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COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Tenth Session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE TWO HUNDRED AND TWENTY-FOURTH MEETING

held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 26 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. SANCHEZ de URDANETA	Venezuela
Mrs. MITROVIC	Yugoslavia

Observers for Governments of States Members of the United Nations:

Mr. SARAIVA GUERREIRO	Brazil
Mr. STOYANOV	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

Representative of an inter-governmental organization:

Inter-American Commission of Women

Miss LUTZ

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 United Nations
Associations

Mrs. KRETSCHMER

Category B

Catholic International Union for Social Service

Miss BOSMANS
Miss HERTOEGHE
Miss de ROMER

International Alliance of Women

Mrs. CHOISY-NECKER

International Council of Women

Mrs. CARTER
Miss van EEGHEN

International Federation "Amies de la Jeune Fille"

Mrs. WOOD

International Federation of Business and
Professional Women

Mrs. FINIDORI
Miss TOMLINSON

International Federation of University Women

Mrs. FLECHTER
Miss ROBB

International Federation of Women Lawyers

Lady CHATTERJEE
Miss MANFREDINI

International League for the Rights of Man

Mrs. WOLLE-EGENOLF

International Union for Child Welfare

Mrs. SMALL

Liaison Committee of Women's International
Organizations

Miss van EEGHEN

Women's International League for Peace and
Freedom

Mrs. BAER

World Federation of Catholic Young Women and
Girls

Miss HERREN

World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations

Miss de ROMER
Miss THUAN

World Young Women's Christian Association

Miss ARNOLD

Register

Open Door International

Mrs. BAER

Soroptimist International Association

Miss WIND

Representatives of non-governmental organizations (continued)

St. Joan's International Social and
Political Alliance

Miss CHALLONER
Mrs. KINSELLA

World Association of Girl Guides and
Girl Scouts

Mrs. BUGNION-SECRETAN

Secretariat:

Mrs. Tenison-Woods

Representative of the
Secretary-General

Mrs. Grinberg-Vinaver

Secretary to the Commission

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN (item 7 of the agenda) (continued):

- (f) Working women, including working mothers, with family responsibilities, and means for the improvement of their position

The CHAIRMAN invited the Commission to continue its consideration of the question of working women with family responsibilities.

Dame Lucile SAYERS (United Kingdom) said that out of a total working population of 23,869,000 in Great Britain in June 1955, 7,811,000 had been women.

Under the National Insurance Act of 1946, as amended by later Acts, and subject to certain statutory exceptions, every person in Great Britain over school-leaving age and under pensionable age was insured. Married women and widows, however, were generally free to decide whether to pay contributions or not.

The following benefits were available under the Acts: unemployment, sickness and maternity benefit (including maternity grants, home confinement grants and maternity allowances), widows' benefit (including widows' allowances, widowed mothers' allowances and widows' pensions), guardians' allowances, retirement pensions and death grants. Extra unemployment and sickness benefits were payable to married women supporting invalid husbands, children or dependent adults.

Maternity benefits had been increased in 1954. The maternity grant was £10, an extra £4 being payable to women confined at home or elsewhere at their own expense. Working women also received a maternity allowance of £2 a week, normally for a period of 18 weeks beginning 11 weeks before the expected week of confinement. Women with dependants were entitled to higher allowances.

At the end of 1953, about 465,000 widows had been receiving benefits varying according to age and the number of dependent children.

Under the Family Allowances Acts of 1945 and 1952, 8 shillings a week was paid for each child after the eldest. In 1953, about 3,250,000 families were benefiting from such allowances.

Thus, the National Insurance and Family Allowances Acts made special provision for the working woman with family responsibilities, whether in the form of children or dependent adults. Persons with heavy responsibilities or limited resources were also eligible for national assistance.

In addition, the local authorities provided a variety of services of special practical benefit to working women with family responsibilities: midwifery services, child and infant welfare services (including visits to children's homes during the first year of life), school medical attention, school meals, the "home help" system and services for the aged and infirm.

Mrs. BEN-ZVI (Israel) said that, although a certain amount of overlapping was inevitable and, at times, even desirable, there was a danger with so vast a subject that the discussion might drift into matters - such as the problem of film and television programmes unsuitable for children - which were important enough in themselves, but not strictly relevant to the topic under discussion.

Her delegation accordingly considered that the exact scope of the sub-item should be clearly defined by the Commission, after study of the material provided by the International Labour Organisation. To that end it proposed that the discussion at that session be confined to consideration of the draft resolution already submitted. She wished, however, to reserve the right to speak again, should her delegation's proposal not be adopted.

The CHAIRMAN proposed that the general discussion continue until the text of the draft resolution was available.

It was so agreed.

Mrs. SPIRIDONOVA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) welcomed the fact that a question which affected the interests of vast masses of working women had been placed on the agenda. As could be seen from the material submitted to the Commission on the subject of economic opportunities for women, there were millions of mothers in employment and the percentage of working women with two-fold responsibilities was steadily increasing. There were even cases in which the woman was the only breadwinner in the family.

Clearly, therefore, despite the fact that uneconomic expenditure on such items as armaments sometimes forced women to take up employment which showed no real economic return to the nation, women with family responsibilities undoubtedly played a large part in the economic life of all countries. According to data published by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) based on a survey of 13 million families in France, women in one year put in 46,000 million hours of work in discharging their family responsibilities, as compared with 42,000 million hours of work put in by government employees. The same must be true of other countries as well.

The Commission should therefore make it its concern to defend working women with family responsibilities, and working mothers in particular, against discrimination. It should draft recommendations to member and non-member States to ensure that such women worked on an equal footing with men in all fields of the economy, and to protect their health and general interests.

The Commission should give no credence to specious propaganda presenting the mother as queen of the home surrounded by washing machines, television and every modern convenience, but actually implying that woman was an inferior member of society whose sole place was in the home. Such propaganda merely served the interests of unscrupulous employers. The working mother had the right to work and to protection against discrimination by employers. She should enjoy privileges appropriate to her position and due regard should be paid to her health. It should be borne in mind in that connexion that many countries still had no fully-developed social security system and that the position was at its worst in trust and non-self-governing territories where the death rate among women and children was exceptionally high.

In the Soviet Union, working women with family responsibilities were entitled under the Constitution to State protection, security of employment, and special maternity benefits. Pregnant women enjoyed one hundred days' leave on full pay. Maternity homes, child welfare clinics, and home welfare visitors, similar to those mentioned by the United Kingdom representative, were provided for them. Every village now had some kind of facility for mothers in childbirth. Undertakings were obliged to allow nursing mothers time to feed their children twice a day, without any sacrifice of earnings. Pregnant women and mothers with small children could not be dismissed. There were also special allowances and layette grants to mothers at confinement. A vast network of crèches, day nurseries and playgrounds had been established to assist working mothers, whose children were entitled to spend two months in a holiday camp each summer, free of charge except in the case of mothers in the highest income brackets.

That did not mean, however, that the problem had been completely solved. Still further measures were required to assist the working mother. Under the sixth Five-Year Plan, beginning that year, the lot of such women would be lightened by an increase in supplies of domestic appliances, and in the number of retail shops, by a 50 per cent increase in the number of communal restaurants and a 75 per cent increase in supplies of prepared meals to homes, quite apart from the school meals system.

The facilities established by the trade unions for the children of working mothers, including clubs and no less than 90,000 children's libraries, were to be greatly extended.

Widows' pensions were to be raised, more facilities provided for post-graduate education, and special facilities to enable working women to take university degrees while working. In all, 210,000 million roubles were to be spent on social measures under the latest Five-Year Plan.

Her delegation, always anxious to learn of measures taken in other countries which might be applied in its own, had been most interested in the statement by the United Kingdom representative. It would readily support any move to enable the Commission to study the problem more thoroughly and any measure calculated to improve the lot of working women with family responsibilities.

Mrs. CHU (China) also welcomed the placing of sub-item 7(f) on the agenda. The five-fold responsibility of the working mother - to herself, to her husband, to her children, to society and to the family as a whole as a breadwinner - was a very heavy burden on her, making it necessary to grant her special protection and treatment in many respects. Until the ideal state of society was reached, in which women with young children would not need to work outside the home for purely economic reasons, the problem of working mothers would have to be faced.

In her own country, various measures had been taken to assist working mothers. Under the Labour Law, health and maternity services were provided for women employees and their children, free of charge, by factories, government services and schools. With the steady expansion of the labour insurance scheme introduced during the past few years, it was hoped to provide still wider coverage for women. Under the existing Factory Law, women employees in factories received eight weeks' maternity leave, on full pay after six months' employment and on half-pay after employment for a shorter period. Similar maternity leave was granted in many other professions. Nurseries had been set up in factories, community housing projects, fishing and salt-producing villages and rural communities, to take care of the children of women workers, and over 43,000 children under school age were already being cared for in that way. Half of the number went to the "agricultural district nurseries". Although those nurseries were open only during the periods of field work, the fact that two or

three crops were harvested in the year in Taiwan meant that they were open nearly all the year. There had been 171 such agricultural district nurseries in 1955, and 189 more were to be opened in 1956, mostly by local authorities with the assistance of subsidies from the provincial governments.

Working mothers engaged in the cottage industries of Taiwan had given an excellent example of self-help by organizing and building their own welfare facilities, and nurseries in particular, out of their own exiguous resources. Thirteen such nurseries, taking care of over one thousand children, had been built by one women's organization alone in 1955 in the very community in which she herself lived.

To meet the demand for trained nursery staff, short-term and in-service training courses had been arranged by women's organizations. Much remained to be done, however; more and better facilities and more trained workers were still needed. Fortunately, the efforts of the women were enjoying wide public support from both sexes.

She would like to add two suggestions to those already before the Commission. The first was that the public, and especially employers, should be brought to realize that working mothers bore a heavier responsibility than other sections of the employed, and were therefore entitled to special measures in their favour. Employers, in particular, should not be allowed to discriminate against women applicants for jobs or against women workers possessing identical qualifications with men, merely because employing them would put the employers to greater trouble and expense. The second suggestion was that, where they had not done so already, women workers should band together in associations to safeguard their interests and promote their welfare. Such associations would not compete with the trade unions. On the contrary, they would be supplementary to them and, in time, come to strengthen them.

Mrs. LEFAUCHEUX (France) said that she had not heard of the inquiry which the Soviet Union representative said had been made in France to establish the number of hours worked by women in the home. Such an inquiry would in any case be very difficult to carry out satisfactorily. It was of course common knowledge that household tasks could be so onerous as to prevent a woman taking up any outside employment, but that was a general phenomenon in no way peculiar to France.

It was disquieting to hear day nurseries and film exhibitions discussed in the Commission. Those were very interesting topics, but they came rather within the purview of the Social Commission, which should be left to deal with them. It would be dangerous for the Commission on the Status of Women to go outside its terms of reference.

Mrs. NOVIKOVA (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) said that eminent sociologists had recognized the part played by working women in inspiring movements for social progress and the defence of human rights. Although the expansion of industry and agriculture throughout the world made it necessary for women to take work in increasing numbers, very conflicting views were held about their position in society and the family, and as to how they could be assisted by governments. In her valuable statement, the Polish representative had pointed out the way in which a vital issue should be approached.

Clearly, when women were given equal rights with men, it must be borne in mind by governments and by trade-union and other organizations that working women had family responsibilities and were therefore entitled to favourable conditions of work as well as maternity benefits. They had long enjoyed such conditions in the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, where large sums were appropriated for special allowances and the provision of a free medical service for working mothers. In recent years, apart from the extensive building of various medical and public health institutions, the number of doctors had greatly increased, considerable successes had been achieved in preventive medicine and there had been a decline in infant mortality. Boarding schools were also to be provided, where children whose parents could not afford the fees would receive the education free. They would be built in healthy surroundings and would be equipped with spacious dormitories and class-rooms as well as facilities for out-of-school activities, so that the children would have everything they needed for their physical and mental development. That was an example of the kind of measures which every government ought to take to enable women to take outside employment with a quiet mind, in the knowledge that everything was being done to bring up their children in the most suitable conditions.

In the Byelorussian Republic lecture rooms were often attached to schools, where talks were given for parents on subjects connected with the upbringing of children and education. There were a number of publishers specializing in children's books, and special programmes for mothers and children were a feature of cinemas and television. Establishments for young pioneers organized study groups on various subjects to occupy children in their leisure hours and often made it possible to discover in which direction a particular child's talents lay. Children's libraries had also been opened in all towns, country centres, collective farms and industrial enterprises. She mentioned those facts because she could not agree with those speakers who denied the important contribution libraries, the cinema and television could make to education.

Obviously the lives of working women could be made much easier by the provision of modern household appliances to lighten the burden of arduous and repetitious housework.

In conclusion, she said that it would be very valuable if the Secretariat could obtain detailed information from governments and specialized agencies about legislative and other measures taken for the protection of working women and their children. That would make it much easier for the Commission to frame practical recommendations.

The CHAIRMAN, speaking as representative of Sweden, said, in reply to the French representative's contention that it would be difficult to make a study of the time taken up by housework, that such a study had been successfully carried out in Sweden by a Royal Commission appointed to examine the duties and responsibilities of housewives. The information had been collected by the same techniques as those employed for industrial work studies. In addition, an attempt had been made to assess, in terms of industrial wages, the value of work done in the home. The inquiry had embraced the cases of working women with one or more children, and had taken into account the amount of modern household equipment they possessed.

Another study, relating to equal pay, had been made by the Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions in conjunction with the Employers' Federation, in an attempt to establish the reason for the higher incidence of absenteeism among women in industry. Details had been collected about working women's domestic responsibilities, and what help they received from other members of their family.

She would have thought that it would be useful to summarize the findings of such inquiries, because they would help to indicate what kind of action was needed.

Mrs. BEN-ZVI (Israel) agreed that it would be valuable to obtain such information both from the International Labour Office (ILO) and from any country which could provide it.

Miss CHALLONER (St. Joan's International Social and Political Alliance), speaking at the invitation of the CHAIRMAN, expressed anxiety about the turn the discussion was taking. Her organization, whose aims were known to members, sympathized with efforts to ease women's daily tasks, but the Commission was surely not the body to discuss the problems of working women with family responsibilities or to listen to detailed expositions of the means taken to improve their position in various countries. The purpose of the Commission was to secure equality of opportunity for women, in other words a fair field and no favour, and it would be regrettable if the Commission were to join those who, in seeking to protect women, in effect damaged their position.

In the absence of further speakers, the CHAIRMAN declared the general discussion on item 7 (f) of the agenda closed.

- (a) Preliminary memorandum concerning a survey of publications available on the occupational outlook of women in the fields of health, social welfare, engineering and architecture (E/CN.6/L.189)

Mrs. HAHN (United States of America) thanked the Secretariat for its preliminary memorandum (E/CN.6/L.189) surveying the publications available on the occupational outlook for women in the fields of health, social welfare, engineering and architecture. It was apparent from that memorandum that valuable information was available, and her delegation had intended to propose a study, for consideration at the eleventh session, of two professions, one in which women had traditionally been employed, such as nursing, and one which they were now entering for the first time, such as engineering; but it now seemed that a broader study than that originally contemplated at the previous session was under consideration. Such an approach should yield useful results.

The four occupations covered by the Secretariat's memorandum were all professions in which the demand for qualified personnel of both sexes far exceeded the supply, so that a study of women's opportunities in those fields would be particularly helpful, not only for the economically more advanced countries, but

also for those which were in the early stages of industrial development, since it would encourage women to take up those professions and would draw the attention of governments to the importance of providing them with equal opportunities with men both for training and for employment.

In the United States of America the number of women engineers had increased significantly in recent years: in 1940, there had been 730 out of a total of 250,000 professional engineers, whereas in 1950 there had been 6,475. During that decade, the number of women engineers had increased ninefold, whereas that of male engineers had only doubled. Nevertheless, engineering was still predominantly a man's profession, and women only constituted 2 per cent of the total number.

The Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor had made two studies of the occupational outlook for women in engineering, the first in 1947 and the second in 1954. The latter had been supplemented by information obtained through a questionnaire sent to members of the Society of Women Engineers, who had reported on various aspects of their training and employment. That Society was a new organization, founded in 1950, and the qualifications for membership - a college degree in engineering, or a minimum of six years' paid employment at a level of a graduate engineer, or a college degree in a related scientific field, such as architecture or the physical sciences, plus at least two years of engineering experience at the professional level - were indicative of the kind of standards expected of women who were seeking to acquire equal opportunities with men for employment and promotion in a highly skilled profession. She mentioned those facts in order to bring out the importance of including in any study undertaken by the Commission information on training requirements, and of defining terms so that the information from different countries, in some of which the term "engineer" was rather loosely applied to any person working with machinery, was comparable.

Miss LUTZ (Inter-American Commission of Women), speaking at the invitation of the CHAIRMAN, regretted that the representative of the International Federation of University Women should not have given any data on Brazil in her statement at the previous meeting, since the first President of the Federation's branch in Brazil had been one of the first women to graduate in civil engineering in that country.

She had been particularly interested by the United States representative's statement, because conditions in that country were very similar to those in Brazil, where there was an association of women architects and civil engineers. Women had begun taking civil engineering degrees some 35 years earlier. They could not be employed either as engineers or architects without a degree. Though she could give no figures, she could state that there were a number of women civil engineers in Rio-de-Janeiro, for example, one was in charge of a whole district and another in charge of part of the water supply, and there was a woman director of city planning.

Stressing the importance of the Secretariat's preliminary memorandum, Miss BERNARDINO (Dominican Republic) said that a detailed study should be made of prospects of employment for women in the fields of health, social welfare, engineering and architecture. The International Labour Office had pointed⁽¹⁾ out that such a study would serve the dual purpose of informing countries of new openings in other countries for women wishing to work in those fields, and of encouraging the publication of studies on vocational guidance with regard to such openings. It was therefore to be hoped that the Commission would press for a fuller survey of the question.

She had been deeply interested by the statement of the representative of the Inter-American Commission of Women. The Dominican Republic was proud of the part played by women engineers and architects in the erection of some of her country's most modern buildings.

Mrs. BEN-ZVI (Israel) said that women should also be encouraged to become engineers and architects because they were particularly well-fitted to understand the needs of housewives, both in the field of domestic architecture and town planning.

Dame Lucile SAYERS (United Kingdom) said that in her country careers officers were attached to provincial offices of the Ministry of Labour, and they had observed a growing interest in the part of women in such professions as engineering and architecture during the past two years.

Further discussion of item 7 (a) of the agenda was deferred.

(1) See: E/CN.6/L.189, para.4.

(c) Report on the Employment conditions of older women workers
(E/CN.6/284)

The CHAIRMAN asked whether there were any further observations on sub-item 7 (c).

Mrs. FIGUEROA (International Labour Organisation) recalled that she had already had occasion to express the International Labour Organisation's viewpoint on the subject of minimum pensionable age. It might be useful in that connexion to refer to the discussions at the first European Regional Conference of the International Labour Organisation, held at Geneva at the beginning of 1955. In considering the age at which a worker should normally be entitled to a pension, it had been found that the pensionable age generally lay between 60 and 70 but that there were variations from country to country and that flexibility in the pensionable age was a feature of many national pension schemes. Various draft proposals had been submitted by government, employers' and workers' representatives, some of which favoured a pensionable age of 60, others 65; the workers' delegates' draft proposal had suggested that the pensionable age for women should be about five years lower than that for men, and the United Kingdom Government representative had suggested a similar provision. The resolution finally adopted was based on the text prepared by the Secretariat, in which no dual pensionable age was proposed and in which the minimum pensionable age was fixed within the range of 60 to 65 years, bearing in mind national differences in the effective earning capacity of the average worker aged 60 or more and in the number of years during which he might expect to enjoy his pension. An amendment was introduced by the workers' delegate of France, fixing the minimum pensionable age for women five years below that for men. This amendment was carried by 70 votes to 18.

Mrs. LEFAUCHEUX (France) thanked Mrs. Figueroa for the explanations she had given the Commission. She was surprised that the Commission had not been consulted in a matter of vital concern to it, or even informed earlier of the existence of the resolution, which was of paramount importance to its work. The Commission should bear in mind the lesson to be learned from that experience when it came to organize its work for future years.

Miss BERNARDINO (Dominican Republic) thanked Mrs. Figueroa for her statement, which showed that there was definite discrimination against women, in flagrant contradiction of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It was the Commission's duty to press for equality of rights in all spheres, and to take a stand against the resolution of the European Regional Conference of the International Labour Organisation. She proposed that that part of the Commission's summary records dealing with the question of retirement age be communicated to the International Labour Organisation for information. She did not think it necessary to draft a resolution on the subject; but note might be taken of the Organisation's attitude in the Commission's report.

The CHAIRMAN intimated that action would be taken on the Dominican Republic representative's suggestions.

Mrs. FIGUEROA (International Labour Organisation) agreed with Mrs. Lefaucheux that the specialized agencies and United Nations and other international organs should maintain the closest possible contact with a view to mutual assistance. At the same time, the principles underlying resolutions and international instruments were frequently to a greater or lesser extent a reflection of national policies. It might perhaps be useful as a first step to ensure that the governments of the various countries adopted integrated policies at national level. A considerable step forward might be made if countries could co-ordinate national policies.

Miss BERNARDINO (Dominican Republic) did not share Mrs. Figueroa's sentiments. If all women in all countries had had first of all to secure the formulation of uniform principles in respect of women's rights, they would never have got the benefit of what the Commission had achieved at international level.

Mrs. LEFAUCHEUX (France) also disagreed with Mrs. Figueroa. It would be dangerous to try to make international action dependent on action at national level. The Commission must discharge its task independently of national action, but its members must of course spur on such action in their respective countries with the object of securing acceptance for the Commission's findings.

Further discussion of item 7 of the agenda was deferred.

The meeting rose at 1.20 p.m.