

## ***Domestics Uniting for More Pay—And Respect***

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WASHINGTON, July 17—Angry and determined domestic workers from across the country gathered here today to begin organizing for a drive to improve their status and compensation.

They told of maltreatment, disrespect and low pay as the lot of millions of household workers but spoke optimistically of organizing drives under way in more than 50 cities. In many they have won significant gains.

More than 500 women, mostly black and middle-aged, applauded enthusiastically as speakers at an opening session told them the time had come for domestics — cooks, “nannies” and other houseworkers — to demand inclusion under

national and state minimum-wage and unemployment-compensation laws.

And the delegates to the first national conference of the National Committee on Household Employment gave their strongest support to statements that they would insist upon respect from their employers and from the white and black communities.

### **One Million Drop Out**

Mrs. Edith B. Sloan, a former domestic who is executive director of the committee, said that Government statistics showed that while demand for household helpers was increasing, nearly one million women dropped out of the occupation in the last 10 years because of the working conditions.

She was loudly cheered when she said, “Unless there are some changes made, ‘Madame’ is going to have to clean her own house and cook and serve her own meals because everyone is going to quit.”

Among the complaints she listed were low pay (the median wage of household workers is \$1,800 a year); lack of vacation or sick pay, coupled with extra work on holidays; the common use of first names and uninvited familiarity by employers—most of whom are younger than the houseworkers, whose median age is 46, and the absence of recognition that housework is a demanding job requiring

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# DOMESTICS SEEK PAY AND RESPECT

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special skills and experience, if properly done.

The speakers all emphasized a call for community organization and unity to help the household workers achieve their goals.

Mrs. Wilhemina Adams, a founder of Domestic United, Inc., in Charlotte, N. C., told the other delegates, "If we stick together there's no way they can't give us what we want."

Mrs. Adams said her group, with 600 members out of approximately 7,000 domestics in the Charlotte area, had been able to win shorter hours and higher pay plus recognition that household workers are among "the cleanest, most respectable women in the world."

Mrs. Melnea A. Case, a fiery 75-year-old woman with two honorary doctorates in humanities, explained how a statewide organization of houseworkers in Massachusetts had successfully campaigned for their inclusion in most of that state's labor laws.

The attitude of most of the women here was summed up by one spirited organizer who said: "The garbage men have been upgraded to sanitation workers, with all the benefits, and that's just what we have to do. If you're tough enough to talk back to your big man on Sunday, don't tell me you're afraid of Miss Suzy on Monday."