1939.

[104] Ibid. Meetings CEC GWU, December 1939, June/July 1940.

[105] GWU, Baa 1. See e.g. 14th meeting CEC GWU, 13.12.1939. Cases of Mrs Ethel Joseph and Hester Renney.

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