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THE CHAIRPERSON: Shirley Hemmings.

Scheduled for 1:40.

MS. HEMMINGS: Hello, I'm Shirley Hemmings. I reside in New York City. I'm a journeyperson carpenter, Local 608.

THE CHAIRPERSON: Local 608?

MS. HEMMINGS: Yes, Carpenter's Local. Eight or nine years ago I became interested in rehabilitation of the many buildings in New York City. The Human Resources Administration --

THE CHAIRPERSON: Can you speak a little louder.

MS. HEMMINGS: I was referred to the WIN Program and referred to several programs afterwards. I started working with Mothers & Daughters Construction Company which is a part of AllCraft Center, and I was paid a percentage of the monies allotted to our company from the cities.

I am kind of going over this. I don't want to read the whole thing.

THE CHAIRPERSON: You were a trainee, you're saying.

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2 MS. HEMMINGS: I was a trainee at the  
3 time. The director of AllCraft had on her  
4 Board of Directors a member, an owner of a  
5 construction company, and she asked him to put  
6 his money where his mouth was and hire some of  
7 the women for his construction company. They  
8 hired me in 1984. I worked for Crow  
9 Construction Company. There were about ten  
10 male carpenters working there and I was the  
11 only woman. There were about twenty  
12 electricians and one was a woman.

13 The day I started work, male members of  
14 the company made comments about me. For  
15 instance, one of the construction workers said  
16 "This is the woman we were expecting," because  
17 they had, of course, talked about the woman  
18 coming on the job, "She doesn't even have a  
19 body. What are we going to do with her?"

20 A couple of days later, the foreman's  
21 son with whom I was working then said, "We did  
22 not want to hire you. We were told that we  
23 had to hire a nigger woman." He continued to  
24 say that "If we had to hire a woman, at least  
25 we wanted to hire a white woman and not just a

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2 nigger. You're not going to be on the job  
3 long anyway. You'll be on Welfare and your  
4 kids will be on Welfare forever." These  
5 statements were also heard by other workers,  
6 who said nothing.

7           The men working with me always sent me  
8 for coffee. The foreman's son also sent me  
9 for his coffee, and to make things even  
10 harder, by telling me to get coffee in one  
11 place, sandwiches in another place and his  
12 desserts or whatnot from someplace else. He  
13 also shortchanged me many times. They also  
14 made comments I should be in the kitchen  
15 making cookies and bringing them down to the  
16 job instead of trying to use a hammer.

17           There was only one bathroom on these  
18 premises, with two stalls. The men sometimes  
19 dressed outside the bathroom while I was  
20 present and told me I should do the same.  
21 They would purposely stay in the bathroom a  
22 long time and make me wait for fifteen minutes  
23 or so until I could get in and get dressed,  
24 and often I would be late for work.

25           The foreman would call me down for this

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2 and he was very often annoyed, although he  
3 never bothered to say anything to the men  
4 about coming out of the bathroom or anything.

5 Same thing happened at quitting time  
6 and, as a result, I with leave work ten to  
7 thirty minutes later than the men. They would  
8 also hide my clothes. One time when I was --  
9 one time they pushed heavy material in front  
10 of the door so I could not get out of the  
11 bathroom. I had to crawl through a eight inch  
12 space on top of the door just to get out of  
13 the ladies room, and then I had to go home  
14 without my coat because they had locked the  
15 office. Everybody had went home and they left  
16 me closed up in the bathroom.

17 One of the men working with me would  
18 constantly grab parts of my body in the  
19 presence of other men. I objected and  
20 complained to both the shop steward and the  
21 foreman, but nothing was ever done and he  
22 continued to grab me.

23 While I was working at this  
24 construction company, the job would sometimes  
25 require overtime work, weekends and weekdays

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2 after hours. The men worked as little as ten  
3 minutes overtime and were paid for an hour or  
4 more. I, however, was given -- was never  
5 given a chance to work overtime until  
6 Christmas.

7 Finally, one of the shop stewards spoke  
8 up and told the foreman that it wasn't right  
9 for me not to get any overtime, especially  
10 around Christmas. And the foreman did then  
11 assign me some overtime, but only half of what  
12 the men were generally assigned.

13 Two or three weeks after Christmas I  
14 asked the shop steward why I was not getting  
15 paid for holidays. He stated carpenters did  
16 not get paid for holidays. I asked him to  
17 please check it out because I was an  
18 apprentice. He did and he told me he was  
19 right.

20 Then I went to the New York Plan and  
21 got documents that clearly stated that  
22 apprentices and trainees in their first and  
23 second years were supposed to be paid for  
24 holidays. The general supervisor heard about  
25 this and said I had no right to go over the

1  
2 shop steward's head for this information and  
3 laid me off.

4 A few weeks after being laid off I got  
5 another job from the New York Plan as an  
6 apprentice. We were working on a dock and I  
7 was put on the water side and worked on a  
8 scaffold without a life jacket or a safety  
9 belt.

10 On the scaffolding we were on the side  
11 of the water. The side where the water was  
12 was maybe a foot over the water and you walked  
13 back and forth on the scaffolding. You were  
14 supposed to have life jackets and safety  
15 belts, we didn't have any.

16 I was working out in the rain one time.  
17 Most of the journeymen went home because they  
18 have the prerogative to either go or stay,  
19 depending on how they feel. They lose pay  
20 when they go home. The apprentices have to be  
21 told to go home in order to get paid. If we  
22 go home, we don't get paid for that time.

23 But they would never send me home when  
24 it was raining even though all the other  
25 journeymen leave -- and, as apprentices,

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you're supposed to work with journeypersons.

They would sent me up on scaffolding maybe five stories high, metal scaffolding, raining and slippery and all, and I had to tighten bolts.

In the rain -- and the foreman eventually complained that I went to the bathroom too often, which was once in the morning, at a coffee break and lunch time, and when I went home. But, of course, it was too often for him and he wanted to lay me off.

On one occasion the men were repairing a broken form and asked me to pass some tools and materials to them. The foreman came around and began cursing at me and forced me to go down in the hole to work with the men, which I didn't have any problem with, but I didn't know I was supposed to be down there with them. I'm still an apprentice. As an apprentice you don't know what goes on out there and you have to be told to do whatever there is to be done.

And the foreman came out and "What the f--- are you doing here while the men are down

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2 there? Get the f--- down there and do what  
3 the f--- you're supposed to do." So, of  
4 course, I went down in the hole and did  
5 nothing because I didn't know what to do.

6 After two months on that job there was  
7 a general layoff. I was given a check for the  
8 amount for which I was owed, but the check was  
9 dated a week ahead, so I couldn't cash it  
10 anyway.

11 On the next job the same employer which  
12 I got from -- I had the same employer but I  
13 got the job from the New York Plan. I was  
14 used as a laborer and not an apprentice.  
15 Laborers are paid a much higher rate than  
16 apprentices, but we weren't learning  
17 carpentry, we were doing laborer's work. I  
18 was, as an apprentice.

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21 (Continued on next page.)  
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2           On the next job, the same employer, I  
3 was working on a scaffold. There was an  
4 accident on the scaffold next to me. A man  
5 was bleeding profusely. He was later  
6 hospitalized. I ran into the office to get  
7 water and bandages and tell them to call for  
8 help. The timekeeper yelled at me for coming  
9 into his office screaming like a madwoman and  
10 told me to leave.

11           The next day I heard the foreman and  
12 general foreman talking the situation over.  
13 The general foreman said to the foreman, "You  
14 know that woman has to go because she will  
15 never keep her mouth shut, but report  
16 everything that went on."

17           One day I was last on line. Somebody  
18 has to be last on the work line. It is  
19 usually a man because there's so many more men  
20 than women anyway. But the general foreman  
21 saw me last on the line and hollered up, "Is  
22 she always late?" The foreman said, "No,  
23 she's always on time." The general foreman  
24 said, "If it happens again, let me know and  
25 she'll be out of here."

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2           The general foreman left and the  
3 foreman turned and kicked me in my behind and  
4 said, "Why did you let him see you come up  
5 last? You're going to get me in trouble."  
6 The fact is, the foreman knew I was not late,  
7 just the last one on line. Most of the time  
8 it would be a man last.

9           After I became a journeyperson, I was  
10 often commended by the big bosses when they  
11 came around to look over the work. I was  
12 never criticized by the foreman or general  
13 foreman. I was always praised for my work and  
14 other journeymen constantly asked the foremen  
15 to be assigned to work with me. Nevertheless,  
16 when there was a layoff, men were kept on and  
17 I was laid off.

18           When I asked why a man was not laid off  
19 and I was, the foreman said, "We can't lay off  
20 the men and keep women." This occurred on  
21 more than five jobs. Furthermore, on all of  
22 these jobs, I have had more seniority than  
23 many of the other men who weren't laid off.

24           On most of the jobs there are portable  
25 Saniports, which are toilet facilities.

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2           Regardless of the number of Saniports  
3           provided, there is never one set aside for the  
4           women.

5                   On every construction job I have been  
6           harassed by men. They would ask me to go out  
7           with them, they would constantly tell me dirty  
8           sexual and racial jokes and make discrimina-  
9           tory remarks about women and blacks.

10                   On one particular job I was asked by  
11           the foreman -- I asked the foreman if there  
12           had been any other women on the job, and he  
13           replied there had been women on the job. He  
14           said there was a woman kept for a long time,  
15           "but that's because she gave me good head,"  
16           which he meant sexual favors.

17                   He's flashing the time in front of me.  
18           I don't know if I should go on.

19                   Many times when there were other women  
20           on various jobs they would complain to me  
21           about sexual harassment by foremen and  
22           workers. When I told them they didn't have to  
23           sleep with them, they didn't have to go out  
24           with them or tolerate their sexual remarks,  
25           the women told me they had to along with such

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treatment because they feared they would lose their jobs.

One time a male worker called me over and said, "Look at this," and he waved his penis in front of me.

I remember another time when I was on a job and asked the foreman -- asked for the foreman. The shop steward said, "All the men out of work and they send us a woman to work?"

The female union members are also discriminated against by unions. There are approximately 100 women or less in Local 608, but there are about 5000 male members.

Government funded jobs require a certain number of women to be on the jobs working. Yet, despite the law, there are always very few women on these jobs. The unions, however, never take steps to correct the situation even when there are no women on the job. All of these jobs have a large amount of men working in all categories.

There are also other instances of union discrimination. Before Thanksgiving of '89, I was on the job where the foreman said there

1  
2 will be a lot of overtime for at least three  
3 weeks. We were told to stay home for three  
4 days, Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, but we  
5 should all return on Thursday.

6 The workers told this to the union and  
7 on Thursday the men returned to the job; and  
8 before I left home I received a phone call and  
9 the business agent told me not to go to the  
10 job, but, instead, to go to another job, which  
11 was only a two day job with no overtime or  
12 anything. And he gave my job to one of the  
13 other men.

14 There are so many things that go on in  
15 the construction trades as far as women are  
16 concerned, their hiring practices. I know in  
17 608 we are asked when we were laid off to put  
18 our name on the shape up list. The shape up  
19 list is ignored. They take names out of their  
20 pockets and call up the men to go to work.

21 I know there are many, many men in the  
22 carpenters trade that work two and three jobs  
23 all year long -- and I have been out of work  
24 since December. In fact, last year I worked  
25 approximately twenty-two to twenty-five weeks

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where the men are working fifty weeks.

THE CHAIRPERSON: The only question I have is, you keep on going back to the same trade.

MS. HEMMINGS: Only because, at this point now, this is now how I feed my family. Previous to getting into the construction trade I was on Welfare, the whole cycle, which was no fun. This isn't fun either, but it's a way of making a living. And I'm qualified. I went through four years of college --

(Applause.)

THE CHAIRPERSON: You sound to be more than qualified.

MS. HEMMINGS: Last month I went to a union meeting, and we were told that they gave out 701 jobs to the carpenters, and I asked how many of them went to women. And they just laughed and walked away. They didn't even bother to reply.

MS. ABDUS-SALAAM: I have a few questions for you.

You mentioned that you were laid off from five different jobs. Can you be specific

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about which jobs you were laid off from and  
the men continued to work?

MS. HEMMINGS: And what?

MS. ABDUS-SALAAM: And the men  
continued to work.

MS. HEMMINGS: I can list about fifty  
of them, really. As a carpenter I work maybe  
ten different places a year, and that's  
because the women were called in certain  
amount of times to work. They take care of  
their status quo. And after that's over,  
whoever is inspecting goes on to --

I've worked for Warner & Crebbs,  
Empire, Tops, National Professional Office  
Installers, Crow Construction, Terminal,  
Chiavonni. The list is endless and it is  
always the same thing. Women are not even  
second class citizens anymore. Women are just  
trash on the job.

THE CHAIRPERSON: Below second class.

MS. HEMMINGS: Yes.

THE CHAIRPERSON: Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

THE CHAIRPERSON: I think it would be

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helpful if you would talk to the Commission staff, the OLS staff, to flush out the details of the statement you made. We would like to have those details made a part of the record.

MS. HEMMINGS: Sure.

COMMISSIONER RIVERA: I will ask the question I asked before: At a job site, the person that you report to, is it usually a foreman?

MS. HEMMINGS: It is usually a foreman. Sometimes it is a shop steward.

COMMISSIONER RIVERA: Are they sometimes the same person; shop steward and the foreman? Could they be one in the same?

MS. HEMMINGS: No, not to my knowledge.

COMMISSIONER RIVERA: That foreman, is that foreman a local member, Local 608?

MS. HEMMINGS: Sometimes he is, but not always.

COMMISSIONER RIVERA: Does that person have the power to hire and fire?

MS. HEMMINGS: Yes.

COMMISSIONER REVERA: Thank you.