NATIVE DAUGHTER—COMMUNIST PARTY FOUNDER AND LEADER

BY SAMUEL ADAMS DARCY

THE pious Jews of patriarchal times, having reduced their women to the lowest estate of slaves, wrote into their morning prayers, and it has been chanted ever since: "Be thou praised God, our Lord, King of the Earth, who has not created me a woman." Many centuries later, Plato set forth his thanks to God for "eight favors" granted him. First he listed that he was "born free—not slave" and secondly, that he was "born man—not woman."

In all recorded history of mankind, probably the most heroic chapters in the long struggle for liberation were written by women who fought their way up from such slavery as even men never knew, to the position where their equal rights with men as human beings—now fully realized in the Soviet Union—are, if not achieved, at least in sight.

The world-shaking war for the destruction of Nazism is also a great struggle of woman to free herself from her disadvantageous place in society, to defeat the effort of the Nazis to drag her back to pre-feudal slavery and to find her equal place with man in marriage, in society, in industry, in education, and in political life.

In the last epoch of the struggle for liberation, the most able and heroic leaders of women have been those who made the fight to free women a part of the struggle for the emancipation of the working class. It is for this reason that the greatest fighters against family poverty, for woman suffrage, for the right of women to higher education, were outstanding leaders of the working class movement. In Germany, where Clara Zetkin first gained prominence fighting for equal suffrage; in Russia, where Krupskaya symbolized the host of workers for woman's full emancipation; in Spain, which brought forward Dolores Ibarruri; in China, as in France and every country of the world, the inspiring saga of the heroic struggle for freedom has many of its most brilliant pages written by women.

There is not a single important epoch in the history of our own country which has not in it the stories of great American women of such stature. Among the best of these in the past three-quarters of a

century there stands out the life and work of Anita Whitney, simply and proudly called, by Al Richmond, our *Native Daughter*.*

Women's Rights and Working Class Emancipation

Anita Whitney was born of distinctly upper-class parentage. Her uncle was—despite the fact that he got his appointment from Abraham Lincoln for his opposition to secession—an extremely conservative, at times reactionary, United States Supreme Court Judge. Her father was a State Senator from Alameda County, California. Her lineage goes back to five Mayflower Pilgrims. Among the most famous of her earliest ancestors is Thomas Dudley, who was Governor of Massachusetts Colony in 1634, succeeding John Winthrop. In "Cotton Mather's Chronicles of the Massachusetts Colony, Dudley is praised for those Puritan qualities of intolerance, dogmatism, austerity, devotion to religion and a keen sense of business." The seeds of progressive thought were probably planted in Anita by her father, who quarreled with his wife for the privilege of reading Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to the children. It was not customary to send girls to college when Anita was in her 'teens. But it was her father's help which won her that right.

Ever since, she has known no relaxation from the battle for women's rights. She fought to alleviate the hunger which was the common lot among the immigrant population of the East resulting from their intense exploitation. She fought for prison reform, especially for women, to alleviate the lot of the hundreds of thousands of honest and decent working class people on whom the heavy oppressive hand of "The Law" frequently falls. She was the leader of the victorious fight for woman suffrage in California and in Oregon and became nationally famous in that struggle. It was during that fight that she made her first contact with the Women's Trade Union Labor League and the Wage Earners League and other working class organizations of women. She played an important role helping the leaders of the West Coast agricultural strikes before the First World War in their battle for their organization and decent working conditions. In 1914 she joined the Socialist Party to fight against the Imperialist War.

Upon the frame-up and imprisonment of Tom Mooney and Warren K. Billings in 1916, she became active in their defense, as she became later in the defense of Sacco and Vanzetti. From the outset, she consistently sided with the Left Wing in the Socialist Party and, in 1919, helped found the Communist Party. She has always been actively interested in all struggles against national oppression. She has been a staunch defender of the rights of the Negro people; for fifteen years she was a member of the Executive Committee of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

**Native Daughter*, the Story of Anita Whitney. By Al Richmond, published by the Anita Whitney Seventy-fifth Anniversary Committee, 170 Golden Gate Avenue, San Francisco, Calif., 1942.

In the past twenty-five years she has fought in numerous working class battles and struggles in defense of democracy—a militant record that has brought her widespread admiration. As the vote she polls on the Communist ticket indicates, she is one of the outstanding popular mass figures in the Communist Party of the United States, on whose National Committee she serves.

With all this, Anita Whitney is no galloping Amazon. Half in play, the elder Liebknecht tells, that Karl Marx, when once asked what is the quality he loves best in women, answered "femininenes." People who know Anita Whitney's battle-marked history are amazed to find a sweet, shy, charmingly attractive and dainty woman whose only outward mark of greatness is her obviously keen intellectual perception and, as one soon learns, her unwavering iron-willed devotion to scientific political thought and working class struggle.

Al Richmond's book *Native Daughter*, to a considerable degree, captures this picture of Anita Whitney. It limits itself to the outstanding facts of her life and work. It deals only briefly with the issues, principles, concepts and ideals for which Anita fought. Now that Richmond has written so fine a book about her life—Anita Whitney herself may find the time to write a very necessary book about the thoughts and struggles which agitate our century. The commentaries of such an outstanding woman, on the life and thought of our time as they affect women, are necessary and would make an invaluable work.

Between the 1880's, when Anita Whitney began her activities, and today, tremendous progress has been made in the position of women in society. The rate of that progress has been constantly increasing. And, under the powerful impetus of the present world-battle for survival, the anti-woman prejudice and bigotry and the idiotic concept of "nature-given" male superiority are breaking down, and woman is fast taking her proper place in the productive forces of the country and thereby paving the way for her proper self-assertion in all other fields of social activity.

It is fitting, therefore, in connection with the publication of the story of Anita Whitney to dwell on certain important aspects of American womanhood's present-day advance as vital participant in our country's production for victory.

Women and War Production

War production for 1942 is planned to double that of 1941; and 1942's production is to be doubled again in 1943. For both war and consumer production for 1943, at least 25,000,000 factory workers will be required. This leaves a minimum shortage of 7,000,000 workers over the present available factory labor supply alone. The bulk of the million or more boys who graduate from schools every year will be going into the army. A great many now unemployed Negro workers are available. But the largest single source for making up this shortage is women. About 900,000 girls finish school each year. The balance will come

from women who are today engaged in other occupations, including housework.

The Need for Women Workers

On September 4, the War Manpower Commission set up a committee of twelve women, to work out a policy for the mobilization of women workers. Paul McNutt, chairman of the commission, formulated their problem as follows:

"Increasing participation of women in our all-out war production effort is essential to its success. War production alone employed about 1,400,000 women last December. This figure will jump to 4,500,000 by December, 1942, and will climb to 6,000,000 by the end of 1943. By then women will represent at least 30 per cent of the labor force employed in war production.

"Over 18,000,000 women must be gainfully employed (in all occupations) by the end of 1943, so 5,000,000 women must be added to the total number of women now employed. This means that one out of every six women over 18 years of age, that are not now in the labor force, will be needed, and one out of every four housewives, perhaps one out of every three, between the ages of 18 and 44 will be employed."

The Availability of Women Workers

In a report submitted by Thelma McKelvey, of the Labor Division of the War Production Board, to the Tolan Hearings in the U.S. Senate, it is estimated that "another 8,000,000 [women] can be inducted into the total war effort to meet the service, agricultural and manufacturing needs of our civilian population and the military forces."

At the same hearings, John J. Corson, Director of the U.S. Employment Service, pointed out the increasing relaxations of employer specifications concerning the hiring of women. In an effort to indicate what jobs might be suitable for women, the Bureau of Employment Security is preparing an analysis of all jobs occurring in key war industries. At present only 623 occupations designated as essential to the war effort have been analyzed. Latest available information indicates that women are now employed in only twenty-seven of these. The analysis of the duties performed by workers in the remaining occupations indicates that 251 are apparently suitable for women. Of these 199 have a training period of less than six months. Another group of 188 occupations appeared to be partially suitable for women. Among these some breakdown of the job may be necessary or some rearrangement of the industrial process might be required in order to employ women. Of the entire list of 623 occupations, only 57 appeared to be entirely unsuitable for women. The employers are eagerly looking into these facts and there already are increasing instances in many industries (machine tool and precision instruments, metal fabricating, arsenals, munition plants, etc.) where the employers specify a preference for female workers as a means of keeping their production organization stable.

In the huge Willow Run plant in Detroit, Charles E. Sorenson, Vice

President and General Manager of the Ford Co., announced that women now form 10 per cent of the plant's personnel and, praising their "splendid" work, he said:

"I am going to do everything I can to put more women into the plant. There is no reason why they should not be 50 per cent. I expect to see them around as foremen and superintendents. Why not?"

The Vultee Aircraft Co. of California began the introduction of women in their plant in April, 1941, when fifteen girls were hired. Today, over 10 per cent of the plant's personnel are women, a total of about 600 out of 5,000, and that number is increasing constantly.

The automotive and aircraft industry generally is making tremendous use of woman labor. The Vega Aircraft Corporation at Burbank, California, employs 1,800 girls, and Courtland S. Gross, executive head of the corporation, predicted that if present trends continue, airplane factories may be manned almost exclusively by women.

"This is looking far ahead," he said, "but it is not beyond the range of possibility. Right now there are so few jobs women cannot handle, Vega is hiring them in the same proportion it is hiring men.

"Heavy lifting jobs are of course beyond feminine capacity as are one or two machines which require masculine strength. However, it may be possible to provide mechanical aids which will remove this last barrier."

The Douglas Aircraft Corporation at Santa Monica, California, employs 3,500 women, and so on throughout the automotive and aircraft industry.

The Navy Yard in Philadelphia employs close to 5,000 women, or about 12 per cent of the yard's personnel, and that proportion is increasing very rapidly. The large Budd plant in Philadelphia, which was regarded as an exclusive "man's preserve," now gives preference to women in several departments.

Increasing proportions of women are being hired in the manufacture of artillery munitions, small arms munitions, aircraft, optical and fire control apparatus. Even the steel mills are opening up jobs to women workers. Harvey S. Firestone, president of his rubber company, has announced that women make up 22 per cent of Firestone's payroll and that before long they will make up 35 per cent of the total number of workers hired.

The Special Needs of Women Workers

That great liberator, Wendell Phillips, who played a part also in the fight for the liberation of women, pointed out that we must fight for an *equal* place with men for women in society and in industry but not for an *identical* place. He was speaking against the concept of certain bourgeois women whose "femininism" encompassed the sweeping away of all safeguards for women, particularly in industry. Over many years of struggle, labor had achieved State laws which governed the hours of work for women workers; they could not work at night; they were to have special rest rooms and medical facilities, etc.

Many employers have, as the price for opening up their plants to women, exacted a number of measures which swept away a great many of the protective laws for women in industry. Altogether twenty-four states have taken such action. In some cases they have issued exemptions from the laws for a limited period of time or only for particular plants with contracts for war materials, but in some cases the elimination of protective measures was sweeping.

In California, Indiana, Kansas, Massachusetts, Nebraska and Wisconsin, plants have been granted permission by the State authorities to employ women at night. In Connecticut, the limit of hours of work per day for women has been raised from nine to ten and per week from 48 to 55. Virginia increased daily hours from nine to ten and weekly hours from 48 to 56, making only a vague stipulation about "necessary health safeguards." In Illinois, scores of firms were granted permits by the Director of Labor to employ women for a seven-day week. Only Ohio and Pennsylvania stipulated that women must be paid time and a half for the extra hours beyond the previous legal limit. New York allows the industrial commissioner to issue permits waiving laws regulating hours, night work, and one-day's-rest-in-seven, except for women under 18 years of age.

Looking at the great sacrifice being made for victory over the Hitlerite Axis by the women in the Soviet Union and other United Nations, it would be difficult to find justification for any complaints about the waiving of protective laws for women in American industry, except for two facts: (a) that very few States have made provisions for overtime pay, thereby giving employers the opportunity of increasing exploitation; and (b) the even more important consideration that these additional burdens are being imposed upon employed women while there are millions of hands available to fill the needs of war production—hands which are now idle, particularly among the Negro people and most particularly among Negro women, who are victims of the worst discrimination in private war industry, and also among many sections of the white female population. The easiest way out for many employers is simply to increase the burden of women already in or most easily available to industry and not compensate them properly for it.

This situation does not, however, obtain everywhere. There are already a number of large plants which are paying equal wages for equal work as between men and women. That, however, is not yet the general rule and is chiefly limited to such plants where progressive unions such as the United Auto Workers or the United Electrical and Radio Workers are strong.

The great progressive development which is augured by the entrance of increasing masses of women into industry is what Anita Whitney has fought for all her life. But, also, she fought for the protection of these women workers through the establishment of proper regulations safeguarding their welfare. And, today, every union would perform its functions better were it to draw the lessons from Anita Whitney's life-

work and concern itself devotedly with this task.

Family and Children

The increasing employment of women in industry also raises problems of the protection of the family and children. The North American Aviation Co. at Los Angeles employs a counselor for women, Mrs. Dorothy Lewis. She listed "worry over the care of children" as the one which came up most often in her daily conferences with women workers. There has been a great deal of talk about Federal Nursery Schools, but thus far, although some appropriations have been made for experimental stations (in Philadelphia and some other cities), few, if any, have actually been established. The Vultee Aircraft finds this such a serious problem that in an interview with newspaper women recently that corporation declared "if the Government agencies bog down and do not act quickly Vultee is planning to go direct to nurseries and arrange care for children of Vultee women workers." Mr. Rochlen, director of industrial relations at the Douglas Aircraft Company, said that they know "of women who could not take jobs because they have no one to take care of their children. Probably within thirty days we will establish our own day nursery. . . ." The crying need for such nurseries is heard on every side, but thus far everything is limited to promises as to the future. In all cities where war industries are located there is developing the serious problem of what is known as "latch-key" children, that is, children whose parents work and who must shift for themselves between the closing of school and the return of their mothers from the factories. A number of cities have already recorded increasing juvenile delinquency because of this situation. This, again, is a ripe field for women who would join in the work in which Anita Whitney was a leader. Every union in the country is directly or indirectly concerned in this question, and if it is to meet the needs of its own membership, of the working class generally, and of the nation in this war period, it cannot continue to ignore these problems. All-out war unionism must break away from the old school of "business agentism" which limits itself to collecting dues, enforcing contracts and keeping the number of workers in industry limited. A new, modernized, streamlined unionism is necessary to meet present needs—of which the problems of women workers and their children are an essential part. The trade unions of our great ally, the Soviet Union, have done this work for many years and have provided us with excellent models to follow, on all these questions as well as in maternity cases, etc., etc.

The Activities of Certain Unions

Yet, unfortunately, very few unions in the country are alert to these questions, and some unions are playing a downright reactionary role. For example, in the Kaiser-operated Oregon Shipbuilding Corporation at Portland, hundreds of women are now employed directly on ship construction. Two hundred and seventy women are working as welders alone, many others as electricians,

etc., etc. It is well known that the Kaiser yards are the most productive in the nation. Jack Murray, personnel director of the three Kaiser yards in Portland, Vancouver and Swan Island, declared that at least "30 per cent of the posts could be held down by women." The unions, however, are resisting that development and discriminating against women by preventing them from becoming full union members. The Boilermakers Union, for example, refuses to accept them into the union but "allows" them to work on a "special union permit." In a master agreement with the employer the union had inserted a clause that no physical examinations may be given to determine the fitness of women for work. The union is taking a hostile attitude toward women being promoted to supervisory jobs in the yards. This is probably one of the more extreme examples of such impediments to the war effort and to our women's effective participation in production for victory.

Our Tasks

Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, in her brilliant series of articles in the *Worker,* points out that despite the fact that Samuel Gompers always considered women unorganizable and that up to 1918 ten internationals of the A. F. of L. excluded women from membership, today there are almost a million women in trade unions. It must be recognized that never having been given adequate opportunity for working class contact, organization and education, the new masses of women entering industry require that efforts be made quickly to educate them to the level of progressive unionism. Progressives in the trade unions should initiate the establishment of special committees to encourage women in industry to join the unions, to carry on special activity to receive them into the unions and make them feel at home there, and to create adequate means to provide educational facilities to acquaint them rapidly with the problems of trade unions and bring them into the ranks of progressive unionists. If this problem slips from the hands of the progressive unions and progressive leaders, then surely certain reactionary employers will know how to take advantage of that.

It behooves our Communist Party which has pioneered in so many battles for progressive trade union organization to take up this fight and help to launch an adequate program for the organization of the unorganized women already in and entering industry, to service their needs, to break down the barriers and restrictions against them, to provide adequate protection and health safeguards and to guide them to progressive unionism. That would constitute one of the best possible contributions to the war effort. It is in the best tradition of the great Communist teachers, Marx and Engels, of Lenin and Stalin, of America's foremost Marxist, Earl Browder, and the great women leaders of our Party, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Mother Bloor and Anita Whitney, that this urgent task become one of the major concerns of the men and women who make up our Party membership today.