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COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Ninth Session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-SECOND MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,  
on Thursday, 17 March 1955, at 3.05 p.m.

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13P.

PRESENT:

<u>Chairman:</u>	Miss BERNARDINO	Dominican Republic
<u>Rapporteur:</u>	Mrs. RÖSSEL	Sweden
<u>Members:</u>	Mrs. CHAMORRO ALAMAN	Argentina
	Mrs. DALY	Australia
	Mrs. NOVIKOVA	Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic
	Miss TSENG	China
	Miss MAÑAS	Cuba
	Mrs. LEMAUCHEUX	France
	Mrs. GUERY	Haiti
	Miss ROESAD	Indonesia
	Mrs. TABET	Lebanon
	Begum ANWAR AHMED	Pakistan
	Mrs. DZIELINSKA	Poland
	Mrs. FOMINA	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
	Mrs. SAYERS	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
	Mrs. HAHN	United States of America
	Mrs. SANCHEZ de URDANETA	Venezuela
	Mrs. MITROVIC	Yugoslavia
<u>Also present:</u>	Mrs. KIEP	Germany
	Mrs. de TEJEIRA	Panama

Representatives of specialized agencies:

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

Representative of an inter-governmental organization:

Mrs. LEYES de CHAVES	Inter-American Commission of Women
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Representatives of non-governmental organizations:

<u>Category A:</u>	Miss SENDER	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
	Mr. THORMANN	International Federation of Christian Trade Unions
	Miss KAHN	World Federation of Trade Unions
	Mrs. EREN	World Federation of United Nations Associations

PRESENT: (Cont'd)

Representatives of non-governmental organizations: (Cont'd)

Category B and Register:

Miss GUTHRIE	International Alliance of Women
Mrs. CARTER	International Council of Women
Mrs. MEINANDER )	International Federation of Business and Professional Women
Miss POLLITZ )	
Miss LAGEMANN	International Federation of Friends of Young Women
Miss ROBB	International Federation of University Women
Miss RUIZ )	International Federation of Women-Lawyers
Miss SMITH )	
Mrs. WOLLE-EGENOLF	International League for the Rights of Man
Mrs. ROBERTS	Liaison Committee of Women's International Organizations; Associated Country Women of the World
Mrs. EVANS	Pan-Pacific Women's Association
Mrs. MADDEN	Pax Romana
Mrs. RICHMAN	World Jewish Congress
Miss ZIZZAMIA	World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations
Mrs. ANDERSON )	World's Young Women's Christian Association
Miss FORSYTH )	
<u>Secretariat:</u> Mrs. TENISON-WOODS	Chief of the Status of Women Section
Mrs. GRINBERG-VINAVER	Secretary of the Commission

EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK: (a) PROGRESS REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PRINCIPLE OF EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK (E/CN.6/257); (b) REPORT ON METHODS WHICH HAVE BEEN FOUND USEFUL IN CREATING A FAVOURABLE CLIMATE OF PUBLIC OPINION ON THE NEED FOR EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK (E/CN.6/263)

Mrs. SAYERS (United Kingdom) wished to give some particulars of the scheme that was being put into effect in the United Kingdom in order to provide equal pay for men and women employed in the non-industrial civil service. The purpose of the scheme was to bring salary scales for women into line with salary scales for men by increasing them by equal annual instalments over a period of seven years. For some grades of employees, in particular, typists, a compromise solution was being worked out whereby the new salary scales applied to men and women would be higher than the scales in force for women, but slightly lower than those applicable to men, of whom there were comparatively few in that branch of work. The negotiations which had resulted in the adoption of the scheme had not concerned posts that were never held by men.

The measures applied only to employees of the non-industrial civil service, but the Burnham Committees, which dealt with the status and salaries of teaching staff, had decided to recommend a similar scheme to equalize teachers' salaries. If accepted, the Committees' proposal would result in an initial increase on 1 May 1955 and that equality of salaries would be achieved by 1 April 1961.

With regard to the industrial civil service, the United Kingdom Government thought it advisable to apply the principle of fair pay and to continue to pay women in accordance with the general practice in the trade concerned.

The United Kingdom Government felt that it should not interfere in the private sector, where wages and salaries were fixed by negotiation between employers and workers' organizations, but doubtless the example it had set with regard to its non-industrial civil service would have its effects.

The United Kingdom Government thought it was of the greatest importance that the public should be well informed on the question of equal pay for equal work. The Commission's discussions and the activities of the non-governmental

(Mrs. Sayers, United Kingdom)

organizations could be very useful in that respect. The International Labour Organisation should continue its work, taking into account the various schemes for fixing wages, which might sometimes be subject to financial and economic circumstances beyond the direct control of Governments.

Mrs. GUERY (Haiti) said that in Haiti, where, as she had pointed out at an earlier meeting, the State was the chief employer and positions in the administration were much sought after for the security and promotion and retirement benefits they offered, women accounted for two thirds of the administrative staff. The highest positions were not, however, open to them. That was an indirect derogation from the principle of equal pay for equal work and was prejudicial to the value of work and to the prestige of the workers. That was why it was necessary that the Convention on Equal Pay should be adopted even by countries which were not yet economically stable.

For the time being, equal pay was not an urgent question in Haiti, where the unemployment problem was still far from resolved, although the Government was hoping to develop the economy by embarking upon large-scale public works and by promoting industry and tourism.

The Haitian representative would endorse any measure designed to ensure the adoption of Convention No. 100 and recommendation No. 90 of the ILO.

Mrs. MITROVIC (Yugoslavia) noted that, while the documents before the Commission indicated progress, the ILO Convention on equal pay had been signed by nine countries only, of which Yugoslavia was one.

The implementation of the Convention was meeting with hostility from those who were against the participation of women in social and economic life as a matter of principle and with opposition from those who accepted the principle of equal pay but refused to take action to give it practical effect. The latter felt that there was no need for the State to intervene because, they argued, the necessary changes would come about naturally in time. History had shown, however, that there were situations in which the intervention of the State was essential; legislation had been necessary to put an end to child labour, for example. The inequality in the pay of men and women workers was

(Mrs. Mitrovic, Yugoslavia)

an anomaly at a time when women made up one third of the labour force and worked in all branches of production. Nor was it simply a question of guaranteeing equal pay to women; they should be given access to all types of employment.

The Commission could not confine itself to an academic discussion of the problem; it should take steps to see that the ILO Convention was adopted, for although the provisions of the Convention were not very drastic, it was nevertheless the only international instrument that represented some progress.

Mrs. DALY (Australia) outlined the procedure laid down in the Constitution of the ILO providing for ratification of Conventions by Federal States, of which Australia was one. In Australia, the Commonwealth Government had the power to ratify conventions, but implementation of a convention was frequently a matter for State authorities, either alone, or in conjunction with Commonwealth authorities. When that was the case, the Commonwealth Government assured itself, before ratifying a convention, that the convention would be, or was being, given full effect in each State.

In each Australian state and also in the Commonwealth, there was a Court of Conciliation and Arbitration which had power to fix wage rates. The legislatures did not interfere with those powers. Late in 1953, the Minister for Labour and National Service had stated in Parliament that while the Commonwealth Government did not oppose the principle of equal remuneration for men and women, for work of equal value, it considered it undesirable to submit legislation to Parliament to give effect to the principle in advance of a determination to like effect by the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration, which was the supreme arbitral authority and the body empowered to deal with such issues. The Minister stated that the Arbitration Court had determined that the basic wage would vary according to the capacity of the industry to pay and had reaffirmed an earlier decision to maintain different wage rates for men and women. The differentiation rested substantially on the social factor of the family responsibilities of the male breadwinner.

The Conference of Premiers, which had met in July 1954, had decided that the ILO Convention could not be ratified or implemented immediately. New South Wales and Victoria had approved of it in principle. South Australia

(Mrs. Daly, Australia)

and Western Australia had said that their Governments would leave it to the appropriate industrial tribunals to regulate the salaries of men and women performing work of equal value.

Wages in Australia were made up of a basic wage plus a margin for skill. Both the Commonwealth Arbitration Court and the State Tribunals have maintained a disparity between the male and female "basic" wages which they determine, although the Commonwealth Government in 1950 had fixed the basic minimum wage for women at 75 per cent of the basic minimum wage for men, thereby legally recognizing the generally accepted rates. The basic wage for men was calculated for a married man with two children. In determining the basic wage for women, the possibility of dependents had not been taken into consideration. In some instances, the basic wage for women was well above 75 per cent of the basic wage for men: women teachers received a basic salary amounting to approximately 90 per cent of the basic salary for men and they were continuing an energetic campaign for equal pay.

In 1953, the Metal Trade Employers Association had asked the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration to reduce the women's wage rate from 75 to 60 per cent of the rate for men's wages. The Australian National Council of Women, supported by other national organizations, had intervened in opposition and the Arbitration Court had not assented to the application.

The progress achieved by the United Kingdom with regard to equal pay was encouraging and she hoped that Australia would follow its example in the near future.

Mrs. SANCHEZ de URDANETA (Venezuela) said that there was no discrimination against women workers in her country. The principle of equal pay for equal work was enshrined in article 67 of the Venezuelan Labour Code and the contracts between employers and employees were governed by the same principle. The law did not differentiate between men and women in such matters as hours of work, holidays, wages and so forth but there were certain special provisions for women: they were entitled to maternity leave and could not be compelled to work at night.

On the other hand, the fact that the principle of equal pay was embodied in the law did not necessarily mean that it was applied in practice. In many

(Mrs. Sanchez de Urdaneta, Venezuela)

countries, notwithstanding the legislation in force, the Government found some pretext for refusing to apply the principle or for giving it only partial application. It was argued, for example, that there were types of work generally known as "women's" where it was difficult to say whether their pay was smaller than that of men, or that in the absence of a classification of work it was impossible to compare the wages of men and women workers.

The Commission should bear in mind the fact that the existing laws were not always applied in practice. It should adopt a resolution inviting those Governments which had not yet done so to ratify the Convention on Equal Pay, condemning the tactics adopted to avoid the application of the law and requesting the non-governmental organizations to study the question.

Miss TSENG (China) said that her Government would probably decide to ratify the ILO Convention No. 100, for China already recognized the principle of equal pay for equal work. The fact remained, however, that women were in a less favourable position than men: it was harder for them to find work, either because they lacked the necessary education and vocational training - at the University of Taiwan only one sixth of the 5,000 students were women - or because employers preferred men workers as being more permanent and stronger physically.

The openings for women were therefore very limited. As far as senior positions were concerned, there were, for example, only two women in the Government, eighty-five in the Legislature and elected agencies, forty-eight in education and one only in each of the following branches: judicial, banking and finance, health and medicine, Press and broadcasting. There was not a single woman in a managerial post in industry, agriculture or mining.

It was clear, therefore, that the principle of equal pay for equal work was not enough in itself. Men and women must be given the same educational and vocational training opportunities and the same openings for employment.

Miss SENDER (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions) said that trade unions all over the world had fought for recognition of the principle of equal pay for equal work and had so far achieved only partial success. There were a number of obstacles in the way of absolute equality of men and women workers. Apart from some women who were obliged to work in order to supply their own needs and sometimes the needs of dependents, and others who worked because they



(Miss Sender, International  
Confederation of Free Trade Unions)

had a strong urge to be useful members of the community, women did not, generally speaking, work continuously throughout their lives. They stopped working when they married, for instance, and sometimes began to work again once their children had grown up. That was the first obstacle. A second obstacle was their lack of proper training. Experience had shown, however, that given the necessary training women could work as well as men in employment that was suited to their physical capacities. During the Second World War, for example, women had been placed by force of circumstances in posts, and sometimes very high posts, in industry and administration which had previously been held exclusively by men.

The organizations concerned with the question of women workers should take active steps to see that women who wished, or were obliged, to work could receive the necessary training and find employment for which they were suited. Certain elements were essential in a sound labour policy: vocational training and guidance, a properly trained and understanding guidance and employment service - in some countries it might be possible to replace private employment agencies by city, state or federal authorities - technical assistance in developing such services, guidance in labour legislation and improved information on openings for women workers.

A policy of full employment could do much to help the cause of women workers; the wages women received obviously depended on the demand for their labour and in periods of low employment women were generally among the first to lose their work. For that reason the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions was devoting its full attention to the development of schemes for full employment.

With regard to the methods to be used, she agreed that the interested organizations and the trade unions should not be content with adopting resolutions on the desirability of equal pay but should also educate their own members. They should not neglect public opinion - a powerful ally - and should make use of all modern means of communication - television, Press and radio - to create an atmosphere favourable to their cause. It was quite obvious that the free trade unions were in the best position to fight for the principle of equal pay, inter alia through the system of collective bargaining. The means of overcoming the obstacles that still existed should be sought in the free labour movement rather than at further conferences and through more resolutions.

Mr. THORMANN (International Federation of Christian Trade Unions)

recalled that in a pamphlet on the question which it had issued a few years previously the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions had said that although the principle of equal pay for equal work had wide support, there were few problems which seemed further from solution. That opinion was still valid.

Progress had admittedly been made in some countries and he was well aware of the useful activities of many state and private organizations, including the Christian trade unions.

It was not the aim of the Christian trade unions that all women should participate in economic life; woman's place was primarily in the home and the head of the family should earn enough to support his dependents. They therefore felt themselves the more justified in demanding that women who were obliged to earn their living should receive the same rate of pay as men.

Nine countries had now ratified the International Labour Convention No.100. That was a very encouraging result but much remained to be done, especially as, even in those nine countries, the Convention was not always put into effect. Furthermore, as a more detailed consideration of the question of equal pay would show, there were other problems involved. For instance, women had yet to learn to assess the value of their work accurately and to lose their inferiority complex in that respect. Then, women must be enabled to choose their work freely and not for economic considerations. Above all, emphasis must be laid on vocational guidance and training, so that women could choose an occupation which suited them, for work, although a duty, should not become a burden.

Vocational training and guidance offered another advantage, that of giving women the chance of promotion, which was still, more often than not, denied to them. It was the usual thing, especially in the civil service, that even if women received the same pay as men for the same work, they could not be promoted to important posts. On that point, he agreed with the United States representative: women were entitled, not only to equal pay, but also to equal opportunities.

(Mr. Thormann, IFCTU)

In its resolution 547 E (XVIII) the Council had confined itself to commending the activities of governmental and non-governmental organizations concerned with the problem of equal pay. He felt that the Commission might well ask it to intensify its efforts and, for instance, to request the ILO to draw up a general picture of the situation, both de jure and de facto, in the various countries.

The Council might recommend the ILO: (a) to request its Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations to draft a report on the subject; (b) to seek information from both official and private sources on the progress achieved in the countries which had already ratified Convention No. 100; (c) to ask the other countries why they had rejected the Convention or had failed to submit it to their legislative bodies. The ILO could then report to the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the results of its investigations and the Commission would be able to take its decisions in full knowledge of the facts.

The Commission might also state that it advocated the immediate ratification of the Covenants on Human Rights, for although the principle of equal pay was enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it should be remembered that that document itself had no legal value.

In conclusion, he wished once again to stress the fact that the trade unions could play an important part in that matter. It was hardly an exaggeration to say that if women's pay was still all too often less than that of men doing the same work, that was because women had not sufficiently realized that the trade unions could give them valuable assistance.

Mrs. CARTER (International Council of Women) felt that the question under consideration was one of the most important of those before the Commission, for the well-being of the family depended upon it.

The International Council of Women had always upheld the principle of equal pay, which was laid down in the ILO Convention. The provisions of that Convention were sound but in many countries its enforcement was hampered by economic obstacles or by prejudice against women's equality with men.

(Mrs. Cartér, International Council  
of Women)

The non-governmental organizations could help overcome those obstacles and could campaign for the application of the Convention in all countries.

The International Council of Women was actively engaged in that task. At the session it had held in Helsinki in June 1954 it had unanimously adopted a resolution on equal pay, in which it had requested Governments to ratify the Convention and to put it into effect. In the same resolution it had laid particular stress on the question of the objective assessment of posts on the basis of the work they entailed, for that was an essential step towards the goal of equal pay for work of equal value. In that connexion, she hoped that the Commission would stress the importance of assessing work in order to guarantee the male and female labour forces fair wages.

She went on to review the activities upon which the International Council of Women was engaged in various countries with a view to securing the application of the principle of equal pay. She felt, however, that the non-governmental organizations could play an even more important part in that field if they maintained closer relations with the ILO. It would be an advantage if the number of women's organizations in consultative relationship with the ILO could be increased; such a step would undoubtedly facilitate the attainment of some of the objectives of the Commission on the Status of Women.

Mrs. DEMBINSKA (Poland) said that the question of equal pay for men and women workers for equal work was of paramount importance, because it was closely connected with the question of political equality for women and that of their participation in economic life. Only when they had attained such equality could women the world over exert political influence and really contribute to the life of their respective countries.

The working masses had always struggled to win equality of pay for women and it was not they who had originated the idea that equality of pay might be prejudicial to the male labour force. It was the employers who were responsible for keeping women's wages at a lower level in order to increase their profits, and who had originated the notion of prejudice to the male labour force.

(Mrs. Dembinska, Poland)

It was not enough to ratify the convention on Equal Pay; it was also necessary to see that it was put into force. Poland had ratified the Convention although it considered it inadequate, having itself made much greater strides in that field. The Polish Constitution guaranteed women the right to work and the right to equal pay. The principle of equal pay was respected and had been put into force immediately, although the Convention provided only for its gradual introduction.

Furthermore, the Convention contained no provision for the compulsory application of the principle in Trust Territories and Non-Self-Governing Territories, where the position of women was particularly distressing and where the pay they received was absurdly low.

The year before, the Commission had adopted a resolution laying emphasis on the need for legislative measures by Governments in favour of equal pay. While not wishing to underestimate the work done by those organizations, she nevertheless felt that it was for Governments to take the steps necessary to bring about equality of pay. Some countries sought refuge in the excuse that their budgets would not allow it. If that was so and if progress was so slow it was because of the heavy burden laid upon the economies of those countries by the armaments race and their preparations for an atomic war. It was also obvious that the race for armaments was a source of discrimination against women in the matter of wages.

Mrs. LEFAUCHEUX (France) proposed that the Resolutions Committee should convene at the close of the meeting, to study draft resolution E/CN.6/L.155.

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 4.45 p.m.