



# EQUAL PAY

for

# EQUAL WORK



**A**BOUT the middle of last month we were asked by one of our readers to open our columns to a discussion to which there could be no logical end. Here is the request:

Sir,—I should like to see some discussion in your columns of the problem of equal pay for equal work. No section of the community is more interested in the matter than the Public Service, and it is surely as important as some of the other subjects on which you have sought the opinion of your readers.

—PUBLIC SERVANT (Wellington).

The sensible answer clearly was No. But we had no sooner decided to be sensible than the subject came up again in a more urgent way in a Press Association message circulated throughout the Dominion. So we decided to get some opinions.

First we went to Miss Kate Ross, President of the Wellington Public Service Women's Committee.

## Public Service Women

"WOMEN in Great Britain have obtained a Royal Commission to investigate this question. In New Zealand, I am sorry to say, there is no such widespread interest. We have, on the one hand, a great shortage of female labour, as anyone who reads the advertisement columns in the Press must be aware; on the other hand, women who have remained in offices and industry are accused of causing unemployment among returned men.

"Why has this situation arisen? Surely because, as in the past, women workers are still paid considerably less than their male equivalents, and consequently employers have, during the war, found it profitable to use female employees in a great many occupations which were once filled by men. In the last few years, women have moved from the so-called 'feminine' occupations, such as shorthand-typing and nursing, into all fields of industry, and in some they provide a menace to returning male workers by forming a body of effective cheap labour, which is economically profitable to the employer. The same thing happens during a depression."

There is only one real answer to this problem—equal pay for equal work.

But what do we mean by this? Not that each job held by a man or a woman should be considered and their relative merits in performing it weighed—no two people ever do exactly identical work in the same time or with the same efficiency.

No, we ask that standard rates of pay should be fixed for all clearly-defined occupations, and that they should be paid to the worker doing the job, regardless of sex. To fix wages for women as a special group seems as illogical as to fix wages for groups of men according to their religion, their race, or their weight. Equal pay for equal work means

that a rate should be fixed for a job, and that appointment to that job should be because of merit and ability only.

It is often argued that if women receive equal pay for equal work, many married women will find it more tempting to keep on with their jobs rather than have children. War-time experience in Britain has shown that this is not so. There, the birth-rate has increased, largely because of higher family incomes and freedom from the fear of unemployment. Men and women have been able to marry younger, and to start their homes with larger savings than ever before, and married women do not have to go on working to supplement the family income, as they so often did before the war.

Without a system of family allowances such a change would admittedly be difficult. But such a system has now been introduced in New Zealand.

## Two Other Objections

Equal pay for equal work is not dependent upon a system of family allowances, since it justifies itself by being a protection against cheap labour, but it should certainly be supplemented in that way.

A further objection is that while women are all right in subordinate positions such as typists and secretaries, it would be fatal to allow them to become controlling officers, as men would rebel against such a situation. To a certain extent, these critics are right, for up till the present women have been working under certain disadvantages. However, where men and women do receive equal

rates for the same job, the evidence suggests that they work as well together.

There are, we realise, many jobs which women just cannot do as well as men—jobs for which they are physically

## Physical Incapacity

incapable. If equal rates of pay prevailed, employers would not give women such jobs; but for the jobs that women can do equal pay would remove the temptation to employ them merely to lower the wages bills.

Equal pay for equal work will not give women a glimpse of the millennium, but it will help to sweep away the barriers which deny them the opportunity of even competing for many of the more interesting and highly paid jobs available to-day. Food, clothing, and shelter cost the same for both men and women; the woman saves to provide for the home as well as the man; many women now spend the whole of their lives working in the business or industrial field; the opportunities at least should be the same for both.

## City Missioner

ASSUMING that the opinions of a man for whom groups of women work regularly (for no pay whatever) would be interesting, we asked the Rev. Harry Squires, Wellington City Missioner, what he thought about the subject. (The women referred to assist the mission funds by holding jumble sales.)

"I would add to equal pay for equal work, 'equal responsibility,'" he said.

We asked him to amplify that a little.

"What I mean is this: Along with equal pay women must and can accept the same amount of responsibility. We saw how that worked in the Forces where they did important work, very often not under the direction of men but of women. Of course, employers in a good many instances, prefer men for their strength and suitability for certain types of work.

"But it often suits an employer to have a woman doing the same job as a man does because, under present conditions, she is paid less and so absorbs less of the profits. And yet goods produced by women are no cheaper than those made by men.

"Then there is the other side of the question. A man is supposed, popularly, to be the head of the house. Whether he is or not is another matter—I know plenty who are not. But he is looked on as the breadwinner and protector. If a woman says, bluntly: 'I get just as much as my husband,' how do we get on then? Will she want to be bothered with home-life and child-rearing, and will homes be broken up? I don't know; but I come back to what I said in the first place, that there must be equal responsibility if there is to be equal pay."

## Teacher and Author

"I'M afraid I can't get worked up over this. When a woman marries she should have a form of State dowry—a payment of say £200 to £250 a year—for her job is no forty-hour week matter but a full-time one. And as to women in industry, if they can do a job as well as a man, they should have the same wage. I believe in that." This is the opinion of Joan Cochran, M.A., a former teacher, and joint author with her husband of a book, *Meeting and Mating*, reviewed in *The Listener* in December, 1944.

"Single women," she says, "should be compensated for not being married. Only by receiving reasonable pay for their work in office, or shop or factory, can they save enough to have comfortable homes of their own. I am in favour of paying according to need, but need is hard to assess. The principle of paying according to ability and achievement is sound; to create a body of cheap labour is a bad thing.

"If women were paid equally with men it would be a great help to family life, because they would be able to save money before marriage and assist their husbands to make a really good start," said Mrs. Cochran. "Most women want home life and a family. Those who don't can look after themselves. They would be useless as mothers, anyway, and had better stay family-less."

## University Lecturer

"UNDER the present social and economic set-up I'm definitely not in favour of equal pay for equal work,"



"Why SHOULD I make something of myself? Isn't this the age of the common man?"