

Unit: 11 October

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"You Can't Scare Me . . ."



LABOR HEROINES: 1930s-1980s
A Union WAGE pamphlet **\$1.50**



I said, "I can't join the union, I don't have any money now." He went in his pocket and pulled out my initiation fee and my first month's dues.

That's how I got into Local 1100. In the end the union got retroactive pay for all those women, bringing them up to union scale, retroactive one year. We were in a membership drive in the union and I marched in with all the women working at Cosgrave's, and I won a prize for bringing in the most members.

I was pretty soon fighting a battle in the union. When I got there, there were no other Blacks selling on the floor. All the Blacks were working in backroom capacity, working in the toilets as maids, and in the stockrooms doing all the dirty work, while white people were out on the floor. During the late 40s and early 50s we had a drive on all over the city to hire Blacks in the stores as salespeople. We were quite successful, although the union at that time was threatening to throw me out.

The Local was put in receivership by the International. They got rid of Johnny Bliota and put in Barney Columbo. When we had meetings, Barney would attack me, indirectly, talking about people who were supermilitant and were destroying the union.

In my fight against discrimination in the union, I spoke at a membership meeting: "The union is destroying itself," I said, "as long as it practices discrimination and doesn't fight for all of its members to have equal opportunities and upgrading."

Cosgrave's closed in 1951 and I was without work for one year because of the leadership in the union working against me. This went on into 1952; that was when I got involved in working in the Independent Progressive Party. I started working in the office, and from one thing to another, I ended up getting elected state chairperson. That was the beginning of me getting into politics and I got into it feet first. I was the only woman, Black or white, who had ever been State Chair of a political party in the state of California.

It was 1957 when I got back into retailing. . . . I got a job at G.E.T. After six months in G.E.T., the members voted unanimously to make me shop steward. From shop steward I got nominated to be on the executive board and won that election. I served on the board until the time I retired in 1977. In 1957, Betsy Blum was on the board and one other Black woman. When I retired we had four Black women, one Black man and one Spanish person, out of eleven members. We became one of the most outstanding fighting unions in the city. To this day I am still involved with Local 1100. I still maintain my delegation to the Labor Council. I guess I will always be involved with my union. . . . Struggles are still going on. It just doesn't end, you have to continue to organize.

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(Union Women's Alliance to Gain Equality)

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