

emily_nuttall_-_3_5 (360p)

Sun, Feb 04, 2024 6:38PM • 22:28

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

hotel, waitresses, union, work, people, shift, agreement, industry, hours, leaflets, felt, signed, employees, organizing, organize, restaurant, cook, turnover, street, contracts

SPEAKERS Emily Nuttall, Sara Diamond

Sara Diamond 00:00

I'm thinking of turnover. Yeah. Yeah. And ask you to talk about that. Yeah. Because they were the rarest. And there was and there still is, you know. So cooling homes where they're an organizing in this industry particular and they give restaurants?

Emily Nuttall 00:19

Well, I guess the biggest problem was the turnover of staff in restaurants. And I think just to a great extent, David exists today. You know, I don't think there's many industries where there's such a turnover of people. And so you, it's hard to stabilize the union, you know, the membership, when you have this constant turn over. And I think part of the reason for the turnover is that being a waitress or a waiter is not considered, you know, a very professional job. It's a sort of a stop gap in people's lives. This is something they think, well, just anybody can do. And yet, the truth is, that I think I have, you can imagine how many times I've eaten out, and there is a very disseminated difference between a good professional waiter waitress, then someone who has just come in off the street, and then sort of has had no training for the job. I, I have had waiters and waitresses that have been absolutely superb. And I think it was because that industry has always been downgraded. And probably one of the reasons to that constitutes towards it being downgraded, is that it's about 90% females that work in it. And let's face it, women have a long way yet to go to become to be considered equal, that the work they do is important. It's a contribution to our society. I don't know what we would do if we took all the waitresses out of the restaurant. So I think it'd be a lot of people go hungry, because a lot of people don't know how to cook. So I think it's a combination of an attitude about an industry that is predominantly women. And the fact that many people consider it just a stock gap and moving up the ladder.

Sara Diamond 02:37

What is the status of waitresses? Are the profession itself changed at all during the war from the depression?

Emily Nuttall 02:46

Well, I think there's always been a hard core of people who feel that this is the kind of work that they enjoy doing. I think you have to like people to do it. And I think it's suits a certain kind of personality, it can also suit maybe the kind of hours that somebody finds good for them. But there's always been a hardcore of people who never left the industry. Believe it or not, I have two sister in laws that were waitresses for, oh, I don't know, 40 years or more, you know, and worked. Not always, just as waitresses, hostesses, and then some of them did other things. But they stayed in the food industry,

because they liked it. They enjoyed it. And I might tell you that they were they're both excellent cooks, you know, and, and they said, beautiful tables when you go to visit them and invited for dinner. So yes, there is a hardcore that I enjoy. I enjoy food. I enjoy cooking. You know, I love putting on a dinner. I don't do it so much. Now, of course, because I don't have all the facilities that I used to have. And I don't do that much entertainment. But I still have dinner parties, believe it or not, I still cook a Christmas dinner in this tiny little apartment. And I enjoy the comradeship that you get when people get together, you know, over food. You know, I think it makes people more relaxed, I think opens people up.

Sara Diamond 04:38

So tell us a bit about the hotel organizing campaign. How did it start and what kind of

Emily Nuttall 04:45

well, are you prepared to listen to the background about it? Well, we did. As I said, we decided that we had to do the hotels. Now. We did have a couple of hotels on haste. sting street where the owners had formerly been union members themselves, they had been loggers are working up in the woods. And they had made their money stashed it away, and they had purchased hotel small hotels. So we knew that we would not run into problems with them. That they would be, it wouldn't be hard to organize and wouldn't be hard to negotiate with them. But we really felt that that was not the best way to start. That was exposing them. That would mean individual contracts with individual hotels. And we really felt that to make the thing. Move, we had to hit one of the big ones. So we decided we would hit the GA hotel. We thought that would be a good place to start. It was a big hotel quite prestigious in that time. I think it probably still is. And so we did the right, we did what we thought was the right thing, believe it or not, May and I the two of us went ahead an appointment with a hotel manager. And we he was very, very nice to us. And we told him Look, we're planning to organize this hotel. And we hope that we can do it a makeup Lee and that you will not put barriers in our ways so that we can talk to the employees and the your bartenders are organized and we feel that the other staff should be well, he was the epitome of etiquette, he was so nice to us, so polished and thanked us for telling us but he didn't really think that he needed a union in his hotel. And I think the fact that it was two young women, you know, I What would be be then both 30 or late 20s or 30s. And he sort of patted us on the back, very sweetly invited us if we would like to have a drink, or we'd like some coffee and sent us on our way. So we said okay, he can't say we didn't warn him. So then we realized that we had to organize this hotel on the quiet. We have to do the preliminary work on the quiet. So we are gonna we we had a meeting and we set out the plan. We got literature, we you know, we had a flyer, appealing to the workers to join our union got that printed, and then we set up teams of two. We had case the place sounds like birthed. We case the place we knew all the entrances, the employees and the various entrances, one on Georgia Street and what was the other house street I think as I recall, that street is and we knew all the places that you could get in and get out of the hotel. So we had teams of two. And we started I think it was seven o'clock in the morning. And we sent two teams in at a time. And they were to stay in the hotel until they were thrown out. And the minute they were throwing out they were to come back to our office. And we sent in other teams. And we had this going all day. And they were given certain departments to concentrate on we said you will do chambermaid, you do the top few floors, let us know when you get kicked out what floors you weren't able to do you do the bellhops you do the desk you do the waitresses, you do the cooks. And I think I'm trying to think how many people were involved. Incidentally, we got we were working in cooperation with the service industry, the server maintenance

and service union. Stan Smith was one of the officers in that union. It was a small union just starting out but there was certain people like carpenters and upholsters and certain painters that wouldn't fall under our jurisdiction. So they we have them also helping us. And so the day that it was planned because I was a spokesman for the Union at the time, I decided that I would stay home that day and not go near the office. This was all part of the plan. And what I remember is about 10 o'clock in the morning the office phone to say they were getting frantic frantic calls from The manager take these people out of here. There's leaflets in the bedrooms as leaflets in the restaurant. He was in an absolute panic. And they he wanted me and they said, We don't know where Emily is she's out somewhere, we were not able to be in contact with her. But we'll pass the message along. So they would phone me. And I always remember I was making cheering Jim that day at home. I thought it was a good day to do it to do some preserving. So the calls kept coming in and I kept saying, Doc, you can't find me, you can't find me. You have no authority. You know, if you're very sorry, yes. It's too bad. This is happening. And it was finally I think it was about four o'clock in the afternoon when I thought I better step into the picture. So I phoned the union and said, Look, I'm going to phone him, you found me. And we better start thinking in the meantime, they were signing up employees all over the place. You know, the I think the reason they went so early, I'm not quite sure the hour they started was because we wanted a night shift that was coming up. We wanted to cover all the shifts. And we felt by late afternoon that we had pretty well covered. But it was really true. He was screaming there is leaflets in the elevators, there's leaflets in all over and our guests are reading it, they think that we're not treating our employees, right. Anyway, we I phoned him and I said, Well, have you had enough? Because if you are willing to meet with us and discuss the question of a union contract for your employees, I will gladly call everybody out. And we will not come back and again like that. Anyway, that was the story. And he agreed you better believe it. But that's how we organized the Georgia hotel. And then with having that, as the, you know, we were able then to go the other employ other hotels. But then the question of, of signing agreements came along. And when the BC hotel men's association got wind, that we were organizing the hotels, and that we were going to sign very favorable contracts with some employers who were felt had empathy for our union. As I say we had a few hotels where the owners were, were quite sympathetic to us. And that's where we were going to start signing the contracts and then go with that contract and try to get it signed by other hotels. But when they saw what was happening, the BC hotel men's association phoned us and said that the BC hotel men's association would take over the negotiations for all hotels in the province of British Columbia. So that was really quite a coup. And other words, every hotel that we organized after that agreement was signed, came under automatically came under that agreement. Well, the first agreement was really nothing to brag about, we had to settle for very little in the agreement. But of course, the main thrust was that we would be recognized that the master agreement for the province wouldn't be signed. And it was the groundwork on which other hotel agreements wouldn't be renegotiated and any conditions that we felt needed improving was improved. So I think it was a landmark in, in organizing, you know, getting the hotels, and now they have camps in the local 40. I understand they have a tremendous membership. But I think the membership, you know, the new membership with the younger membership today should know some of the struggles that went on. You know, how I got thrown out of a hotel because I was organizing the Belmont hotel. And that was one of the hotels we had set her sights on and I got thrown out I was up in the halls looking for the chamber maids to talk to them and to sign them up into the Union. And of course, the host detective caught me going from floor to floor and he wanted to know what I was doing in the hotel. And of course, I wasn't going to tell him I've been organizing this hotel and he was very furious and he just marched

me into the elevator Bear in took me downstairs and this huge lobby with a lot of people sitting on Chesterfields, and big comfortable chairs and, and what looked to me then like a mile to walk to the door with him pushing me and his voice saying we don't allow the kind of women in this hotel soliciting business. This is a respectable hotel. You get out and everybody's eyes turned and looked at me as I went out the door. Yes, he thought it was a prostitute was quite these the kind of things I think that experience affected. No, you know, nothing. Now at the time I when I got out of the hotel. I was devastated. It never dawned on me that anyone would mistake me for prostitute. Frankly, it's a trade I don't know very much about. But I think I felt devastated by the accusation. And yet I felt honor bound not to tell him what I was doing. And so when I got out of the hotel, I'll tell you, the floodgates opened, I leaned against the wall, and I cried, and I cried. But that was it. I cried. And I went on doing the job. And he succeeded. And we succeeded. And I met that man afterwards, when we were signing our agreement. I said, Now you know who I am. And he we both got a good chuckle out of it. Yeah.

Sara Diamond 16:42

Um, tell us just briefly, though, you were able to achieve a shorter workweek through your union?

Emily Nuttall 16:51

Well, you know, there was, there was different hours, and I think, mainly wasn't so much hours of work as a terrible splits, that the shifts that we're all split up, we instituted, unfortunately, no, I can't remember the exact details. Because my goodness, I don't have any of the old agreements that we negotiated. But certainly hours of work and with emphasis on split shifts, because at that time, you know, you they had them working all kinds of crazy hours, whenever they were busy. And if the it rained, or business was slow, they had the right just to send them home, you know, within work two hours, and they were sent home and then come back at five o'clock, you know, it was a terrible way to organize your life. So we did manage to make it that you worked with, you know, this shorter shift was four hours, as I recall, whether you worked it or not, you had to be paid for four hours, we only agreed that there could be one split, and that these two shifts had to be within 12 hours. You know, instead of spread over 16 hours and 20 hours. And we also fought a chorus and got legislation passed pass, we had a brief and went before the Labor Relations Board and managed to stop any employer allowing his employees to and a shift if it ended between midnight and six o'clock in the morning, then he had to provide transportation for her to go home and that that was his responsibility between the hours of midnight and six. And that really came about because we had a terrible murder on Kitsilano beach of a waitress, you know, it was she was very badly mutilated. And she had been a waitress that came off shift, I think, as I recall something like about three o'clock in the morning, and she was found the next morning and Kitsilano beach. And it was that incident that gave the impetus to the union to say enough is enough, you know, let's do something about this. And frankly, we got fairly good reception from the government. They they brought that the board brought recommended to the government and that became part of the labor code. So that was and then we had proper locker rooms, proper dressing rooms, you know, it was just unbelievable. The holes in the basements in the filth. You know, they didn't think it was important that we needed a clean wash room. washrooms were so horrible and so dirty that I can remember uh, you know that you just didn't dare use the bathroom. Why? On your shift you waited till you go home you gradually got yourself trained that you went before you went to work and you didn't go in until you came home. Yes