

DOMESTIC WORKERS AND EMPLOYERS: "BECAUSE YOUR LIBERATION IS BOUND UP WITH MINE, LET

IN THE 1930S, DOMESTIC WORKERS (NANNIES, HOUSECLEANERS AND HOME ATTENDANTS TO SENIORS AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES) WERE EXCLUDED FROM MOST U.S. LABOR LAWS.

This exclusion came as a result of southern politicians' refusal to sign labor legislation that included sectors of predominantly Black workers; the complicity of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt administration represented a pivotal codification of white supremacy and patriarchy in U.S. labor and social policy. This history of racism, along with the devaluing of "women's work," anti-immigrant policies, and the marginalization of seniors and people with disabilities, resulted in multiple forms of injustice in the domestic work industry. Conditions for workers have long been characterized by systematic abuse, low pay, long hours and limited job security.

Domestic workers have been organizing throughout U.S. history. The most recent iteration began about 20 years ago and included Domestic Workers United (DWU), which was founded in New York in 1998. Since then, thousands of workers have come together, standing up for their rights, breaking out of isolation, and reversing the legacy of exclusion. When JFREJ started working with the domestic worker movement, there were only four domestic worker groups in the country. Today, the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) is powered by 53 local affiliates and one chapter in 30 cities across 18 states.

In 2002, DWU approached JFREJ with a visionary request: to organize Jewish employers to improve their employment practices and support the campaign for the New York Domestic Worker Bill of Rights. There was no roadmap to organize this constituency, and we knew it would be a challenge. But JFREJ said yes to building this base. And in the years to follow, we slowly built an organizing model to do just



JFREJ turns out hundreds of New Yorkers for Jewish Community Stands with Domestic Workers: A Shalom Bayit Town Hall, 2009.

that: the **Shalom Bayit: Justice for Domestic Workers Campaign**.

Gayle Kirshenbaum was the first JFREJ member to speak out as a domestic employer. Gayle's courage to share her story in public became a model for hundreds of other employers to do the same: "When my son was three months old, I became a part-time employer of a childcare provider named Debbie. The first time I heard Debbie refer to me as her boss, I was taken aback. The word seemed too formal, too authoritarian.... But the reality was that while Debbie was showering love on my son, and as we steadily built an increasingly comfortable and close relationship, I never stopped being her boss, with the power to terminate her job and jeopardize her ability to care for her own children... Without workplace standards, which kind of employer she ended up with was wholly arbitrary. Debbie ended up with me; my resistance to seeing myself as an employer meant that it took too long for Debbie to be treated like an employee."

As the years went by, we heard a lot of stories like Gayle's. Contrary to the notion that the interests of employers would be

at odds with those of workers, employers consistently revealed that they had their own stake in the campaign — as Jews, as union members, as feminists, as caregivers themselves, and as employers. Employers said that it was important to them to build positive relationships with the workers who cared for their homes, their children, and their aging relatives. For that reason and others, most expressed wanting to do the right thing, but employers also said that, like workers, they felt isolated and didn't know what 'the right thing' was. While there was certainly resistance, often centered on affordability, it turned out that most employers expressed that setting fair labor standards would provide guidelines that they truly needed and wanted.

JFREJ organized hundreds of employers, synagogue members, rabbis, and others who, with leadership from the growing domestic worker movement, marched in rallies, lobbied legislators, and spoke to the press in support of the NY Bill of Rights. Perhaps more significant, together with DWU, JFREJ had a transformative impact on the fraught dynamics between workers and employers — in homes and synagogues across the city, in the streets, and

in the halls of Albany. The mostly white and class-privileged employers JFREJ organized at the time came to look to immigrant women of color as leaders and experts in the industry, and workers felt emboldened by having allied employers at their sides.

In 2010, JFREJ celebrated with the NY Domestic Worker Justice Coalition, as a key player in the passage of the first ever Domestic Worker Bill of Rights. It was a tremendous victory for everyone involved.

The NY Bill of Rights campaign was in many ways the flagship campaign for this movement. By extension, the partnership between the DWU and JFREJ has reverberated nationally, inspiring new campaigns, partnerships, and organizations. As Ai-jen Poo, Director of NDWA, writes in *The Age of Dignity*, "We realized we could not accomplish our goals with only the voices of this virtually invisible workforce. This led to a powerful, transformative shift in our organizing, as we understood that nearly everyone is connected to someone who works as a domestic worker, whether they were raised by a domestic worker or employed a worker, had relatives who were caregivers or themselves had done caregiving work. We learned that bringing domestic workers' experiences into the light formally also brought many domestic

employers' struggles into the light as well. This enabled us to see the shared goals and potential power of our collaboration."

In reflecting on what made the NY campaign a success, leaders in NDWA and JFREJ agreed: a key element had been the contribution of employers. In 2010, a small group of JFREJ members founded Hand in Hand: The Domestic Employers Network, which aimed to expand JFREJ's innovative organizing model to become a national network of domestic employers grounded in the conviction that dignified and respectful working conditions benefit worker and employer alike.

The launch of Hand in Hand was momentous for many reasons. JFREJ would no longer be the sole employer group, which would open up space for a strategy that better reflected the many Jewish community members who are not white, not middle/upper class, and not domestic employers. As it turns out, both JFREJ and Hand in Hand would soon come to represent a multi-racial community with Jewish and non-Jewish members from a wide range of class backgrounds.

After the passage of the NY Bill of Rights and the founding of Hand in Hand, there were big questions on our minds. Among others: What happens after a win? Will there be future victories in other states?

And, how will we ensure that care will be affordable for all who need it?

Here's a snapshot of what happened next: Danielle moved to California and planted roots for Hand in Hand to organize in partnership with the CA Domestic Workers Coalition in support of the CA Bill of Rights, which saw victory in 2013! Nationally, Hand in Hand was on the founding Leadership Team of Caring Across Generations, a campaign led by NDWA and Jobs with Justice to transform the home care industry so that everyone will be able to live, work, and age with dignity. As a part of the CA Bill of Rights campaign and Caring Across Generations, Hand in Hand began organizing people with disabilities who employ home attendants, and in doing so learned a whole new set of lessons that will inform the domestic workers movement and JFREJ for years to come. In New York, JFREJ and Hand in Hand partnered to investigate strategies that could reach a much broader base of employers to implement the standards outlined in the NY Bill of Rights and beyond. From there, the Eldercare Dialogues launched, led by JFREJ, B'nai B'rith, and the NY Domestic Workers Coalition; and in 2014, Hand in Hand launched the Fair Care Pledge and My Home is Someone's Workplace initiative in partnership with NDWA and JFREJ.

ADRIENNE COOPER (adapted from a traditional song)

volt ikh gehat koyekh

volk ikh gelofn in di gasn

volt ikh geshrign "sholem,

sholem, sholem, sholem."

If my voice was louder

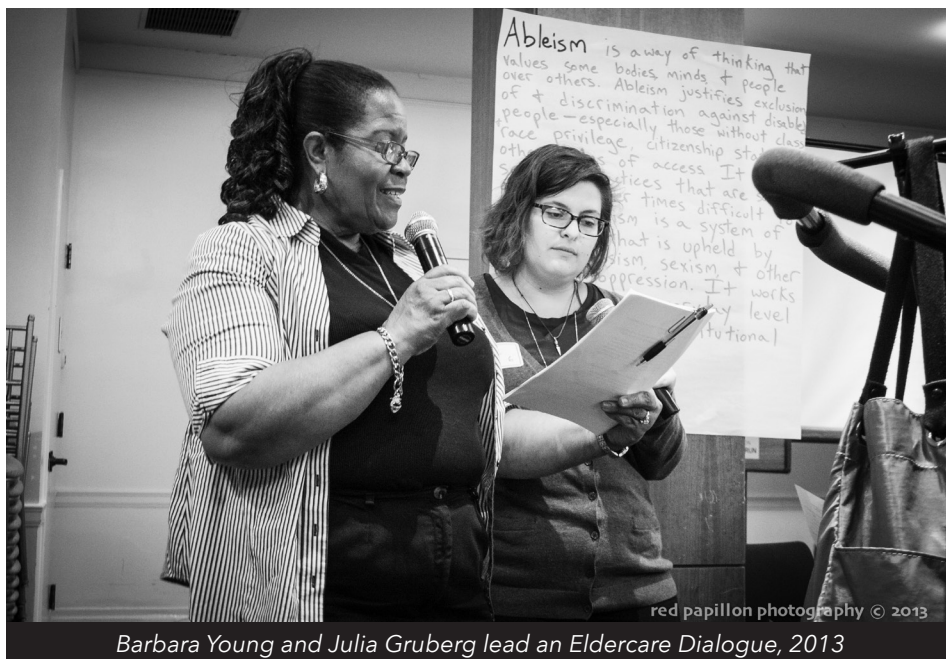
If my body stronger

I would take to the streets

Shouting, "peace, peace, peace."

Yiddishist, activist, teacher, and internationally recognized, stellar performer of Yiddish song, Adrienne Cooper (1946-2011) was a recipient of the Rabbi Marshall T. Meyer Risk Taker Award in 2011. "Peace in the Streets/sholem lid" can be heard on Adrienne's album Enchanted: A New Generation of Yiddishsong.

DOMESTIC WORKERS (CONT'D)



Barbara Young and Julia Gruberg lead an Eldercare Dialogue, 2013

Whew! There's more to say — perhaps on Hand in Hand's 10-year anniversary?!

For now, we'll share that JFREJ and Hand in Hand's organizing models continue to evolve. Both organizations remain committed to accountably taking leadership from those most impacted, with the added acknowledgement that in this sector multiple groups are impacted and are often pitted against each other by decision-makers. To find solutions together, we must continue to grow beyond traditional notions of solidarity toward recognition of mutual interest and interdependence.

In the Eldercare Dialogues, we used storytelling to connect the dots among care, aging, disability, and migration. By juxtaposing the experiences, for example, of an aging domestic worker and a Jewish family caregiver, the process organically illustrated the links between these struggles. Similarly, after a National Caring Across Generations convening, Jill Shenker, NDWA Field Director reflected, "It was powerful to hear Nikki [Brown-Booker] from Hand in Hand tell her story. As both a person with a disability who employs attendants, and as the child of a mother who was once an immigrant domestic worker and is now 80

years old in need of care herself, Nikki's story brings to light the reality of interdependence and interconnectedness that is at the heart of the Caring Across Generations campaign."

By 2035, there will be 11.5 million people in the U.S. over 65 years old. Currently, there is no clear plan for training home care workers or for making home care affordable and accessible to a majority of families. Our partners at NDWA are once again forwarding a courageous vision, turning what could feel like an impending national crisis into a singular opportunity to transform how we care for one another in this society. As a part of this vision, Hand in Hand will continue to build a home for all domestic employers, and JFREJ will turn its focus toward organizing Jewish elders.

We are proud and humbled to have had the opportunity to do this work with JFREJ and Hand in Hand. And we are boundlessly grateful to our partners in the domestic worker movement, and the thousands of domestic workers who labor every day, making all other work possible.

References & Other reading:

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How Domestic Workers Won Their Rights: Five Big Lessons, Yes! Magazine, Amy B. Dean, 2013

"Because Your Liberation Is Bound Up with Mine, Let Us Work Together" — paraphrase of quote from an Australian Aboriginal group (often attributed to Lilla Watson)

Danielle M. Feris is a proud and committed JFREJ member and was founding director of Hand in Hand. DMF lives in Oakland, focusing movement-building energy on resourcing the transformative work of generative somatics.

Rachel McCullough is Director of Organizing at JFREJ. She has been a JFREJ member since 2008 and cut her teeth through Shalom Bayit organizing and the campaign for the New York Domestic Worker Bill of Rights.