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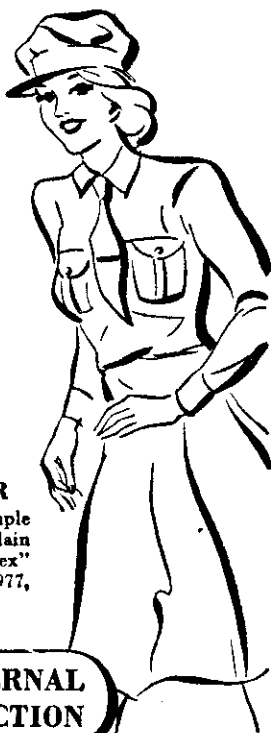
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A WOMAN WITH A JOB
—And A Man With Doubts

THREE weeks ago in Auckland I stood at a busy intersection watching the trams go by. I knew that, on twenty of these trams, women conductors were punching tickets and delivering change, but each tram I sighted seemed fully manned by a motorman at one end and an unmistakably male conductor at the other. In desperation I approached a stationary tram. "If you're looking for a woman conductor we've got one," said the motorman in answer to my question. I looked inside. Sure enough, one of the objects of my search was sitting at the back of the car, checking off ticket numbers in her notebook, while the regulation masculine version stood on the rear platform exchanging wisecracks with the motorman behind.

The Passengers Were Helpful

The conductor rang the bell, the tram began to move, the conductress rose and started to collect the fares. There was a diffidence in her actions due to her newness to the job, but the passengers were co-operative, and didn't stage disputes about half-crowns versus florins, or ask for change of a pound, or inquire exact directions for getting from the Zoological Park to the Football Ground. More and more passengers got on at each stop, the conductress conscientiously went her rounds, the conductor proper gossiped with a passenger on the platform. It was not till the tram pulled up at the terminus that the conductress had leisure to answer my questions.

"This is our first week out on trams," she confided. "We spent last week being trained at the depot. And this is the first job I've had since I was married. Yes, I've got four children, one 14, one 11, one seven, and one six, but they're all going to school now. And I've got a good woman staying in the house to look after them. You see, when we start doing this job properly we'll be on any shift from six in the morning to one o'clock at night, and so I couldn't rely on being home to get their meals. As it is I need have no worries about them."

"Yes, I like having a job," she went on. "I felt I wanted to do something and this seemed right up my alley. Of course it's fairly tiring work. I get tired even now, though we haven't really started properly—at present we're doing only four hours a day. But every one tells me we'll get used to it."

"And there's quite a lot to be learnt about the roads which the trams serve, because people are always asking you which stop they have to get off at if they want to get somewhere or other. Last night when I got home I took out a road map and tried to learn all the names of the streets. And it isn't as though you're always on one particular route—you get shifted round, so you have to know almost all the streets in Auckland."

When the Novelty Wears Off

"I suppose you couldn't very well say 'Sorry, madam, I'm a stranger here myself'?"

"No, I don't think so. Of course there's one comfort, you can always ask the motorman. And the other passengers

are always very helpful if you want to find out anything. But once we've ceased being a novelty, people will regard us just as conductors, and we'll be expected to know as much about everything as the ordinary conductor does."

At that moment the conductor-in-chief rang the bell and the tram started its journey back to town. Reminded of her duty, the conductress rose. Soon afterwards the place beside me was taken by the conductor-in-chief. He at any rate was having an easy time during this probationary week.

He Gloomily Shook His Head

"What do you think of this idea of women conductors?" I asked.

"I suppose it's all right," He shook his head dolefully. He obviously had doubts.

"Well, your recruit seems to be a credit to you," I watched her as she practiced service with a smile on the passengers further down the compartment. She seemed to be gaining confidence with every trip.

"Oh, she's all right. But I don't know if it will work out."

He sighed deeply. I waited. At last he went on.

"Will they stand up to it? That's what I ask myself. It's the terrific mental strain."

Another pause while I tried to think in terms of mental strain.

"Do you realise," said the conductor impressively, "that every man in the service over the age of forty has to go through a rigorous medical examination every year to make quite sure he's fit enough to stand the strain? Let me tell you that being a conductor or a motorman demands every ounce of strength you've got. Look at me now. Went on eight o'clock Friday morning, worked through with just a brief spell or two till 1.30 Saturday morning. Didn't get home till 2.30, and had to be on the job again at six. Two and a-half hours sleep. Now, how's any woman going to stand up to that?"

I hastened to assure him that with the twenty women conductors now on the job, and the forty who were to begin training next week, it was possible that conductors would work reasonable hours. But regardless of my explanation he swept ahead.

"And rush hours," he began. "How's any woman going to cope with that? They haven't tried women out at rush times yet."

I began to say something about passenger co-operation.

"And what about dealing with drunks?" he asked in a voice heavy with foreboding.

"There'll always be the motorman," I suggested.

"Perhaps it'll be a motorwoman before long," he remarked gloomily, "and then where will the tramway service be?"

I got off at the next stop. As the car moved past me I could still see the conductor sitting wrapped in gloom on the back seat. Near the front of the car the conductress was briskly punching tickets.

—M.B.