

Book Review

by BARBARA KLUGMAN

NUMSA Women Organise!

The introduction to this book says, "This book was written by women members of NUMSA. It looks at the problems women have - at work and at home - and at their determined struggle to solve the problems." It is a very important book for two very different reasons.

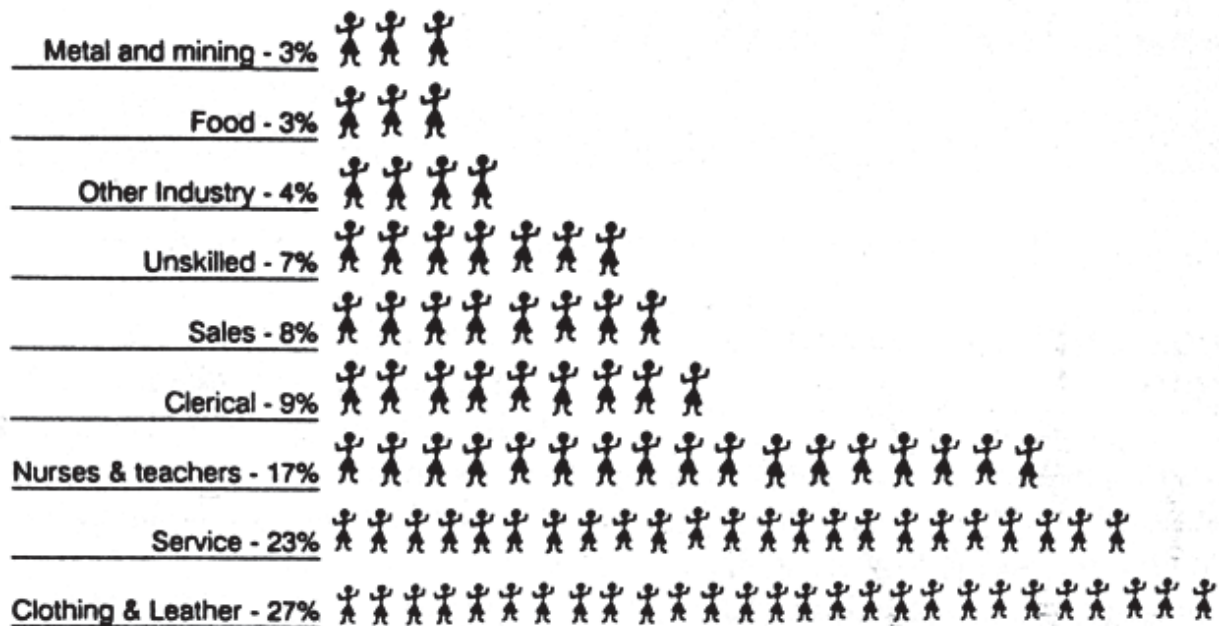
Firstly, the fact that NUMSA has written this book tells us that women have particular problems which need to be addressed - there is no argument in the union about whether there is a need to focus on women's issues within general workers' issues. The book describes how the union has learnt about the many different kinds of discrimination that women workers experience, and how the union has taken up these issues and won major victories.

Some of the issues covered in the

book, such as maternity rights, are by now accepted as 'union' issues in all COSATU unions. But other issues are only beginning to be put on union agendas. For example, *NUMSA Women Organise!* discusses the union's campaign for equal pay for work of equal value. It spells out all the subtle ways in which women's work is undervalued, and offers examples of how the union has challenged this in different factories.

The book also shows how women are excluded from vocational job training. One way the NUMSA is challenging this problem is by arguing that training institutions should not be accredited if they don't have facilities (change rooms, toilets, etc.) for women. It is sections like these which will be very useful and challenging to other unions, just as CCAWUSA's focus on maternity rights in the early eighties offered inspiration to other unions. Finally the book will serve to inspire the members of NUMSA, and the women particularly.

The second reason why this book is

Where women work

Each figure represents 1% of employed black women in South Africa.

One of the graphs which is in the book

important is that the preparation and the gathering of information were done by union members, not by 'outside experts' were only brought in to edit the information and put it into the book. So *NUMSA Women Organise!* is a very good example of collective research. It has been published at a time when there is lots of debate about whether it is possible for organisations to do their own research.

One of the women who was centrally involved in the book, a NUMSA administrator, described how shopstewards took questionnaires to their factories, asked women to complete them, and then returned them to a central base. In addition, general women's meetings in most regions were held to discuss the experiences of the women in NUMSA, and to talk

about what the book should say. Reports of these meetings were brought to national meetings at which the final framework for the book was agreed. the NUMSA National Women Workers' Committee then co-ordinated with The 'experts'. This process of calling meetings, and discussing women's issues helped to build the women's structures in NUMSA, exciting women's interest, and gaining their participation the union.

Although there are times when participatory research is not appropriate, this experience in NUMSA offers a valuable example of the way in which the process of doing research can build organisation - even before the information has been analysed and new organisational tasks have been identified! ☆