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use the wrong shade  
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## Incomes For Wives

### HUSBANDS' REPLY ON CONTENTIOUS TOPIC

*[IN "The Listener" last week three prominent New Zealand women expressed their views on a suggestion by Herbert Morrison that there should be statutory incomes for wives. Since then we have had a good deal of uninvited comment from the husbands' side. Unfortunately, most of this has been couched in terms rather too violent to permit its publication, but there seems to be agreement on one point—that statutory incomes for wives are out of the question, unless there are also statutory incomes for husbands.]*

Since the question roused such partisan feelings, I felt it would be dangerous for me to interview just anybody. I therefore approached four men of my acquaintance, who, though married, were, I knew, of a mild and beneficent disposition and capable of treating the question with some degree of detachment. Here is the result, and I had better warn you that some of it is not to be taken too seriously:

"INCOMES for wives?" asked one young husband whom I approached. "Speaking as a husband who has endured all the hardships and risks of married life for ten years come Michaelmas, I am seriously of the opinion that if there was a guaranteed income for husbands there would be no need to need to worry about a guaranteed income for wives. Something like the guaranteed price the farmers receive is what I mean, with the Government making up the difference between what a man gets and what he is worth."

MY next questioner was a husband of one year's standing. "At the present time," he said, "there are two kinds of husband, (a) The husband who hands over his pay envelope to his wife and gets back half-a-crown tobacco money. (Ultimately of course he devises some means of steaming open the flap and taking out his pocket-money first.) (b) The husband who does out to his wife each week only sufficient for housekeeping expenses and forces her to invent a good story every time she wants a new hat."

"Both these extremes are undesirable. But would Mr. Morrison's proposed bill solve the problem? I doubt it. There are, moreover, the difficulties of how the wife's salary is to be paid and how much is to be paid."

"If a certain proportion of the husband's income belonged by law to the wife," I asked, "even if the actual apportioning of the money remained the same, don't you think it would do away with the feeling of inferiority which Mrs. Stewart mentioned last week?"

"I doubt it," he replied. "Such a feeling would be due to some maladjustment which the husband and wife could settle only between themselves. The disposition of any salary must vary according to individual needs, and each household must work out its own salvation."

"Then you think it's only a matter of educating the husbands?"

"No, of educating the wives."

"I HAVE been married fourteen years," said another man whom I interviewed. "During that time I have given my wife a fixed sum each week, varying according to the salary I was getting. I myself have always paid the rent, the gas, the electricity bills, the large items, such as furniture. My wife, out of the amount I gave her, paid the household

expenses and bought clothes for herself and the children. She admittedly had no fixed allowance for her own personal use, but she seemed quite satisfied, and for fourteen years I never once asked her what she did with the money. The system worked perfectly—until yesterday."

"Yesterday?" I asked.

"Yes, yesterday. She read the article in last week's *Listener* and now she has views. She says now that housekeeping is the only job that doesn't get paid."

"And what do you propose to do about it?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Well, I'll leave it to Mrs. Stewart and the Government."

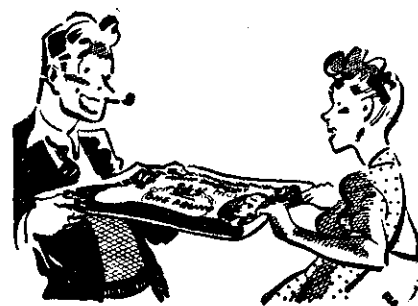
MY final contribution came from a husband who was even less hopeful about the whole subject, but who held forth at some length and with considerable feeling.

"Incomes for wives' is psychologically sound but as a matter of practical politics its social and economic implications seem to have been only vaguely realised by the three women whose views you published," he said. "With women, as with men, the basic and the eternal humiliation is to be dependent upon another individual for the means of livelihood and, to overcome that, equality with men in all spheres of life (Mrs. Knox Gilmer), more domestic help (Miss Kane), or more women in Parliament (Mrs. Stewart) will not of themselves avail us. Nothing short of a complete revolution in our national organisation and social outlook will meet the case."

"Consider Mrs. Knox Gilmer's views. She is in favour of married women getting a statutory income. But how? Where, if I may be so conventional, is the money coming from? If by law the husband is compelled to allot a portion of his salary to his wife for her exclusive use, it leaves the psychological problem completely unsolved. As before, it is the husband who is providing the money and if my knowledge of feminine psychology is sound, the wife's income would at once go back into the family war-chest and we would be back where we started."

#### The Real Problem

"The real problem, as I see it, is that under the present conditions, the average woman is never likely to have an income which she can truly call her own and which she can spend at her own sweet



will (any more than her husband is) for the adequate reason that few husbands get enough in salary or wages for more than the necessities and simple pleasures of modest family life.

"Take my own case. I am receiving a salary which is something in excess of the average wage-earner's. Each pay envelope I turn over intact to my wife. She tots up her week's bills, lays aside what will be necessary for incidental purchases and so on during the ensuing week, returns me the money for my fares and my tobacco, with an extra florin perhaps, against emergencies, and if there is enough money still unaccounted for she may be able to buy some wool for a new cardigan for the baby, or mend a pair of shoes. But if Mrs. Knox Gilmer can, by some financial legerdemain, turn the infinitesimal residue left after the average workman has 'paid his way' into a private income for that workman's wife—a modest dress allowance would more than satisfy most women—then she can do something which I can't but which I would give my left hand to do."

#### From a Different Angle

"Of course, the problem might be approached from a different angle," he continued. "It should be recognised that the wife and mother in the home is serving society as well as her husband."

"If the husband has to allot some of his salary to his wife, should that allotment, then, be subsidised by the State, the employer, or both? If it should, and it seems logical that it should, we are faced with an immeasurable extension of the Social Security principle. Would that conclusion be acceptable to Mrs. Knox Gilmer and to Miss Kane and to Mrs. Stewart?"

#### Why Stop at Wives

"But if you agree with the justice of what I have said, why stop at wives? Go back to the beginning of things and take the case of the husband, the worker. He is dependent, in most cases, on another individual or group of individuals, for all that he earns, just as the wife is dependent on him for everything. But is not the psychological situation identical? And should not business as well as marriage be a true partnership? If so, are we agreed that husbands (and all other men, too) should have a statutory income? And if we are, where does our agreement lead us? Surely to the conclusion that within the framework of society as we know it there is no hope of the problem ever being solved at all."

"Unless we are agreed that a true co-operative commonwealth is the fundamental pre-condition of freedom, discussion of the importance of economic independence for husband or wife must remain on the academic (or the sentimental) plane."

—M.B.