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ECONOMIC
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Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.6/SR.218
19 June 1956

ENGLISH
Original: ENGLISH and
FRENCH

COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Tenth Session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE TWO HUNDRED AND EIGHTEENTH MEETING

held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 21 March 1956, at 10.30 a.m.

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Present:

Chairman: Mrs. RÖSSEL (Sweden)

Members:

Mrs. CORREA MORALES de APARICIO	Argentina
Miss GIBSON	Australia
Mrs. CISELET	Belgium
Mrs. NOVIKOVA	Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic
Mrs. CHU	China
Miss MAÑAS	Cuba
Miss BERNARDINO	Dominican Republic
Mrs. LEFAUCHEUX	France
Miss ROESAD	Indonesia
Mrs. BEN-ZVI	Israel
Begum ANWAR AHMED	Pakistan
Mrs. DEMBINSKA	Poland
Mr. GIRON	Sweden
Mrs. SPIRIDONOVA	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
Dame Lucile SAYERS	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
Mrs. HAHN	United States of America
Mrs. BENITEZ de SOCORRO	Venezuela
Mrs. MITROVIĆ	Yugoslavia

Observers for Governments of States Members of the United Nations:

Mr. SARANA GUERREIRO	Brazil
Mr. DASKALOV	Bulgaria
Mr. STRNAD	Czechoslovakia
Miss CORCOS	Italy
Miss LUNSINGH-MEIJER	Netherlands

Representatives of specialized agencies:

International Labour Organisation	Mrs. FIGUEROA
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization	Miss SALAS
World Health Organization	Miss HOWELL

Representative of an inter-governmental organization:

Inter-American Commission of Women	Miss LUTZ
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Representatives of non-governmental organizations:Category A

International Confederation of Free Trade Unions	Mrs. EKENDAHL
International Federation of Christian Trade Unions	Miss NAGELS Mrs. SCHMIDT
World Federation of Trade Unions	Mr. DRINKWATER Mrs. NOCE
World Federation of United Nations Associations	Mrs. KRETSCHMER

Category B

Catholic International Union for Social Service	Miss BOSMANS Miss HERTOEGHE
International Alliance of Women	Miss CAMPOAMOR Mrs. CHOISY-NECKER Miss GINSBERG
International Council of Women	Mrs. CARTER
International Federation "Amies de la Jeune Fille"	Mrs. van WERVEKE
International Federation of Business and Professional Women	Miss TOMLINSON
International Federation of University Women	Mrs. FIECHTER Miss ROBB
International Federation of Women Lawyers	Lady CHATTERJEE Miss MANFREDINI
International League for the Rights of Man	Mrs. WOLLE-EGENOLF
Liaison Committee of Women's International Organizations	Mrs. de CAZOTTE Miss van EEGHEN
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom	Mrs. BAER

Representatives of non-governmental organizations (continued)

Category B (continued)

World Federation of Catholic Young Women and Girls	Miss FARQUET Miss HERREN
World's Women's Christian Temperance Union	Mrs. CHAIX-CONSTANTIN
World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations	Miss de ROMER Miss ARNOULD
World Young Women's Christian Association	Miss ARNOLD
Young Christian Workers	Miss PEZZULLO

Register

Open Door International	Mrs. BAER
St. Joan's International Social and Political Alliance	Miss CHALLONER Mrs. KINSELLA Mrs. LEROY-BOY
World Federation of Democratic Youth	Mrs. MOLKOVA

Secretariat:

Mrs. Tenison-Woods	Representative of the Secretary-General
Mrs. Grinberg-Vinaver	Secretary to the Commission

1. TRIBUTE TO THE MEMORY OF THE LATE Mrs. IRENE JOLIOT-CURIE

Mrs. DEMBINSKA (Poland) said that on the occasion of the State funeral to be accorded that day to the late Mrs. Irène Joliot-Curie in Paris, she wished to pay her respects to the memory of that eminent woman and outstanding scientist, who, the daughter of Marie Curie-Sklodowska, had passed away before her time as the price of the scientific work to which she had devoted her life. It was the bounden duty of the Commission on the Status of Women to pay a well-merited tribute to one who had been an ornament to science.

Mrs. LEFAUCHEUX (France) thanked Mrs. Dembinska for her condolences on the passing of Mrs. Irène Joliot-Curie. Mrs. Dembinska's kind words would touch the heart of Frenchwomen and other women throughout the world, who regarded Mrs. Joliot-Curie as a great example of devotion to duty and human worth.

2. EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK (item 5 of the agenda) (E/CN.6/285 and Corr.1, E/CN.6/276 and Corr.1) (resumed from the previous meeting)

The CHAIRMAN invited the Commission to continue its consideration of item 5 of the agenda: equal pay for equal work.

Dame Lucile SAYERS (United Kingdom) congratulated the representative of the International Labour Organisation on her able introduction at the previous meeting of the report on equal remuneration for men and women for work of equal value (E/CN.6/285 and Corr.1).

The United Kingdom had now introduced equal pay for men and women in non-industrial sectors of government service. Women's pay scales were being increased by annual instalments to bring them up to the level of those for men. That example had been followed in certain other fields of public employment, but the principle was not generally recognized in private employment, which was regulated by a system of collective bargaining between employees and employers in which it would not be appropriate for the Government to intervene. The United Kingdom Government was therefore not in a position to ratify International Labour Convention No. 100. Moreover, the wider implications of the ratification of that Convention needed careful consideration, having regard to the system of industrial relations obtaining in the United Kingdom.

Referring to specific points in the documents before the Commission she said that the statement in paragraph 77 of the Secretary-General's report (E/CN.6/276)

that ratification of the Convention would "not impose any legal obligation" was inaccurate and misleading, for in signing the instrument governments surely assumed an obligation to promote and ensure the application of the principle of equal pay for equal work. With reference to paragraph 142, where it was stated that the London County Council had conceded the principle of equal pay in the administrative and clerical grades in 1952, she said that in fact identical scales had applied for men and women in the administrative and technical grades for many years. The clerical grades alone were affected by the innovation. With reference to paragraph 144, she pointed out that equal pay in the National Health Service did not cover domestic and ancillary staff. In the nationalized electrical industries (paragraph 145), schemes of equal pay would reach their final stage in January 1960.

The position of women in non-self-governing and trust territories had been kept under careful observation, and the principle of equal pay borne in mind in the light of local conditions and possibilities.

Mrs. MITROVIĆ (Yugoslavia) said that a perusal of the report of the International Labour Office on equal remuneration for men and women for work of **equal** value and of the Secretary-General's report on methods used in campaigns for equal pay for equal work, based on information received from non-governmental organizations, showed that progress had been made in that direction since the ninth session. It appeared from those reports that International Labour Convention No. 100 had recently been ratified by Bulgaria and that several other countries were proposing to accede to it; and at the previous meeting the Commission had learned that the Byelorussian and Soviet Union Governments were also about to ratify it. It was also noteworthy that the International Labour Organisation and its technical committees, in particular its Textiles Committee, were doing their utmost and suggesting ways of applying the provisions of the Convention. Another important circumstance was that a number of States, including the United States of America, had introduced legislation giving practical effect to the principle of equal remuneration.

Nevertheless, it was clear from the Secretary-General's report that, even today, a great many countries, far from implementing the principle of **equal** remuneration, were invoking every kind of pretext to avoid paying women

the same wages as men for identical work. Yet the principle was of the utmost importance if women were to enjoy an equal social status, and members of the Commission had all along unanimously agreed that it was just as important for women as the principle of political rights.

The Commission could already be said to have considerable achievements to its credit in the matter of equality of rights. It had, for instance, prepared the Convention on Political Rights of Women, a draft of a convention on the nationality of married women, and other texts. The problem of equal remuneration, however, also called for careful consideration by the Commission which was in duty bound to ensure that International Labour Convention No. 100 was universally ratified.

Obviously the application of the principle of equal remuneration entailed measures of vast scope for any country. In Yugoslavia, the principle was applied very widely - an indication that all such problems could be solved, even in countries where industry was not yet highly developed.

In Yugoslavia the number of women in employment was constantly on the increase. Women constituted 25 per cent of the entire wage-earning population. The proportion of gainfully-employed women varied according to the sector: it was 21 per cent in industry, but 50 per cent in administration, public health services etc. In industry, however, the number of skilled women workers was still rather low as compared with that of men, except in textiles, the main reason being that industrial development had been concentrated mainly on heavy industry - the key industries - and on building, where the number of openings for women was limited. The situation was changing, however, and once the phase of industrialization was over, there would be more jobs for women in skilled occupations, both in industry and in other sectors of the economy. There was no doubt that as the younger generation with eight years' compulsory schooling began to take its place in economic life, that tendency would become more marked, since at the moment girls accounted for up to 60 per cent of the mixed classes. Incidentally, in many sectors of industry, the eight-year leaving certificate was required as a qualification for employment, and it had been made compulsory for young male and female workers entering industry at 15 or 16 years of age to take a course in an industrial or trade school. Vocational training would also

be required in all branches of industry. Thus in Yugoslavia, once women had acquired the same technical qualifications as men, there would be no further obstacles to the universal application of the principle of equal remuneration.

State intervention in that field was considerable, and took the form not only of legislation but of the creation of commissions to study specific problems. As a result, all women, both manual workers and salaried employees, whatever their occupation, enjoyed the benefits of labour legislation - social security, free health services, the right to retire at fifty (as compared with fifty-five for men), pensions in full after thirty years of service, and pro rata according to length of service, fourteen days' paid holiday a year after eleven months' service and so on. In that connexion, she would point out that in evaluating the standard of living of a country, it was necessary to allow for the many benefits enjoyed by the workers. If in Yugoslavia, for example, the standard of living appeared to be lower than in the highly developed countries, it must be remembered that the system of workers' security and the benefits they received under the social security system gave them many advantages which were particularly valuable because guaranteed by the State.

Describing the various measures, especially legislative measures, introduced to protect mothers and to ensure equality of rights for working women, she mentioned maternity leave of ninety days, three weeks of which had to be taken before confinement; regulations governing the employment of pregnant women; special facilities by which nursing mothers were allowed to break off their work if the child was in the immediate neighbourhood of the undertaking; the rule that women could not be dismissed while pregnant; leave for the mother when the child was sick, and so on and so forth. Such measures were part of the general social security system, and any woman with not less than six months' uninterrupted service in the same undertaking could benefit from them. Thus, in a practical fashion, the measures relating to equal remuneration were supplemented by others designed to protect women and working mothers. Clearly the strict application of such protective measures sometimes ran into difficulties; but the managements of undertakings, labour inspectorates, trade unions and women's associations kept a constant watch on infringements of the regulations, which in any event were becoming fewer and fewer. The general experience was that undertakings were sometimes reluctant to employ women, and tended to dismiss them

more readily because the benefits to which they were entitled in the social and public health fields were hard on the employer's budget. But, through social security, the community bore the main burden of protecting women, especially working mothers, thanks to insignificant contributions levied on all its members. There was in particular one provision under which, in case of illness, women - who had been found to be absent more often but for shorter periods than men - did not receive the full allowance payable by the enterprise in lieu of salary, as was the case with men, but only half the allowance, which was paid out of social security. That was a kind of compensation to the undertaking for the loss caused by the more frequent absence of women. While it was true that the burden on the community entailed by the measures for protecting working women and for ensuring equality of rights was rather onerous, it was equally true that in the long run such a policy was less costly for the State and gave better results. That was why the Yugoslav delegation upheld that policy, and was at all times ready to encourage any step and to support any constructive proposal for the improvement of the status of working women throughout the world.

Mrs. CISELET (Belgium) said that Belgium was one of the ten countries which had signed and ratified International Labour Convention No. 100 on equal remuneration for men and women for work of equal value. She was able to state that in her country remuneration was equal in all public posts - meaning in all departments of the Government and in local Government, and especially in the huge field of education, in which so many women found employment. It was equal even in the higher public offices, such as those concerned with the administration of justice.

On the other hand, she could not say that the principle of equality of remuneration was admitted in the private sector. Belgium was, of course, a country of free enterprise, and interference by the Government, or even by the legislature, in the private sector of its economy was avoided as much as possible. The Government could not, therefore, give orders; but it could bring friendly pressure to bear on employers and workers when wages were fixed through collective agreements. It should be remembered that International Labour Convention No. 100 did not impose on signatory States stricter legal duties than that, at least in respect of the private sector.

Moreover, the Belgian trade unions had advocated the principle of equal remuneration. It was plainly being put slowly but surely into practice and the differential between men's and women's wages was dwindling. The general introduction of equal remuneration would obviously place new and growing burdens on undertakings which could clearly not cut men's wages but would have to raise women's.

For that reason, heads of undertakings in Belgium would desire the measures now being debated by the Commission to be adopted everywhere, particularly in countries with which Belgium had to compete economically, sometimes on difficult terms.

Miss GIBSON (Australia) was pleased to learn that the principle of equal pay for equal work was being implemented, in whole or in part, in a number of countries. She gave a brief description of the position in her country for the benefit of members of the Commission who had not attended the ninth session, when the Australian representative had outlined the position as it had then stood.

The position had not materially altered since. Equal pay was not yet a fact, though the Commonwealth Government did not oppose the principle. As she had mentioned at earlier meetings, the distribution of power between the Australian Commonwealth and the constituent States created certain difficulties. Although the Commonwealth had power to ratify International Labour Convention No. 100, its implementation was a matter for the State authorities, whether alone or in conjunction with the Commonwealth authorities. It was accordingly the practice of the Commonwealth Government, before ratifying a Convention, to ascertain whether it would be, or was already being, implemented in all the constituent States.

The powers of the Commonwealth Parliament to legislate directly on wages were restricted to its own employees and to those of the Australian Territories. In practice, however, the great bulk of decisions devolved on the Arbitral Tribunal. The Conciliation and Arbitration Tribunal dealt with all matters concerning the prevention and settlement of industrial disputes extending beyond the limits of any one State.

Wages other than those of Commonwealth civil servants could be determined directly by the parliaments of the constituent States, but tribunals had been established under State laws to deal with them.

The Australian Commonwealth Government had hitherto declined to introduce the principle of equal pay for equal work, as it considered that it was for the Conciliation and Arbitration Tribunal to take the initiative in the matter. The question of women's wages had come up for discussion in 1953, when a number of employers' organizations had asked that they be reduced. It had been decided to maintain women's wages at 75 per cent of those paid to men for work of equal value. There were, however, certain cases in which women were paid the same rates as men.

It had emerged from the discussions held in connexion with the ratification of International Labour Convention No. 100 that none of the constituent Australian States was prepared to change its views. None of the tribunals had accepted the principle of equal pay for equal work, although in certain isolated cases identical rates of pay had been fixed.

Current pay scales for women workers ranged between 65 per cent and 90 per cent of the wages paid to men, although the "margin for skill" which was added to most adult basic wages had also to be taken into account. In some cases, as in the Commonwealth Public Services, the "margin for skill" rate was equal for men and women, in others it differed widely.

The attempt to implement the principle of equal pay in Australia had run up against a two-fold difficulty. Politically, the principle did not commend itself to the majority; and from the industrial point of view the trades unions were not very active in promoting it. At its last congress, held in September 1955, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) had passed a resolution requesting:

"the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia to consult with the respective State Governments with a view to the implementation of the ACTU policy of equal pay for the sexes; where State Trades and Labour Councils have not already established equal pay committees, that they be requested to do so, and that the facilities of the ACTU and the State Trades and Labour Councils be provided to co-ordinate the work of such committees and to assist them to carry out a vigorous campaign to popularise the equal pay objective; and that ACTU call a national conference of trade unions having women members, on the question of equal pay, in March 1956."

ACTU had not, however, yet approached the Commonwealth Government with the request contained in the first paragraph of that resolution and the trade union claims being currently heard on the question of basic wages included no reference to equal pay for men and women, although the conference to be held in March might perhaps encourage them to take up the subject again.

It was essential, through the women's organizations and the trade union movements, to stimulate public opinion in favour of the principle of equal pay, as it was not likely to be put into effect in Australia until it had majority support. However, it was encouraging to find that it had been accepted in the United Kingdom, and to read in the Secretary-General's report that one government's action could induce others to follow suit. The summary, in the Secretary-General's report, of methods used in campaigns for government action should prove most helpful. She thanked the Secretary-General and the International Labour Office for the excellent information contained in their documents and announced that, in reply to the request from the International Labour Office, her Government would be submitting a report on equal remuneration very shortly.

Mrs. BENITEZ de SOCORRO (Venezuela) expressed her Government's interest in the documents on equal pay for equal work prepared for the Commission. Her country had been the first to sign International Labour Convention No.100, and took very seriously the resulting obligations both towards the other signatories, and towards the forces of labour that were contributing so powerfully to the achievement of higher standards of living in Venezuela.

Her Government had done all in its power to discharge its obligations in respect of the principle of equal pay. The flourishing conditions prevailing in Venezuela made it possible for men and women, whether nationals or foreigners, to find highly paid work, and sex was never a handicap. Collective agreements concluded between employers and workers in the petroleum, metallurgical, building, water supply and other industries could stand before the world as models of justice and equity to both parties.

The vital significance of a convention lay not in its ratification, but in the sum of the measures taken to give it practical effect. Her country, whose legislation on the subject was already among the most progressive, was now preparing even more far-reaching reforms to promote the social security, moral

health and well-being of women. A women worker's training and recreation centre had been set up to give courses in subjects required for professional qualification, languages and civics, and to provide information on technical and industrial questions, libraries etc.; a holiday camp had been established for men and women workers and their children at which they could enjoy all the advantages of a fine beach at a cost that was well within their reach. Every use was being made of the cinema, broadcasting and television to raise the cultural levels of workers of both sexes.

She referred to the remarks made at the previous meeting by the representative of the International Alliance of Women on the subject of the resolution adopted by the International Labour Office first Regional European Conference, concerning the retirement age of women. It was regrettable that the International Labour Organization, which had always stood for the rights of all workers, should have adopted a provision which was very unfavourable to older women, and amounted to discrimination against them. She shared the views of the representatives of the International Alliance of Women on the subject, and considered that the Commission should study this question and express an opinion on it.

Part-time work was not discussed in sufficient detail in the International Labour Office Report (E/CN.6/285 and Corr.1). The organization of part-time work would be harmful to women if it were imposed by employers. In her own country, the great demand for labour made it possible for workers to fix their own time-tables in accordance with their household commitments.

Mrs. CORREA MORALES de APARTICIO (Argentina) said that equality of remuneration prevailed in her country in national administration and in education. The principle was not observed by private employers, but the Government was working on plans which it hoped would have early and far-reaching effects, even if in some respects it had to proceed step by step.

Earlier legislation had left the door open for many agreements between employers and employees under which differentials between men's and women's pay had varied between 0.01 per cent and 21 per cent, but all such agreements would have to be modified to make them conform to a new decree, promulgated on 17 February 1956, according to which all women workers who until that date had been receiving up to 90 per cent of the pay of a man doing identical work would

have to be paid the same rate as the man, and those who had been receiving less favourable terms would have their rates increased by one half the difference between their old salaries and those paid to men. The decree also established an insurance fund for family maintenance, to which employers were obliged to contribute. The preparation of the decree had been largely the work of the National Directorate of Women, set up recently within the Ministry of Labour.

She hoped to be able to give the Commission news of Argentina's ratification of International Labour Convention No.100 before the session ended. She would transmit all further information on the measures taken in Argentina to the representative of the International Labour Organisation.

The new measures introduced by her Government had needed no publicity campaign to prepare public opinion, which, although it had been silent for many years, had remained conscious of the position; some groups, however, feared that they might create unemployment among women.

Two points had already emerged: first, the Maternity Law, which had come into force 25 years ago, was in urgent need of reform. The Government had tackled the question with the collaboration of the National Directorate of Women, and hoped to introduce new legislation that would stand comparison with the best in force in other countries. Second, the new measures meant that men and women would now be subject to the same standards of efficiency, so that women would have to take full advantage of the facilities provided by the national vocational training schools and the workers' university if they wished to maintain their equality with men.

The Government was in favour of women workers' representatives taking part in negotiations with employers, and it was hoped that the conditions established by the new legislation would encourage them to take a more active part in trade union life.

The desirability of reforming legislation which imposed restrictions on women in their own interests (in case of dangerous occupations and the like) was debatable, and the question required further study. However, women in Argentina had no cause to fear unemployment, since they generally tended to take work appropriate to their biological functions and physical capacity, and once they had been given equality before the law that tendency would probably increase.

Mrs. CHU (China) had read the two reports, and heard the non-governmental organizations' statements, on equal pay for equal work, with great interest. The principle was recognized in her country's constitution, which included special provisions relating to women workers. Her country's labour legislation also emphasized the point. In practice, conditions of equal pay obtained in the most important industries, the principle having long been applied in the sugar, tea, pineapple, textile and tobacco industries, in which women predominated. The same could be said of the civil service and the teaching profession. Progress had been made during the past year in Chinese industrial life, and women now had better opportunities of finding work, although employers still tended to prefer men, especially in the private sector. There were also very few women in senior positions in the government service and in trade and the professions. She therefore agreed with the view expressed by other delegations that recognition of the principle of equal pay was not enough. It was necessary to strive everywhere to secure more educational and vocational training opportunities for women, and the Secretary-General's report (E/CN.6/276 and Corr.1) on methods used in campaigns to secure government action would be particularly useful in China.

The women's organizations in her country had exerted influence on the Government during the past year to ratify International Labour Convention No.100, as speedily as possible, and she was happy to say that the executive branch of the Government was already undertaking the preparatory work for ratification, and it was expected to be submitted to the Legislative Yuan for consideration and approval before long.

The CHAIRMAN expressed the Commission's satisfaction at the announcements made by the delegations of Argentina and China concerning the ratification of International Labour Convention No.100 by their respective Governments.

Begum ANWAR AHMED (Pakistan) expressed appreciation of the clear way in which the representative of the International Labour Organisation had introduced the report on equal remuneration for men and women for work of equal value (E/CN.6/285 and Corr.1) at the previous meeting. She recalled that at the ninth session a resolution on the subject had been introduced by the French representative, requesting Member and non-Member Governments alike to enact legislation on the principle of equal pay for equal work. The Pakistani delegation had then pointed out that in many countries such legislation could not be effectively enforced, as

there was no machinery for fixing wages or for job evaluation, and had submitted an amendment to the French resolution to take account of that state of affairs. Some members had felt that her suggestion would impair the impact of the French proposal, and others had regarded it as tantamount to interference by governments in questions that concerned employers and employees alone. In order to expedite the Commission's work she had withdrawn her amendment, expressing the hope that it might provide a basis for discussion at the present session.

The representative of the International Labour Organisation had made it quite clear at the previous meeting that the principle of equal pay for equal work could not be considered in abstracto, but only in close connexion with the means of applying it. At the last session, the representative of Sweden had said that countries with industrial traditions of long standing found it more difficult to implement the principle. It was therefore essential that countries in the initial stages of development should take immediate steps to ensure equality of remuneration for equal work before the tradition of inequality had become too deep-rooted. The Pakistani delegation proposed either to introduce a separate draft resolution on the point, or to have it embodied in some other proposal relating to item 5 of the agenda.

With regard to conditions in Pakistan, equality of pay was practised. Conditions of employment, however, were governed largely by demand, and no reliable statistics were available, so that it was probable that discrimination against women existed in certain fields of employment. Her delegation was therefore anxious that practical steps should be taken to eradicate the evil. As the Byelorussian representative had stated at the previous meeting, equality of remuneration would give woman that dignity in economic life which the vote gave her in political life.

The CHAIRMAN, speaking as representative of Sweden, pointed out that what she had actually said at the ninth session was that in countries with a high standard of industrialization there generally existed a long-established machinery for fixing wages by negotiation between the parties on the labour market. In Sweden those parties had agreed to take the principle of equal pay as a basis for their collective bargaining. Under such circumstances it was not necessary to enforce legislation relating to equal pay, except where the State was the employer. For the Swedish civil service, however, the principle of equal pay was already embodied in the constitution.

Begum ANWAR AHMED (Pakistan) said that, although she had not expressed herself precisely, in substance that was what she had intended to ascribe to the Swedish representative.

Miss LUTZ (Inter-American Commission of Women), speaking at the invitation of the CHAIRMAN, said that the Inter-American Commission was particularly interested in securing equal conditions of work for women. She had listened with great attention to the statement of the representative of the International Labour Organisation at the previous meeting, and felt that that agency deserved full praise for all the efforts it had made in that field. She regarded it, however, as her duty to make a few remarks about International Labour Convention No.100. As an old member of the women's movement, she had always been accustomed to use the words "equal pay for equal work", and she was somewhat concerned about the use in the Convention of the words "equal pay for work of equal value", because they introduced the idea of evaluation, which was subjective and thus liable to lead to biased interpretations. She had therefore been extremely interested to hear the representative of the International Labour Organisation say that efforts were now being made to eliminate subjective criteria in job assessment and to replace them by objective ones. She had also been gratified to note that most representatives had omitted any reference to evaluation in their statements, and had always used the expression "equal pay for equal work".

She had also listened with great interest to the explanations given by the United States representative, also at the previous meeting, that in her country rates were fixed according to the job, sex playing no part in the process. The same practice prevailed throughout most of Latin America; in countries like Brazil, where entry into the civil service was carefully regulated by a competitive system, women had equal opportunities with men and were remunerated on the same scales.

She agreed with the French and Belgian representatives that it was undesirable to accept a lower retiring age for women than for men, because such a favour was likely to have unwelcome repercussions in the exclusion of women from the higher posts. She hoped that it would be possible to take her remarks into account, as her Commission intended to pursue its campaign for the ratification of International Labour Convention No.100 in the Americas. Although

there was no discrimination against women in the civil services of most Latin-American countries, something had still to be done in eradicating discrimination from agriculture, because it was difficult to frame suitable legislation in that field or to enforce it. The general trend towards equality in the Americas was, however, very encouraging, women being privileged only in respect of maternity benefits. Apart from that sole instance of discrimination in favour of women, there was good ground to hope that the ideal of equal pay for equal work would fairly soon become universal reality.

The CHAIRMAN thanked the representative of the Inter-American Commission of Women for her interesting statement.

Mrs. LEFAUCHEUX (France) did not wish to repeat what she had already said on the subject of equal remuneration; but she would point out how disquieting it was for workers in countries where the rates paid to men and women were equal to see that in other countries they were still unequal. Leaving aside the liberalization of trade, it could be said that the flow of trade would be obstructed so long as no steps were taken to even out the position throughout the world. Clearly certain countries ought not to be subjected to an indeterminate economic handicap because they had put into practice a principle which had been unanimously accepted.

Advances had undoubtedly been made in the application of the principle, and the Commission had heard very encouraging statements in that connexion from the representatives of the United Kingdom and the United States of America. She was also gratified to learn that International Labour Convention No. 100 had been ratified, or was about to be ratified, by more governments. Nevertheless, she agreed with the Byelorussian representative that the Convention was not wholly satisfactory because, as the Belgian representative had pointed out, it was not legally binding on signatory States.

Answering previous speakers, she said that in her opinion the legislature even of a country of free enterprise could oblige private employers to respect the principle of equality of remuneration.

She would like to see the Commission express its view clearly on another important matter: the age of retirement. She cited the speech she had made at the Commission's meeting on 23 March 1955, at the ninth session, when it had been debating the subject, and the reply given to her then by the representative of

the International Labour Organisation. The Commission had stated in its report to the Economic and Social Council on its ninth session⁽¹⁾ that: "The consensus of opinion was that the compulsory retirement age should be the same for men and women workers, and that the International Labour Organisation should pay particular attention to this question". She asked whether that explicit opinion given by the Commission had been considered, and whether it had affected any subsequent discussions at the ninth session. She had not found any precise information in the documents which she had consulted in preparation for item 5 of the agenda, and she therefore thought that the Commission ought to restate its position.

The problem was not a secondary one, but one of the utmost importance for women's professional careers. Generally speaking, women embarked upon their chosen career less well qualified professionally than men; and their professional activities were more often broken off than men's. That raised the problem of absenteeism among women, mentioned by the Yugoslav representative. If, in addition to those handicaps, women were obliged to retire earlier than men, they could never hope to acquire the same professional standing, since it was as a rule in the last few years of a career that success came to crown a whole lifetime of effort. Women would, of course, have been able to earn a livelihood, and often to maintain their families by their work, but female employment should not be regarded exclusively from the utilitarian point of view. If women were to take their proper place in the economic, social and political life of their countries, they must have an opportunity of making their mark in their professions.

Having thus demonstrated the importance of the retiring age, she considered that the Commission should study the matter closely. Some considered that the possibility of earlier retirement was an advantage to women. Even if that were the case, it would be as well to remember that all privileges had to be paid for, sometimes very dearly. When the labour market was such that staff had to be laid off it was only natural that those who were entitled to retire should be the first to go, in which case women would be laid off, however much they might wish to remain at work. Hence she was against the system of the earlier retirement age, even where it was put forward as an advantage which depended entirely on the free choice of the woman worker.

(1) See E/2727, para.109.

The CHAIRMAN proposed that the representative of the International Labour Organisation should reply to the French representative on that point when the Commission came to discuss economic opportunities for women (item 7 of the agenda).

Mrs. LEFAUCHEUX (France) agreed.

Mrs. NOCE (World Federation of Trade Unions), speaking at the invitation of the CHAIRMAN, said that the principle of equal pay for equal work was in the interest of all countries, since its application would raise the purchasing power of millions of families, and the consequent increase in consumption would be conducive to economic expansion. Moreover, that principle was based on justice, and was an essential prerequisite for the achievement of women's demands in other spheres of social and political life. Women had to work for the same reasons as men, their work was of equal productive value, and modern economic systems could not function without them.

Though some progress had recently been made in applying the principle of equal pay for equal work, much remained to be done, since the vast majority of women workers were paid at rates at least 10 to 50 per cent below those prevailing for men, and since only ten countries had so far ratified International Labour Convention No.100. In an ever increasing number of countries, however, both men and women workers and their trade unions were taking steps to put an end to that anomalous state of affairs, and new wage agreements were coming to include clauses which reduced or eliminated differential rates as between men and women. At the same time, an endeavour was being made to secure recognition of the principle of equal pay for equal work through legislation.

The World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) was taking an active part in that campaign, and was organizing a world conference of women workers. The two main questions on the agenda of that conference, in which all trade unions were being invited to participate, would be equal pay for equal work, and the increased participation of women in the activities and leadership of trades unions. The two questions were clearly closely related, since increased participation of women in trade union activities was bound to give added impetus to the unions' campaign for the recognition of the principle of equal pay for equal work. The news that the conference was to be convened had been very well received, and preparatory work was now in progress in more than 35 countries. The preparations

were closely connected with the campaign for equal remuneration, and took into account the special demands voiced by women workers in all the countries concerned. But far from being the culminating point in the struggle, the conference would be a further means of promoting the campaign for the rights of working women.

A number of erroneous ideas had to be dispelled in the struggle for equal remuneration. As a representative of WFTU had already stated before the Commission, the problem did not affect women alone, because differential rates of pay for women often meant that the wage rates for men remained at an unduly low level. Such was the situation in Italy where the low wages of male textile workers were certainly due to the fact that women accounted for 80 per cent of all workers in the industry, whereas the proportion was considerably lower in the United States of America, France and the United Kingdom.

Some countries, although admitting the principle of equal pay for equal work, limited its application by paying for work done exclusively or in large part by women at only 80 per cent of the man's rate. WFTU strongly objected to that practice, because the value of labour did not depend on whether it was man's or woman's, and because in countless cases the value of women's work was infinitely greater than that of men's work. Moreover, in many industries women were now doing work which had until recently been the exclusive province of men. In such cases, the payment of differential rates simply reflected the employer's greed, and his desire to benefit from the competition between male and female labour. Such a practice could only lead to further exploitation of women workers.

Employers often tried to justify differential rates on the ground that female labour was not in every respect the equal of male labour. The slightest change in raw materials or machinery was seized upon as justification for paying lower wages to women. It was therefore essential to be perfectly clear about the meaning of "equal pay for work of equal value", and WFTU asked that equality of pay should be based not only on equal work and work of equal value, but also - and chiefly - on equality of qualifications and category. It was necessary to secure recognition for that principle, which was eminently just, irrespective of differences in the kind of work done.

The argument that women's "output" was inferior to that of men was not valid. The quality of women's work was often superior to that of men's, and as far as quantity was concerned it was sufficient to fix an equal minimum

wage for both sexes, when the problem of quantity would disappear. Men and women would then be paid according to the quantity of their output but on an equal footing.

Finally, it had often been suggested that the campaign for equal remuneration was hampered by women's excessive absenteeism, and that women's comparative lack of interest in trade unionism made it difficult to carry on the struggle. WFTU agreed that it was essential to arouse the interest of women in the unions, which was why it had included the question in the agenda of the coming world conference. But it was untrue to say that women were not interested in the principle of equal pay for equal work. The difficulty was that, in countries suffering from chronic unemployment, where standards of living were low, women were forced to accept almost any kind of work in order to support their families. It was hoped that the world conference would shed considerable light on that problem.

WFTU entirely agreed with the representative of the International Labour Organisation that legislative measures fixing an equal minimum wage for all workers would be extremely helpful in the campaign for equal remuneration. There were many ways of attacking the problem, but the central struggle was that carried on by the trade unions. It was essential that all workers should unite if their claims were to bear fruit. Once positive results had been achieved, such as agreements in certain sectors of industry, it would be possible to extend the process through legislative action.

WFTU did not agree with those who minimized the importance of legislation. On the contrary, it was highly desirable that the principle of equal pay for equal work should be recognized in the laws and constitutions of all countries. The Commission would be doing a useful service in the common cause if it prepared a draft standard law on equal remuneration, which might serve as a model for countries, particularly those receiving technical assistance.

In a recent interview with the Director-General of the International Labour Office, WFTU had suggested that trade unions throughout the world should organize a campaign for the ratification of International Labour Convention No.100. The resolution recommending the general application of that Convention, which had been adopted in the Textiles Committee of the International Labour Organization, was about to be transmitted to all States Members of that agency.

A first result of that resolution in Italy, her own country, was that the Chamber of Deputies would now discuss the ratification of the Convention, and all trade union members of the Italian Parliament would seek a debate on the draft bill on equal pay for equal work which she had herself introduced. WFTU felt that it would be appropriate for the Commission at the present time to address a request to all governments to ratify the Convention, as the representative of the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions had already suggested. In the new phase which was opening in the struggle, it might also be desirable for the Commission to carry out a study, jointly with the International Labour Office, on existing differential rates of pay for equal work and on the differentiation between the jobs offered to men and women, which led to discriminatory practices. Furthermore, since the International Labour Conference would, at its forthcoming session, be examining a series of reports on the ratification of the Convention No.100, the Commission might make a joint study with the International Labour Organization of the extent to which the Convention was actually being applied in the world.

Finally, the Commission might also examine the possibility of publishing a pamphlet on equal remuneration, on the same lines as that published on political rights. It had already played a large part in securing the general recognition of that important principle, and it was to be hoped that it would pursue its efforts in that direction. The road would be finally opened to success only if all discriminatory practices were brought before the public eye.

Further discussion of item 5 of the agenda was deferred until the next meeting.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.