

'The Times: Are They A-changing?'

Media Women Want Better Jobs and More Money

BY JOANNA FOLEY

New York. The strike which has shut down *The New York Times* may be a financial burden on the publisher but it may also be a boon if the prestigious paper is spared the embarrassment of covering a sex discrimination lawsuit against itself. Some 600 women employees are suing *The Times* and the case was scheduled for federal court on September 28.

The suit is of no small significance to the newspaper industry. The results could have a wide ripple effect, involving some 124,600 women newspaper workers (including advertising, circulation and production staffs) and, eventually, 30,000 women now studying journalism. It's the landmark, precedent-setting case for women's equal jobs rights in publishing," says Hannah Jo Rayl, national human rights coordinator for the Newspaper Guild. "As *The Times* goes, so goes the industry."

So far, pre-trial depositions have brought to light a variety of less than exemplary *Times* practices.

Betsy Wade, now an assistant travel editor, tried for 10 years to rise to assistant

news editor but was passed over in favor of at least 14 men. Although she never got the job she wanted, *The Times* did praise her for being able to do "a man's work with a woman's delicacy."

Grace Glueck, now an art reporter, began her *Times* tenure as a receptionist and then spent nine years as a picture researcher, a job held only by women. According to her pre-trial deposition, when she inquired about promotions, her boss said that "something special" was required of women before they could get ahead. Later another editor advised that she get married instead.

Louise Carini, a benefits administration clerk with extensive experience, was bypassed by seven men for various promotions.

Overall, *Times* men averaged higher salaries than women in 73.4 percent of all jobs in January 1976 and the difference between the average male and female salary was \$5,159.

But this case is by no means the first instance of women workers putting the squeeze on a newspaper. Nearly 13,000 women, including reporters, editors and even rejected job applicants, are pushing a

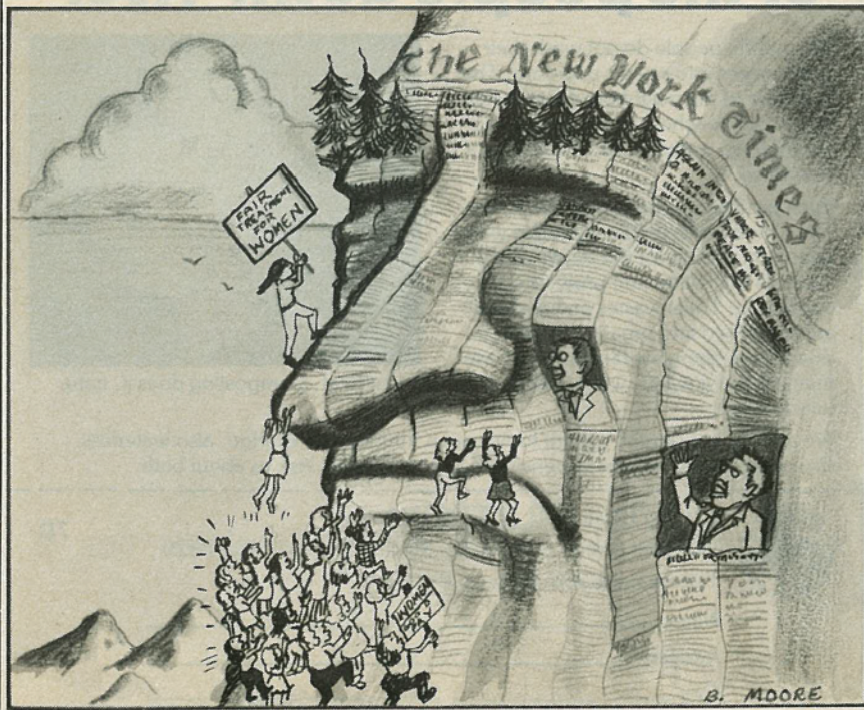
class action lawsuit against Long Island's *Newsday* and last April, New York *Daily News* police reporter Cass Vanzi filed a complaint with the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission when the paper gave her police beat to a man. According to the Newspaper Guild, the EEOC has received discrimination complaints against 11 newspapers including the *Washington Post*, the *Cleveland Press*, the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch*, the Bakersfield *Californian* and the *New Haven Register*.

Women first took on sex discrimination in the media in the late 1960s. The war zone was the alternate press where battles were fought over the sexist editorial content as well as jobs.

One early offender was a *Ramparts* cover story on the women's liberation movement. Its version of "Woman Power" was a leotard-clad female body cut off at the neck with a Jeanette Rankin brigade button dangling from one breast. For feminists, it was as though *Ramparts* was jeering, "Two breasts, no head." At other counterculture publications, women organized caucuses, undertook to educate their male peers and sometimes put out special feminist editions. Out of these struggles was born the independent feminist press.

Protest spread to the mainstream magazines in the early 1970s. *Newsweek* and *Time*, Inc. women broke out of their research ghettos in 1972 and won increases in the numbers of women in reporting and editorial positions through affirmative action. Their successes encouraged others. Women at NBC and *The Reader's Digest* wrested equal opportunity programs and substantial back pay awards to compensate for past discrimination, costing their respective employers \$2 million and \$1.5 million. The federal courts are also dealing with class actions against KNXT, the CBS affiliate in Los Angeles, and the Associated Press.

In one way, the times have changed and now several lawyers, including Harriet Rabb and Howard Rubin who are handling *Times*' employees case and Janice Goodman who won the NBC settlement, specialize in media discrimination cases. They say it's still hard to prove in court that a newswoman didn't get a job or a promotion because of discrimination



rather than lack of skill.

Times women expect that management will denigrate their work at the trial but lawyer Rabb will counter the allegations with statistical analyses from computer experts to show patterns of discrimination in hiring, pay and promotion. "While not just anyone could do Seymour Hersh's job," Rabb says, "it's a statistical improbability that no woman could."

The Times is a newspaper with a long history. For women, it goes back to the 1850s when "Minnie Myrtle" covered the social scene at Saratoga, establishing a precedent that women covered only society news. Later there were a few exceptions. Mary Taft covered suffrage activities in the early 1900s but had to turn the story over to a man when suffrage hit the front page; Anne O'Hare McCormick won a Pulitzer for foreign coverage in 1937. These women were the tokens of their eras, but today's activists refuse to be tokens.

Facing 600 determined women, *The Times* maintains an air of injured innocence about the case and insists that it is "at the top of the list in progressive hiring practices." One official said, "We don't have the classic situation where the editor of the *Vassar Gazette* is hired as a secretary."

Yet the newspaper is dragging its feet in resolving the case which first was initiated in 1974 and this may be due to more than a defense of *Times*' institutional credibility. "Delay is a common tactic for management lawyers in labor and discrimination conflicts; sheer inflation alone makes delay worthwhile," explains Phyllis Gelman, a Connecticut attorney specializing in non-media sex discrimination practice.

Although *The Times* may be saving money by refusing to meet the demands of its dissidents, it has already spent an estimated \$100,000 on the suit. "I can't imagine why they want to spend the amount of money they're spending," said one clerk who thinks it "would be cheaper to admit some of the guilt, fix it and go on to other things."

One answer, suggested by the Guild's Hannah Jo Rayl, is that "*The Times*, like most employers, would like to weaken the anti-discrimination law by getting a court decision against it."

In its defense *The Times* has claimed that it strongly supports affirmative action for women but can't find qualified applicants for top jobs. "Nonsense," says a male reporter, "they could raid every paper in the country if they wanted to." The recent hiring of several top women reporters confirms this view.

Underneath it all, *The Times* may be afraid of the enormous changes that a program of affirmative action would represent. Affirmative action in the media can make a difference in how women's issues are covered, says Peter Dreier, a Tufts University sociologist and media watcher. "When there are one or two women in the newsroom, they're tokens under pressure to prove they can cover a story like a man. But when there are 20, and there are women editors too, they don't have to trivialize stories like the recent anti-rape 'Take Back the Night' march in Boston.

Still Dreier worries that unless affirmative action is placed in the context of a demand for full employment, it can divide different groups of people from one another as they compete for the same few jobs.

For some observers, affirmative action in the media is a potentially revolutionary issue. One former *Times* man claims it is much more important than affirmative action in other industries. "No matter how well-meaning pale male straights are in reporting what they see, still they're not

always able to ask the right questions in the context of the lives of women, minorities and poor people. [A race discrimination suit is also pending against *The Times*.]

"Newspapers need to become a true medium of inter-communication among all different kinds of people and they won't be until all the previously excluded groups have access to jobs there," the ex-reporter said. "Affirmative action in the media is a good place to start working on social change."

"Start" is the operative word. Despite women's organizing and lawsuits over the past decade, Harriet Rabb says, "The only real changes have been more new hires at the lower levels. Women have not been cut in on the decision-making processes. But the new hires may well bear real fruit in 10 years when these women may be in real positions of power."

It was, in fact, a question of power 10 years ago when counterculture women activists launched the first struggles against media sex discrimination and it is still one of the basic issues today. A loss of power may be what *The Times* fears most.

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