

# Worker oppression at

by Bruce M. Lantz

The information in the following was given to the GAZETTE collective by a former worker at the Moirs factory in Halifax. It was verified by others who have had dealings with the company and their products. We hope that the points raised in this article and any that follow will cause that firm and others like it to open their doors to journalists and photographers so that the entire situation may be presented to the public. NOTE: the photos appearing here were taken by our informant and not Dal Photo.

The Moirs (Halifax) Ltd. chocolate factory is oppressing its workers and may be operating under conditions which are contrary to Nova Scotia health and safety regulations, according to one former worker at that plant.

In an interview with the GAZETTE, the ex-worker stated that "the only reason Moirs isn't literally a sweat shop is that the heat would melt the chocolates. It's often cold enough to make your hands numb; then you drop and break boxes of them all over the floors. The pay is poor and the working conditions worse."

Most of the approximately 200 employees at the Moirs plant are women who receive an average wage of \$1.43 per hour, as compared with the \$1.90 paid the 50 male workers, who primarily work as maintenance caretakers and heavy loaders.

Most of the women spend their eight-hour day seated at a fast-moving conveyor belt, frequently rushing to stack wooden boxes weighing eight to ten pounds each — without falling behind the conveyor.

"That conveyor belt isn't like an automobile assembly line", she said. "It's much too fast. You have to work at top speed continually but you're always behind the belt."

This backlog and rush frequently results in quantities of chocolates spilling onto the floor. According to the former worker, these are later swept up ("dirt and all") and put through the dipping process once more. From these are produced many of the well-known Moirs' "double-dipped" chocolates. The only way to ensure that an ordinary Moirs

chocolate has not been re-cycled is to bite into only half the chocolate piece. If two chocolate layers can be distinguished, it is possible that these were once spilled onto the floor of the Moirs factory.

**THE INFORMANT INDICATED** that maggots, mice, rats and cockroaches are to be found in various sections of the factory. "The dead bodies of these animals (along with general garbage) pile up in the courtyards and aren't always immediately removed", the worker stated.

Boxes of chocolates are often left uncovered for days at a time. When the factory area is fumigated at periodical intervals, the cockroaches escape into these boxes, which are temporarily covered.

The majority of Moirs employees have not finished their high school education. The number of such drop-outs in the Halifax-Dartmouth area has been increasing rapidly, resulting in long waiting lists for most unskilled jobs.

The GAZETTE has learned that the Moirs factory often lays off workers a few months after they are hired. Seventy-five women were hired during the month of September; by Christmas none remained.

The ex-worker has very definite ideas why this occurs. "This could be related to the fact that wages rise with seniority, and seniors pull quite a weight. The way to deal with seniors is to avoid having anyone in a job for a long time", she said.

Previous to the turn of the New Year, Moirs underwent a transformation which affected the job status of at least 23 workers. The change involved moving all

hard candy productions previously handled by the Halifax factory to Sherbrooke, Quebec. The Halifax plant now handles packaged chocolates exclusively.

**THIS "THRIFT MEASURE"** meant that 23 workers faced a winter of unemployment in the Metro area. Some of those who were approaching seniority status were able to take junior positions which frequently resulted in wage reductions.

In this type of situation, Moirs "protects" the wages of seniors in junior positions for an 18-month period, while giving them the opportunity to advance through on-the-job training. If the worker cannot meet the training standards after this time, he receives the standard wage

for his lower position.

Workers at the Moirs factory are represented by the Bakery and Confectionary Workers Union. This organization appears to have taken no steps to force Moirs to adhere to health and safety regulations in its factory; nor has it done much to improve the pay scale of this predominantly female work force.

When an employee at the factory is in difficulty, she first sees the shop stewardess, who in turn relays the circumstances of the problem to the union. That group may or may not decide to interfere; if they do and the issue requires the services of a lawyer, then the worker must pay the expenses.

Our informant only recently ceased to work at the Moirs factory and has kept in

touch with working conditions there. The information which the GAZETTE has indicates several violations of the Nova Scotia Industrial Safety Act and the pursuant Industrial Safety Regulations. The related segments of these appear on this page.

**THE QUALITY OF THE DRINKING WATER** at Moirs does not appear to conform with the regulations outlined in Section 182 (f) of the Regulations. The water from the drinking fountain is said to be "usually yellowish in color, changing to nearly black after two to four days".

"When it gets that bad they put up a Do Not Drink sign on the fountain. When we go back the next week, it's the usual yellow color and the whole thing repeats

**INDUSTRIAL SAFETY ACT**, Chapter 141, revised statutes of Nova Scotia, 1967.

Sec. 3 (1) Every employer shall keep his industrial establishment in such a manner that the safety and health of persons in the establishment is not likely to be endangered.

(2) Every employer shall take such precautions as are reasonable in the circumstances to ensure the safety and health of every person in the industrial establishment in which he is the employer.

Sec. 23 Any person who violates or fails to observe any provision of this Act or the regulations or any order or direction given pursuant to this Act or the regulations is guilty of an offence and is liable on summary conviction for a first offence to a penalty of not more than one hundred dollars and in default of payment to imprisonment for not more than thirty days, and for a second or subsequent offence to a penalty of not more than five hundred dollars and in default of payment to imprisonment for not more than ninety days.

**INDUSTRIAL SAFETY REGULATIONS**, (pursuant to Chapter 141 of the Revised Statutes of Nova Scotia, 1967), February 11, 1969.

Sec. 3 Every employer shall provide and maintain in good condition in a location readily accessible to his employees, a copy of the Act and the Regulations.

Sec. 182 An employer shall,  
(a) if females are employed, provide a rest room or space affording reasonable privacy together with one or more couches or cots and chairs and satisfactory to an inspector;

Sec. 183 An employer shall,  
(a) keep the premises in a clean and sanitary condition and free from any effluvia arising from refuse of any kind and remove, at least daily, by a suitable method, all accumulations of oil, grease, dirt and refuse from the floors, work tables, passages and stairways;

(d) provide and maintain for the use of employees a convenient and sufficient supply of clean towels or

air dryers, soap or other suitable cleansing agent, toilet paper and in each toilet room used by females a suitable covered receptacle;

(f) provide a supply of safe drinking water. When the supply is not taken directly from a water pipe it shall be contained in a covered vessel equipped with a drain faucet. The water in the vessel shall be renewed at least daily. A supply of individual cups shall be provided except where the water is delivered by an upward jet.

Sec. 195. Where, in the opinion of the Inspector, the whole or substantial portion of the work upon which employees are engaged in any department of a factory are employed, can be efficiently performed while such employees are seated, the employer shall provide chairs or stools with suitable back rests. If high stools are used a foot rest shall be provided. The Inspector may stipulate the type of seating required if necessary. Chairs and stools shall be constructed for proper height adjustment. If self-adjusting seats are not provided, the chair or stool furnished for any employee shall be altered to comfortable height.

Sec. 246. Every employer shall,  
(d) ensure that any place where dust may accumulate is regularly cleaned by vacuum, wet sweeping, wet shovelling or other method that reduces the dissemination of dust into the atmosphere;

Sec. 197 An employer shall  
(d) where wash fountains and wash basins are provided, supply hot and cold water to taps or outlets.

Sec. 47 In an industrial establishment the employer shall provide and properly maintain means of egress that is convenient to and having easy passage with all areas likely to be used by any person.

Sec. 53 Every employer shall provide and properly maintain such equipment and facilities as directed by an inspector for protection from fire and the prevention and extinguishment, thereof.



# chocolate factory

Moirs chocolates are internationally known and their local factory has been in operation since the early 1800's. The factory is located at 1820 Argyle St., near the Scotia Square complex and downtown Halifax. It is the central distributor of Moirs products in the Atlantic region and is one of the largest manufacturer distributors in the area.

Moirs is owned by Standard Brands Ltd., which is connected to the United States firm of Standard Brands Inc. This company also owns Walter M. Lowney Ltd., Melrose Foods, J. C. C. Stores, Doctor Ballards Animal Foods, Jenny Lind, Bluebonnet and Planters Nuts.

itself. When it's just a yellow color we drink it anyway", she stated.

She also said that she had never seen a fire escape or any exit marked as such in the four months that she worked with Moirs. As well as this, new additions to the work staff are not told what to do, what precautions to take or what doors to use in case of a fire. (See Sections 47 and 53)

Moirs appears to have violated Section 182 (a) of the Regulations by failing to provide a reasonably private rest area with proper seating facilities for the women.

"Other than a long wooden bench in the washroom, the only rest area there is the cafeteria", said the former employee.

In order to reach the cafeteria on the third floor for their 25-minute lunch break, the workers must walk several flights of stairs — the only elevator in the eight-storey building is reserved for freight — accompanied to and from by supervisors who signal the return to the work area.

The only other rest times offered factory workers at Moirs are four or five minute breaks in the morning and afternoon.

"Not even enough time to finish a cigarette", she declared.

In at least one known instance the Moirs plant is violating the specifications laid out in Section 197 (c) of the Regulations; this regards the number of toilets and washbasins per set number of workers.

The washroom on the third floor (according to our information) contains only one toilet and one washbasin, even though it is used by 30 to 60 workers. The regulations stipulate that there should be three toilets and washbasins for such a number.

The women working on the conveyor belt are only provided with plain stools for seats as they work. This violates Section 195, which states that in such circumstances chairs or stools with back rests should be provided.

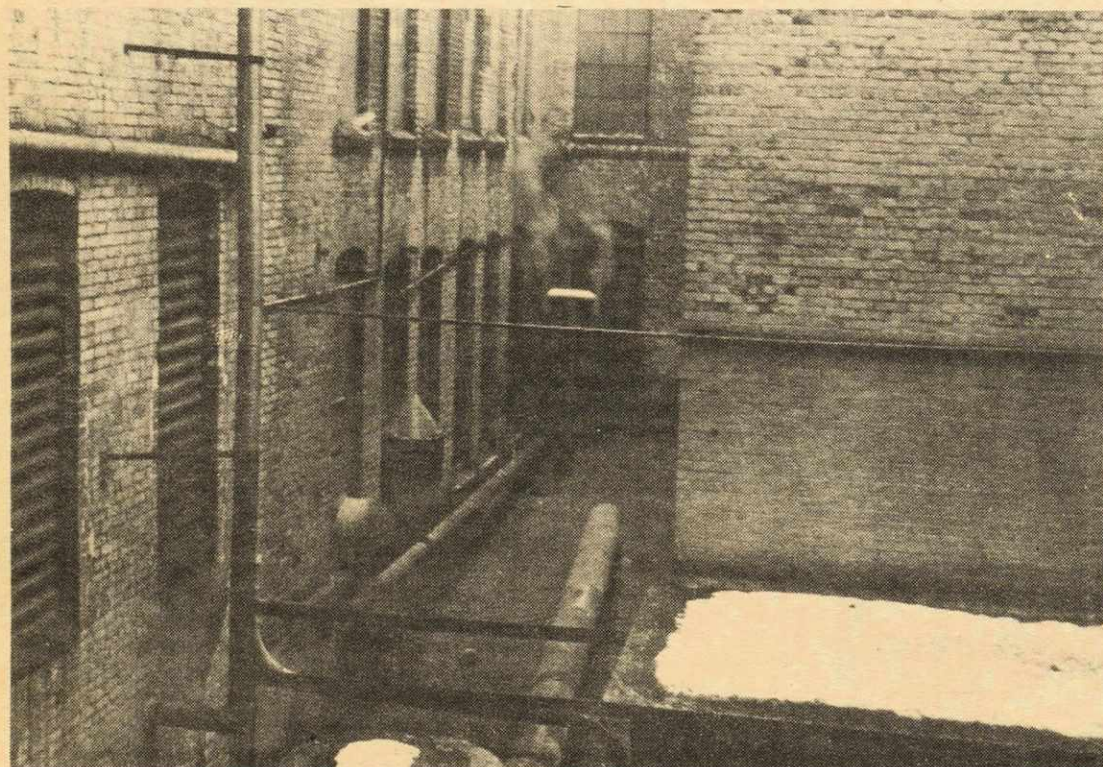
Contrary to Section 183 (a), the only visible daily clean-up operation is a general sweeping. "That doesn't remove the spilled chocolates that are ground into the floor underfoot."

**SOME WORKERS HAVE ALSO COMPLAINED** about inflammation and irritation of the nasal passages; this could indicate that dust-prevention measures are inadequate at the Moirs factory. (See Section 246 (d))

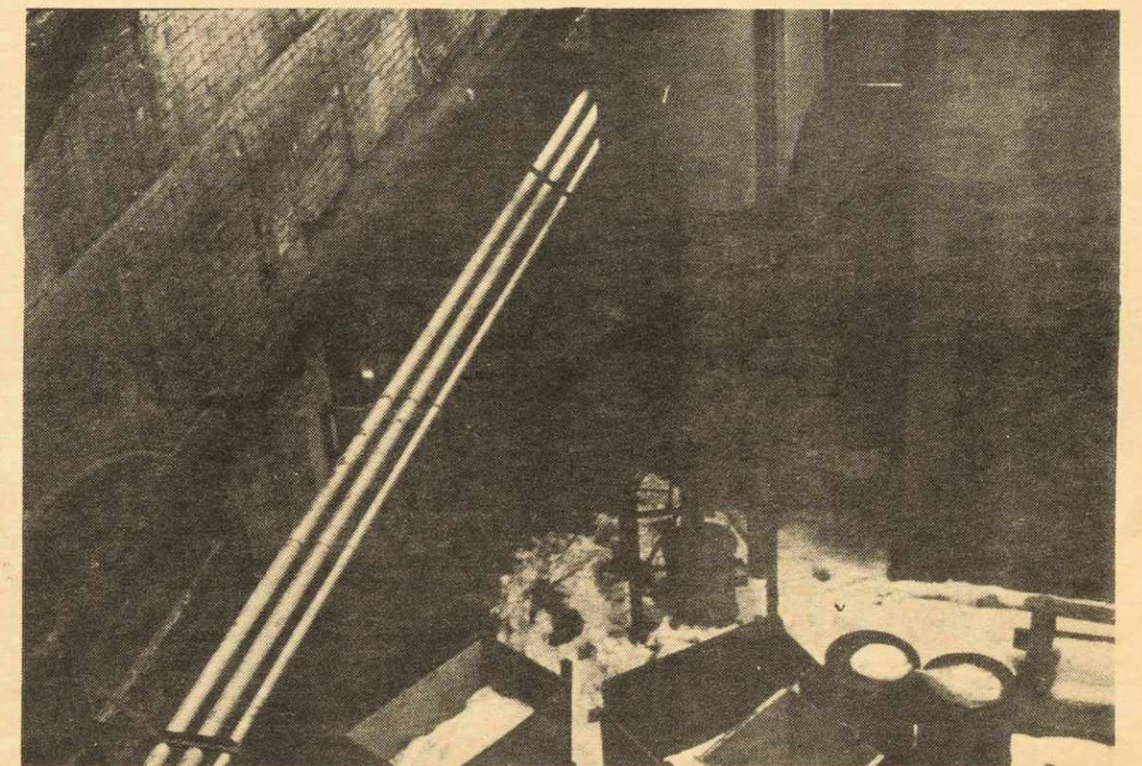
The management has also neglected to provide soap or hot running water in the washrooms, thus breaking the regulations set down in Sections 183 (d) and 197 (d).

As far as the GAZETTE has been able to ascertain, there is no regulation which stipulates how often the health and safety inspectors should examine conditions in such factories.

One secretary in the Health Department inspectors' office stated that "Their time is all taken up with complaints."



Another shot of the not-so-clean inner courtyard at Moirs.



This is a photo of the courtyard, sided by the building, and apparently where garbage, boxes and dead rats, etc., are thrown.