Hanging In, Solo (So What's It Like To Be the Only Female on the Job?)

Susan Eisenberg
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Abstract
A poem.

Keywords
poem, women's rights, gender
to establishing equality for working women. And it will be extremely important for the labour movement to fight against a free trade deal that will have such negative consequences for women.

But with only one-third of the female labour force represented by unions, it is important that more and more women's workplaces be organized. While this is not an easy task in many sectors, it is encouraging to see one of the largest organizing drives ever

**Hanging In, Solo**
*(So What's It Like To Be the Only Female on the Job?)*

*On the sunshine rainbow days womanhood clothes me in a fuchsia velour jumpsuit and crowns me with a diamond hardhat. I flare my peacock feathers and fly through the day's work. Trombones sizzle as my drill glides through cement walls through steel beams. Bundles of pipe rise through the air at the tilt of my thumb. Everything I do is perfect. The female of the species advances 10 spaces and takes an extra turn.*

*On the mudcold-gray-no-sun-in-a-week days womanhood weighs me down in colorless arctic fatigues; hands me an empty survival kit; and binds my head in an iron hardhat three sizes too small. I burrow myself mole-like into my work, but my tampax leaks; my diamond-tip bit burns out after one hole; my offsets are backwards; all of my measurements are wrong. At each mistake, a shrill siren alerts all tradesmen on the job to come laugh at me. Everything I do must be redone.*
underway. The Communications Workers of Canada is once again trying to unionize the 17,000 clerical employees at Bell Canada, located in offices throughout the provinces of Ontario and Quebec. If successful, this will be the largest single private-sector group to be unionized since the organizing drives of the 1940s. And it will be an important step in continuing to strengthen women's presence in the Canadian labour movement.

The female of the species
loses her next turn
and picks a penalty card.

On most days, those
partly sunny days that bridge the
rainbow sunshine days and the mud-cold-gray days
womanhood outfits me in a
flannel shirt and jeans
and hands me a hardhat just like
everyone else's. I go about my work like
a giraffe foraging the high branches:
stretching myself comfortably.
As I hang lighting fixtures and make spikes,
I sing to myself
and tell myself stories.
Everything I do
is competent enough.

The female of the species
advances 1 space
and awaits her next turn.

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* Susan Eisenberg is a member of Local 103 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) in Boston. In 1982 she graduated from IBEW 103's apprenticeship program in its first class to include women. A recent book of her poetry, It's a Good Thing I'm Not Macho, is available from Whetstone Press, 94 Green Street, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130. Eisenberg gives poetry readings for labor and women's groups and conferences.