

The Jobs 'No One' Wants

By DAVID EGNER

Growing numbers of women are tearing down the "male only" barricades that have kept them out of countless jobs, but few men are lifting a finger against "female only" job restrictions.

Most sex discrimination is illegal. But nearly all the persons who complain about it are female.

"No more than 5 or 10 per cent of our sex discrimination complaints come from men," said Edward D. Lynch, regional director of the State Division of Human Rights. That's fewer than 10 complaints a year.

Lynch and representatives of area employment agencies and business schools agreed that the low pay and slight chance for advancement in "female only" jobs — jobs like secretary, waitress, receptionist — are responsible for the unattractiveness of these jobs for men.

Another reason lies in men's minds.

"Boys are never taught to think of themselves as becoming something like a secretary," said James Piper, supervisor of the youth placement section of the State Employment Service in Rochester.

"When an employer hears the word secretary," said Jane Plitt-Selman, president of the Genesee Valley chapter of the National Organization for Women, "he conjures up an image of a female with a typewriter."

Ms. Plitt-Selman contends that "stereotyping of a job by sex" hurts employers and employes of both sexes.

"Not all women make good secretaries and not all men

make good mechanics," Ms. Plitt-Selman said. If all jobs were open to both men and women, she said, "employers would benefit by choosing the people with the most talent."

For the very few men who have both the talent and desire to take on a "female job," finding an employer often becomes a hopeless task.

None of the four men who came to the Carter MacKay employment agency in the two years it's been operating here has been able to find the "female only" job he wanted.

"People think if a guy wants to be a secretary, he's automatically queer," explained Douglas McCarthy, president of the agency.

Mrs. Sylvia Strawczynski, placement manager at Carter MacKay, fought an unsuccessful battle last week to find an employer willing to hire a man for secretarial work.

"Employers said these jobs were open to both men and

women, but that they preferred women," Mrs. Strawczynski recalled. "They said a man would expect more money and wouldn't stay at the job long."

The man finally did find a job: loading trucks.

"Employers just don't think a man would fit in well in a job where everyone else doing that type of work is female," explained Fred A. Weterings, president of Plaza Girl employment service.

Plaza Girl has never found a permanent job for a Plaza Boy in its nine years of business, Weterings said, though he insisted his agency accepts male clients.

Plaza Girl draws about four or five men seeking "female jobs" each year. It draws about 75 women a week.

Not all employers will come right out and say they won't hire a man for a job because of his sex—that opens them to a charge of illegal discrimination—but many find other rea-

sons to use as excuses.

Few persons would argue that men should be eligible for all "female" jobs. Most women would feel understandably uncomfortable if they found a male attendant in a restroom, for example.

So three types of employment discrimination by sex are allowed, under a set of 1971 guidelines by the New York State Labor Department. They are:

- "For reasons of authenticity" in performances. A male actor can't complain about not getting a female role.

- If "community standards of morality or propriety so dictate (restroom attendants, dress clerks)."

- "In entertainment industry jobs where sex appeal is an essential requirement."

The only reason the State human rights division gets so few sex complaints, Lynch conceded, is that so few men try to get "female jobs."

He added that he and his nine employees, who are responsible for fighting discrimination of all types in Monroe and 10 neighboring counties, "just don't have the manpower to launch as many actions of our own as we'd like." He said his office acts on sex discrimination only when a "verified complaint" is made.

Mary Kate Driscoll, a senior employment service representative at the State Employment Service here, said that one reason why "almost no" men try for "female jobs" is that they lack the required skills.

There appears to be no rush of men into schools where they can pick up these skills.

The Wayward Bus...

A Regional Transit Service bus driver received a summons for speeding after his bus was involved in an accident at 7:30 a.m. yesterday that damaged three other cars and tied up rush hour traffic on Route 47 North for 45 minutes. No injuries were reported.

Trooper John O'Neill of the State Police said the three cars had slowed to a stop behind one another when the bus came up from behind and hit the line of cars in the rear.

The second car was demolished when it was sandwiched between the bus and the car in front of it.

O'Neill identified the driver of the bus as Donald E. Mostyn. His address was given as 1372 E. Main St., the Regional Transit Service terminal.

Mostyn was charged with driving too fast for existing conditions.

Drivers of the cars involved were Douglas Ross, 50½ Rowley St.; Oliver C. Hellems, 1354 Calkins Road, Pittsford; and Mary Hallman, 143 Greystone Lane.

Class Play's Language Called 'Vulgar'

Two City Board of Education members called for an investigation last night to determine whether "vulgar language" was used in a play yesterday at Jefferson High School as two parents reported.

Anthony Merola, 1280 Jay St., president of the United Schools Association, and Rita Penna, 60 Michigan St., one of the parents who organized block schools last year when city schools were desegregated, brought the complaint to the board last night. The board met last night at School 43, 1305 Lyell Ave.

They said their children and other parents had reported

that a "play about slavery" was presented in the school yesterday. Actors used a street idiom for intercourse, they said.

"I don't believe in censorship, but I believe when you have a captive audience, you have added responsibility . . .," said Commissioner Joseph Farbo. "I don't think any language, even if it portrays real life, should be used in a junior-senior high school in front of a captive audience, if reporters can't use it in the newspaper."

Jefferson Principal Norman J. Morreale said last night the play was written by a drama class student. He said

he did not see the play.

"There's always the possibility of some kids ad-libbing," he said. "I certainly don't condone use of vulgar language." He said he would investigate the complaint today.

One teacher who saw the play once said she didn't hear the words that parents claimed were used. The play, the teacher said, portrayed a story of a runaway slave. She said the language was "difficult to understand" because of "the heavy southern dialect and music in the background." A cast of black students reportedly played the roles of both whites and

blacks, using flour on their faces for white characters.

The board also heard a complaint last night on "sexism in schools" and a plea for a letter-writing campaign to Governor Rockefeller for more state aid.

Jane Plitt Selman, president of the Genesee Valley Chapter of the National Organization of Women, told board members they had an "obvious misunderstanding" about what "equality really means."

She pointed out that the students said girls "sew" costumes for their plays while boys "do the woodworking" for the stage settings.



Jane Plitt Selman speaks on sexism to the board

The Equal Rights Amendment

Will It Finally Bring Equality?

YES

Jane Plitt-Selman is personnel manager—labor relations at Rochester Telephone Corp.; president of the Genesee Valley Chapter of the National Organization for Women; a delegate to the 1972 Democratic National Convention, and a Democratic candidate in 1971 for the 24th district seat in the Monroe County Legislature.

By JANE PLITT-SELMAN

Have you ever thought about the path you didn't take? Did you ever know people who wished they had free choice in pursuing professional and public goals and not been burdened with assumptions others — parents, spouse, friends, associates, or neighbors — made for them?

The Equal Rights Amendment would essentially guarantee that we could pursue our goals according to our individual interests. Job choice, whether it be a professional or non-professional pursuit, would be ours to define for ourselves. There would be nothing limiting our choice to be childrearer, cancer researcher, doctor, homemaker, police officer, cab driver, garbage collector, secretary, President of the United States, or a business executive.

Nothing should limit that choice except our abilities, hard work, and personal preference. America is supposed to be a land of opportunity and reward for such pursuit.

UNFORTUNATELY, FOR more than 50 per cent of the U.S. population, that ideal has been an impossible dream. In 1973, the facts are that:

(1) The Courts have failed to interpret the equal protection amendment to the Constitution (the 14th) as being applicable to women.

As a result, Congress or any state could pass a law that discriminates against women or restricts them from particular types of work, compensation, or education (e.g., Congress could legislate a law preventing married women from working).

(2) According to federal Department of Labor statistics, women in 1970 were earning 57 per cent of the average male's salary with equivalent age and education.

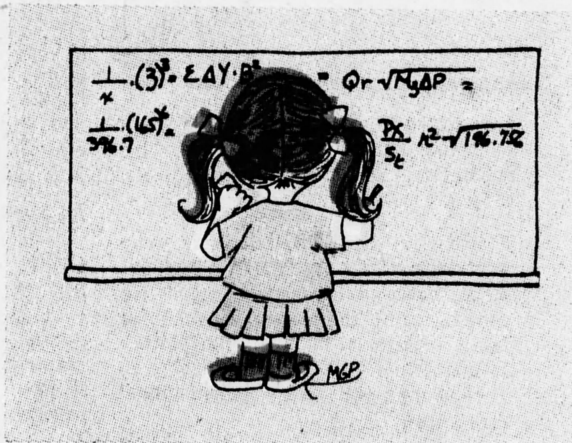
This is 7 per cent less than women were earning as a percentage of men's salaries in 1955. (Essentially, the earnings gap between women's and men's income is widening).

(3) Discrimination exists in

Before the Equal Rights Amendment can become law, 38 states must ratify it. Since Congress passed it during the 1971-72 legislative session, 30 states have approved it, nine have rejected it, and 11 are considering it this session.

The legality of the Nebraska legislature's action (first approving the amendment, then, in a second vote, rejecting it) is being tested in the courts.

If three-quarters of the states don't pass it within seven years of Congress' approval, the amendment will die.



the social security laws and benefits accrued to men and women.

(4) **IN SOME** areas, there are different punishments given to men and women for the same crime.

(5) Women often cannot obtain a loan to establish a private business or get a mortgage based on their real income, or establish credit, own property, or have equal inheritance rights.

(6) Quotas exist in universities, technical schools and training programs based on sex which limits the career development of women.

The Equal Rights Amendment would establish the constitutionality of equal opportunity for men and women, for it states:

"**EQUALITY OF** rights under the law shall not be de-

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NO

Dorothy Livadas is an associate professor of English at Monroe Community College and teaches a course in journalism. She is also a columnist for the weekly newspaper, City/East.

By DOROTHY LIVADAS

Sometimes it seems as though women are hellbent on depriving themselves of many of the privileges they now enjoy. Not all women. Just that determined fringe which under the guise of fighting for equality would set women's rights back to an era of unenlightened self-interest.

In their eagerness to get the Equal Rights Amendment passed, many of its proponents are willing to sacrifice valuable protections women have fought for. Curiously, they honestly believe that with equal rights the millen-

nium will arrive for them.

On the contrary. Seduced by the siren song of equality, these persons have lost some of their senses.

HOW ELSE can one explain their headlong plunge into the battle to wrench from men the primary responsibility of support of the family? The laws of every state now require the husband to support his wife and children and provide a home for them.

Some ERAers deny this. Let me refer them to the most comprehensive modern text of American law, a legal reference work entitled American Jurisprudence.

In Vol. 41, Section 329 of this authoritative series, they will find: "One of the most fundamental duties imposed by the law of domestic relations is that which requires a man to support his wife and family. In some jurisdictions, the duty of support is imposed on the husband by statute . . . But it exists apart from statute, as a duty arising out of the marital relationship . . ."

Even though some of the new breed of lawyers scoff at this reference as out-dated, women have not yet lost their legal right to support for themselves and their children. Many women don't receive it, but that is not the fault of the law. It is the fault of the circumstances under which the law is sometimes applied.

WHY SHOULD the ERA supporters sneer at a woman's right to be a full-time wife and mother, at her right not to take a job outside the home? If the female bears and rears the young, she is entitled to financial protection. Men aren't anxious to stay home and change diapers.

Those who would "free men as well as women" forget that most men aren't pleased at relinquishing a responsibility they consider their contribution to the family.

The Equal Rights Amendment will completely wipe out the husband's sole obligation to the family and make the wife **EQUALLY** responsible to provide a home and 50 per cent of the family's financial support. That this legislation bestows more benefits upon men than it does upon women apparently does not trouble its proponents.

Up to now, in 90 per cent of the divorce and separation cases, the mother has been granted custody of the children. Under ERA, the children become pawns of the

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'Women's Voice Must Be Heard'

THANK YOU for printing the requests of the Women's Coalition for Media Concerns, and your responses (D&C April 25). This is the kind of 'news about the news' which we need in order to be conscious of the process by which we get our information, and I trust the dialogue will continue.

While you seem to feel that the women's movement represents a small minority of your readers, the image of women in your news, features, and advertisements affects all women—and men.

More and more feminists are coming out of the (broom) closets as women realize how our images are shaped—mostly by men.

We who share the concerns expressed by the Coalition have to make our voices heard so you will know that we are your readers.

FOR EXAMPLE, to counter your rationale for sexually-discriminatory employment ads as an employer convenience, my husband and I are employers who have advertised several times for a babysitter. We would accept qualified male or female candidates, but have been forced by your classifications to advertise under "Female Help Wanted" because both ad-takers and job-seekers have told us 'that's where babysitter ads go'.

Thus we perpetuate the arbitrary limitation of opportunities — this time for men, and the chance for our children to be freed from sex-role stereotyping by being cared for by people of both sexes. There will be loud cheers from this community when you reconsider this obviously discriminatory policy.

BONNIE KLEIN, 225 Edgerton St.

'Why Segregate Sexes?'

I WAS VERY interested in the recent special coverage of the goals of the Women's Coalition of Media Concerns and the response of your newspaper to them. I was particularly pleased to read of your commitment to good journalism and the interest of the reader.

Given such a commitment I found several of your responses somewhat contradictory. For example, you stated that the issue of eliminating sex segregated help wanted ads really was not in the domain of the newspaper, but rested in the hands and practice of employers (or in employment agencies implicitly). How did you explain then when employment agencies nearly two year ago came to you and asked for the separate help wanted male female columns to be eliminated, it was the newspapers

Letters

Readers' opinions on the issues of the day are part of the lifeblood of this page, and original letters are welcomed accordingly. The rules aren't rigid, but preference will normally go to clearly-written letters of one page or less. The editors reserve the right to edit conscientiously for reasons of space, clarity, and fair play. Names and addresses must be given for publication. Letters not accepted will be returned only if accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes.

that refused?

Or, explain why you and other newspapers saw fit to eliminate years ago separate help-wanted columns labeled Black or White, yet defend separate columns based on sex as being for the convenience of the reader?"

Let me suggest if that was your concern you would eliminate the separate columns and list jobs in alphabetical order so that people could quickly find the job they sought, rather than hunt through many columns. But then, your newspaper would not be able to take in as much money from agencies or employers for listing jobs in more than one column.

IT IS ALSO interesting to note your amazement to the proposal that degrading advertisements to the image of women be eliminated by your newspaper. Surely, you would not print a racist advertisement, so why print a sexist advertisement? Both are immoral and insulting to the human race.

Lastly, it is my impression that the Coalition seeks sensitive, fair reporting, not as you allege, sympathy. I believe the cause of equality can and is standing on its own merits, as long as your newspaper will accurately report them.

The equality movement is all about those basic American principles of freedom and justice for all people. No one is asking for special treatment, just honest and good communications.

JANE PLITT SELMAN, 100 Mulberry St.

On Women's News

FEMINIST-ORIENTED women in the Rochester community can feel much friendlier toward the Gannett newspapers now that you have printed a detailed report of the Gannett

meeting with the Women's Coalition of Media Concerns (April 25, 1973).

The public in general can feel that you are willing to meet halfway with active, reformist organizations and to keep the public adequately informed about them.

We hope that the impartiality Gannett correctly claims as a right will not result in balancing your increasingly good coverage of women's right with such archaisms as cartoonist Bill Seibert's misogynistic stereotypes, the latest being the cover to the April 15-21 TV guide — is this not "ethnic" ridicule?

We appreciate that Section C stories on women politicians mean that "issues can be explored at length" — but is this not discrimination against men politicians who might like to be popularized too?

We still wonder how Gannett publisher Allen Neuharth could speak so eloquently on women's rights at the recent Women in Communications conference and yet continue to "sexegrate" the want ads.

BE THAT AS IT MAY, the record shows that the D&C has not only given increasingly sympathetic editorial support to women's rights but increasingly extensive reportorial coverage.

We realize that women and the Gannett Company both are contending with a deeply ingrained caste distinction.

Feminists are not interested in taking power away from men but in acquiring the same opportunities. Women are following news of the movement with a gut interest, and as Gloria Steinem said recently events could "explode in a difficult and complex way" if women cannot trust the press for ongoing information.

As Steinem also said to the American Newspaper Publishers Association convention, "If I believed what I read about the movement in the press, I'd have nothing to do with it. If I believed what I read in most of the press about myself, I'd have nothing to do with me."

FLORA FAY WADE, 170 Commonwealth Road, Co-coordinator, Committee on the Image of Women in the Media, Genesee Valley Chapter of the National Organization for Women.

Bible Passage

GOD WILL BRING every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.—Ecclesiastes 12:14

But there are costs. The Congressio-

SORTING

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provements in old buildings or bring previously tax-exempt properties onto the tax rolls.

Possibly a broader bill wouldn't have gotten through the State Legislature because such a law would make it theoretically possible to reduce a local government's tax base, he said.

Stockton said he is looking into getting money from the U.S. Economic Development Administration for a revolving loan fund for small business in

Municipal bonds are supposed to be

the city.

As for the state loans, Jane R. Plitt, ombudsman for the state Department of Commerce, said the law was changed this summer so that commercial businesses as well as manufacturers and wholesalers are eligible.

Tim Fries said local government should be interested in helping new types of business such as Sorting and Inspection Systems because they don't compete with existing Rochester businesses.



Ombudsman Jane Plitt

Rated best at job, but ineligible

By PHIL EBERSOLE

Jane R. Plitt, the state Commerce Department's best ombudsman, has been ruled ineligible to take the civil service test for the job, Commerce Commissioner John Dyson said in Rochester yesterday.

As far as that goes, Dyson said, he wouldn't qualify either. And, as near as he can figure, neither would Jesus Christ.

Moses would qualify, but just barely, said Assembly commerce committee chairman Roger Robach, D-Rochester.

Dyson and Robach discussed this and other issues yesterday morning with editors of the *Democrat and Chronicle* and *The Times-Union*.

The eligibility rules award points for educational background, work experience and the like, Dyson explained. Ms. Plitt had 75 points out of a required 85, he said.

The basic reason she didn't qualify, Dyson said, is that she is too young to have piled up all the required points. She is 31.

Across the state, he said, the ombudsmen who do qualify are middle-aged men and those who don't are young women. For this reason, he said, he thinks he can get the ruling overturned on affirmative action grounds if not on grounds of basic fairness.

"I'm not as confident about the system as John is, although I would love to be proved wrong," Ms. Plitt said. "I'm quite disillusioned with the system."

Her job is to make government responsive to the needs of people, but this shows government isn't responsive, she said. "This pretty much destroys most of my ideals," she said.

She became ombudsman for the nine-county Rochester region in Jan-

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Slow down tax inflation, legislators asked

By PHIL EBERSOLE

Inflation is raising taxes faster than the state legislature is cutting them, Donald D. Lennox, president of the Rochester Area Chamber of Commerce, told state legislators yesterday.

Lennox, one of 15 to testify at a joint Assembly-Senate hearing in Rochester on business problems, proposed "indexing" the tax rate to the inflation rate.

In 1960, he said, a typical factory worker would have had a marginal, or top, tax rate of 4 percent and, at rates of inflation current then, would have taken more than 10 years to move into a higher tax bracket.

Today, he said, the average factory worker is in a 6 to 7 percent tax bracket and, at today's inflation rate, will move to a higher bracket in two or three years.

"Without legislative action," he said, "inflation will rapidly erode the recent reductions in the New York state personal income tax."

If a worker earning \$12,500 a year received a 7 percent pay raise each year for five years, Lennox said, the

worker's income would be 40 percent higher and taxes would be 100 percent higher because of being pushed into higher tax brackets.

Lennox didn't propose full indexing, in which a worker whose pay raises did no more than keep pace with inflation would stay in the same tax bracket.

Instead he proposed partial indexing, in which such a worker would move into higher brackets, but at a slower rate.

"The state's revenues," he said, "will still grow significantly faster than personal incomes."

His proposal was that tax brackets be adjusted according to the annual rate of change in the consumer price index, minus 3 percent. For example, the annual inflation rate was 7.1 percent for June, 1976, through June, 1978. So, under his proposal, the \$9,000 to \$11,000 tax bracket would be raised 4.1 percent, to \$9,400 to \$11,500.

A worker who received pay increases of 40 percent over five years, with inflation also 40 percent, would be paying taxes 70 percent higher rather than 100 percent under this partial indexing plan, Lennox said.



Donald D. Lennox



Robert Flavin



John D. Hostutler



Jane Plitt

The joint hearing yesterday of the Assembly and Senate commerce and economic development committees, headed by Assemblyman Roger Robach, D-Rochester, and Sen. Joseph Pisani, R-Buffalo, was the sixth of eight hearings being held across the state.

The main complaints were the famil-

iar ones of too much taxation, too much government spending, too much regulation, and unreasonable product liability claims. Witness after witness mentioned that:

• A recent study by the Council of State Manufacturing Associations ranked New York 46th out of the 48

contiguous states in overall business climate. The council said New York had the highest state and local taxes, state spending and state debt per capita, and was among the top 10 in unemployment compensation, worker's compensation, energy costs and state

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LEGISLATORS

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spending in relation to income growth.

- Many small-business people have had to work overtime or put other business aside in order to reply to a state agency within a required 10 days, so as not to suffer a penalty. Yet the same state agencies sometimes take months in answering their own correspondence.

- Retailers each March must not only send in the sales tax on their March sales by March 20 of each year, but are punished if they guess wrong on what the sales are to be.

John D. Hostutler, president of the Industrial Management Council of Rochester and Monroe County, said that economic growth requires skilled workers.

In April, he said, 66 member companies reported 2,393 job openings — 1,263 classified as “technical” or “professional” and some 450 to 500 more “skilled.”

“When unemployment is in excess of traditional levels and yet a substantial number of jobs go unfilled,” he said, “there would seem to be an imbalance in our ranking of educational priorities.”

Among important local industry-education programs are the Rochester Area Career Education Council, PRIS2M (Program for Rochester to Interest Students in Science and Math), Rochester Institute of Technology's School of Applied Industrial Studies, and the Tool, Die and Precision Machining Institute, Hostutler said.

Pisani said it may be asking too much of the school system to train students to do specific jobs. Schooling would tend to lag behind changing technology, he said.

The schools will be doing well if they teach the basic skills needed in any job — reading, writing, spelling, and basic mathematics.

Daniel Bailey of the Rochester Tool and Die Makers Association said he often has to turn away young job applicants because they haven't gotten beyond algebra. His industry requires trigonometry, he said, and that can't be taught on the job.

Hostutler also said increased energy

supplies are needed to meet “the needs of a generation of young people who will wish to enter the economic mainstream in the years ahead.”

Industrial growth has always required increased energy consumption, he said, except during the “all-out energy conservation program” following the oil embargo of 1973. Further gains will be smaller, he said.

A dissenting note in a chorus of complaints about regulations was sounded by Robert Flavin, president of Local 1170 of the Communications Workers of America.

He said regulation can be burdensome, but most regulations were enacted in response to some abuse by industry. For example, he said, the Employee Retirement Income Security Act was enacted after new owners some industries unilaterally abolished their pension plans.

Deregulation of the telephone industry, he said, has meant that the installation cost of a home telephone has gone from \$10 to \$45 in the past three years.

Yet, he said, quoting *Forbes* magazine, “Rochester Tel is sitting on \$21 million in cash it doesn't know what to do with.”

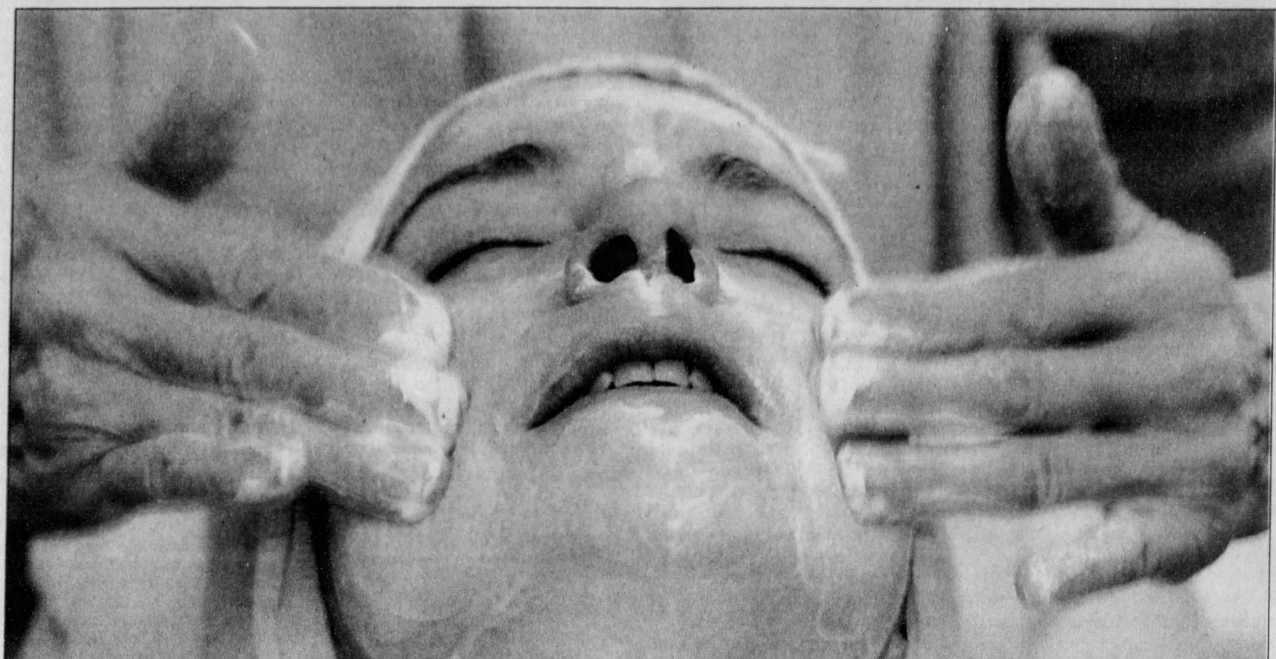
“Yes, deregulate, help business,” Flavin said. “But don't hurt the people.”

Jane Plitt, business service ombudsman for the state Department of Commerce, said all state laws and regulations that set deadlines for business should set like deadines for government.

She proposed pre-testing regulations by businesses who are willing to voluntarily obey them to see what the costs and problems would be. “Regulations should not be a surprise,” she said.

Civil servants should be judged by their work, she said, not by their time in grade or ability to pass a test. Otherwise, she said, there will be an attitude that “it doesn't matter what I do, I've got this safe job.”

W. Alan Burris, of Pittsford, said future historians of New York state will conclude that “the main purpose of government was to punish capitalists and most of the population must have been hopeless incompetants to require or merit such detailed supervision.”



ANDREA MELENDEZ staff photographer

Author Jane Plitt gets a facial from Centa Sailer, who runs Rochester's only remaining Harper shop.

A Beautiful business breakthrough

In the 1880s, a Rochester maid began building an empire of salons. A new biography tells her story — and creates controversy.

BY STAFF WRITER
STUART LOW

Martha Matilda Harper's proud motto was "The sun never sets on a Harper shop." The petite businesswoman with floor-length hair launched her career modestly in 1888 with a beauty salon in Rochester's Powers Building. Over the next half-century, she forged an international empire of 500 hair and skin care shops.

Beauty is Health

What: A new exhibit on Rochester entrepreneur Martha Matilda Harper.

Where: Third floor, Rochester Museum & Science Center, 657 East Ave.

When: Through Jan. 1.

Admission: \$6; \$5 seniors and students; \$4 children ages 3 to 18.

Call: 271-4552.

Long before McDonald's and Kentucky Fried Chicken, Harper pioneered the concept of franchise stores. She hired lower-class women to run them,

putting feminism behind the cash register at a time when Susan B. Anthony was urging women to vote.

But unlike her friend Anthony, Harper didn't win lasting fame as a reformer, and the sun might have set on her empire had it not been for Rochester author Jane Plitt. Her new biography, *Martha Matilda Harper and the American Dream* (Syracuse University Press, \$26.95), has sparked media praise and controversy around the nation.



Photo courtesy of Jane Plitt

Martha Matilda Harper used a photo of herself to advertise her shop.

From *The Wall Street Journal* to trade journals like the *Franchise Times*, business experts are asking: Could a former servant girl like Harper really have pioneered the modern, standardized franchise?

The influential International Franchise

Local author's 'passionate involvement' brings Harper to limelight

BY STAFF WRITER
STUART LOW

A six-year scavenger hunt whisked Rochester author Jane Plitt around the nation in search of a nearly forgotten Rochester pioneer: Martha Matilda Harper.

Plitt's first glimpse of the beauty salon entrepreneur came in 1994, when the First National Bank of Rochester moved into the refurbished Powers Building. The bank decided to sponsor a history of this downtown landmark and chose Plitt to do the research.

Plitt

She soon stumbled upon newspaper clippings about Harper and met Kreszentia "Centa" Sailer, who owns the Harper Method Founders Shop on the 10th floor.

"There was something about Harper that intrigued me," says Plitt. "I couldn't get her out of my mind. I kept asking: Who was this woman?"

Plitt's fascination with Harper was fueled by her own career in labor relations and women's rights. She feels a deep affinity for Harper's ideals — especially her crusade to help working-class women by putting them in charge of her salons.

"Writing *Martha Matilda Harper and the American Dream* was not a job, but a passionate involvement," says Plitt, 52.

Plitt grew up on a Rockland County farm and developed an early interest in history, spurred by a high school teacher who "turned