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PRINCIPLE OF EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK FOR MEN AND WOMEN WORKERS

The Secretary-General has received the following communication from the American Federation of Labor:

The American Federation of Labor has indefatigably stood for equal pay for equal work for the woman worker. As early as 1898, J. H. Sullivan, of the Brotherhood of Painters and Decorators of America, introduced the following resolution which was passed at the annual convention:

"In view of the awful conditions under which woman is compelled to toil, this, the 18th Annual Convention of the American Federation of Labor strongly urges the more general formation of wage-working women, to the end that they may scientifically and permanently abolish the terrible evils accompanying their weakened, because unorganized, state, and we emphatically reiterate the trade union demand that women receive equal compensation for equal service performed".

In 1901 Samuel Gompers, in his annual report, stated:

"Realizing the continued increase of woman's labor in industry, commerce, and office work, we have always given every encouragement and made strenuous efforts to secure for them considerate treatment and its correlative, equal pay for equal work with men".

And again, in 1905, after announcing the fact that a League had been formed for the organization of women into trade unions, he said:

"In our movement we accord fair and equal treatment to all wage earners in any trade, craft or calling, and that membership is accorded in our unions to women upon an exact and equal and impartial footing with men. Some of our unions, as an inducement for women to join them, make both the initiation fees and dues less than those required of men".

The application in practice, however, sometimes met with some difficulties. Thus there were such difficulties in the Barbers' Union, one of the early fields invaded by women.

In the 1921 Convention some of these facts were brought out on the floor after delegate Ethel Hague, of the Tobacco Strippers Union #10422, proposed an amendment to the Constitution which would permit women in a trade which denied membership on sex grounds, to be allowed a separate and direct

/charter

charter from the American Federation of Labor without the consent of the trade unions concerned.

In spite of some defections of the affiliated internationals, the Federation has consistently continued to advocate the adoption of the equal pay principle. The Federation supported the House and Senate bill on equal pay in 1946, although asking for certain improvements.

The same attitude was taken by the State federations and locals in those states which have introduced equal pay legislation of various kinds.

A study made by the Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor in 1946, covering 543,599 workers in textile mill products, footwear, tobacco, paper containers and costume jewelry, showed that women constituted more than 40 per cent of the plants' work force in almost every industry studied.

Woolen and worsted mills were among the best-paid group, with an average of 86¢ an hour. Almost half of the women wage earners averaged 75¢ to 90¢; 2 per cent made \$1.40 or more per hour.

In the woolen and worsted groups the base wage for a weaver in a union plant was \$1.14, while in non-union plants it was \$1.04. Still greater was the difference between unionized and non-unionized shops in the full-fashioned hosiery industry, where a machine boarder in a union shop received \$1.06 while the non-union boarder received only 83¢ average.

The International Association of Machinists, long a bulwark of men workers, have a fine record. Out of the 11,000 contracts which the Union concluded for the fiscal year ended 30 June 1948, only 70 had separate wage scales.

The Commercial Telegraphers Union illustrates an occupation in which one may be mistakenly led to the belief that there is discrimination in the Union. It has often been stated that there is discrimination where women do not rise to the most highly paid positions. An examination of the qualifications in the Telegraphers Union shows the women to be in the majority in some groups in the middle sphere of workers while in others they are in the lower paid occupations, but they are at no time prevalent in the lowest-paid groups. However, neither are they, for the most part, in the highest paid group. Rates run for them from 70¢ to \$1.15. The Union estimates that 65 per cent of their membership are women. However, in examining the death benefit list for the fiscal year ended 30 June 1948, only about 26.7 per cent of the list are women, which seems to indicate that women workers do not stay at their trade as long as their male brethren.

Another reason explaining the situation is the fact that in the work for the various press services the hours are longer and more continuous, therefore produced higher pay, but they are less attractive to women.

/The Union

The Union has insisted, in several of its contracts, on maternity leave, amounting up to one year, during which time the member retains full seniority benefits.

A further indication of the participation of women on an equal footing is the fact that the Western Union Division (the largest division of the union) has 7 women presidents of locals out of a total of 60, and there are 25 women secretaries of locals.

The progress of the last decade is clearly demonstrated in the ladies' garment industry. The International Ladies Garment Workers Union reports that all contracts of the industry provide for equal pay for equal work for men and women alike. The industry is based on piece-work. The Union's policy has led to good wages for all those working in the industry.

In the coat and suit industry the average wages are \$2.15 an hour; in the dress industry the average wages are \$1.80.

The Wage and Hour Law of 1938, which established minimum wages and maximum hours for all workers, provides, in Section 8-C:

"No classification shall be made on the basis of age or sex".

During World War II, five to six million women were added to the labour forces above the nearly 13 million estimated in 1940. On 19 December 1947, the women labour force in industry was still 17 million.

It is often difficult to prove discrimination. What is a woman's job in some plants is a man's job in others. The differences are the effect of many factors. Working women as a group usually are younger than the gainfully employed men because their employment, outside the home, is interrupted by marriage, or women have not accumulated the seniority that leads to higher paid brackets of a trade.

The United States Department of Labor Women's Bureau, in 1943, visited a number of plants representing 1 3/4 million employees, of whom 330,000 were women. The possibilities for effectively correcting the situation for wage differentials were indicated by the fact that in industries where the employment of women is relatively new, the Women's Bureau found that the policy in the great majority of plants was to hire women at the same minimum starting rate as men, to advance them under the same progressive policy, and to pay the same rate as men for the job they were doing.

The American Federation of Labor, at its 1944 Convention, adopted a recommendation that special attention be given to the organizing of women, and that they be aided in every possible way in obtaining and maintaining agreements and securing legislation assuring them the protection of their physical, social and economic wellbeing.

/Individual

Individual international unions affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, have made some real progress toward equal pay by incorporating several types of pertaining clauses in their contracts; by securing simplification of systematizing of wage rate schedules so that job classifications are combined in such a way as to bring rates for women's work up to the rates paid men for similar work; and by bringing cases of rate discrimination against women to the War Labor Board and pressing for favourable action on them.

In a Women's Bureau (Department of Labor) study of Women in Industry in a large mid-western war area, half of the 80 union contracts studied were found to have equal pay clauses. However, it is not always easy to evaluate the wages paid as to the question whether they are equal to wages paid to men. A job analysis often will show that the same name is applied to jobs which are not fully comparable economically, and some apparent discrimination will thus be justified, while cases of unjustifiable discrimination will be revealed.

The objective of any thorough investigation must be the equality of economic opportunity, and the rates have to be equitable, not merely within but also between all occupations.

The trend in the Western Hemisphere may be shown by a resolution adopted by the Second Labor Conference of the American States which are members of the International Labour Organization, at Havana, Cuba, held from 21 November to 2 December 1939. The resolution reads as follows:

"In all cases where minimum (living) wage rates are being fixed, the same principles should be applied in determining the rates for workers of the two sexes. In occupations where female labor is employed, care should be taken that in estimating the value of the work, the skill which it requires is assessed on the same basis as in the case of work done by men".

As a long-range objective, equal pay for women is concerned not only with outright discrimination but with a prevention of woman's possibility for training and advancement.

The greatest amount of progress made was that registered by the trade unions during the war, when a strong effort was made for the inclusion of equal pay clauses in contracts because of the influx of women into jobs where they had previously not been, in order to protect the job rate for returning men. This progress has not been erased since.

As a Director of the Women's Bureau of the United States Department of Labor, Frieda S. Miller, has stated, in a hearing before the House of Representatives in 1947:

/"I would

"I would say progress has been made in an area where pressure can be applied--that is, by a trade union which has an interest in it".

In summing up, it may be stated that experience shows that one may not rely exclusively on legislation, but essential conditions for obtaining equal pay are free collective bargaining and free, strong trade unions. Equality of pay in itself has not sufficient meaning when this equality exists in a very low standard for both men and women workers. Equality of pay for women achieves its real meaning only when a high standard of living has been achieved through free action by trade unions organizing men and women.
