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for the Economic Emancipation of the Woman Worker.

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THE WAGE-EARNING MOTHER.

- By -

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The perfecting of machinery and the tremendous advance in industrial development resulting therefrom have brought about revolutionary changes in the principles of home-keeping, which up till now formed the very foundations for the existence of the home. The machine absorbed most of the work not only of the home, but also of the craftsmen and home industry.

The result was unemployment on a scale hitherto unknown within a field of labour pertaining to the home, even though said unemployment did not give much concern due to the fact that such labour was largely unpaid.

In consequence, women were driven more and more out of the home and into the factory, which in turn caused an oversupply of workers in an industrialized world. The mothers and daughters, robbed of their ancient field of labour within the home, were now forced to seek new ways of earning a living outside the home.

Inasmuch as industry and an advanced technique simultaneously opened up new fields of labour, the influx of women-workers did not bring about an immediate unemployment.

The economic value of women's work.

Heretofore society had, to a large extent, taken advantage of the circumstances attending woman's work within the home, which differed from work outside in that she was not compensated for her labour.

When women entered a new sphere of work outside the confines of the home the remuneration in money seemed to them a great advantage. By continuing to live at home, they were able to maintain a low cost of living, but on the other hand it largely curtailed their sphere of action and limited the market for their as yet untrained skill. Woman's conception of remunerative work was in the beginning casual and subordinated. For many work outside the home represented merely an interim before marriage - which continued to be considered the normal means of support. All this contributed to the prevailing idea that woman's work was inferior to man's and among employers and in public opinion the conviction grew that men and women should not enjoy equal pay, but men to have higher wages, women lower.

The consequences of a wage scale based on sex.

Since a man's earnings were considered to be the family's only source of income - for woman's work at home remained unpaid - a popular belief was established: man the provider,

woman the provided for. Formerly, moreover, it was a question of prestige, family prestige demanding that women lead the most idle and protected life possible.

This idea has set its stamp, indeed, laid the foundation for many of our laws and regulations up to the present day, and it is largely on this ground that man as the accepted family provider has enjoyed privileges, both monetary and in preferment, whether he was obliged to support a family or not.

For women, on the other hand, a scale of wages was fixed which was based on the minimum cost of living for a single person, irrespective of the fact if she was the bread-winner or not.

Naturally, this principally affected the women of the working classes, who were never privileged to choose between work at home or work outside, for to them it meant both, a double burden that was underpaid.

However, this wage scale based on sex finally had its effect on men's wages too - not only because of the competition itself which entered in as a factor but also because this competition was waged with the weapons of underpayment.

The effects of the World War on women's work.

It is often maintained that the World War, destructive and disastrous though it was, yet indirectly brought to women a longed-for opportunity, speeding up by several decades their advance in the field of remunerative work.

The lack of man power in trade and industry caused by the war so greatly increased the demand for women in these fields that one no longer thought of their private conditions of life. If a woman were married or unmarried, wife or mother, supporter or supported, was no longer of any consequence, and they proved their efficiency to a degree hitherto unsuspected.

The home woman, wife and mother, showed herself capable of work which formerly lay quite outside her sphere of interest and experience, and thus demonstrated the injustice lying in hide-bound tradition.

The mother who had children to provide for frequently showed a deeper sense of responsibility and was more conscientious in her work than the unmarried woman who was more given to pleasure-seeking. How often did not the mother support the whole family by her work while the father was away from home.

On their return from the war, men experienced the unwelcome competition of a new and partially trained working unit.

A number of other effects of the war, such as the difficulties in finding markets for increased production, contributed to an increasing and wide-spread unemployment, a circumstance which resulted in still further reaction against women as a factor in the labour market and which was directed especially against the wife and mother, the so-called supported woman.

Familiar phrases to the fore.

"Woman's place is in the home as the mother and educator of her children". In the excitement no one stopped to think that this phrase, appropriate perhaps when women had on an average 10 - 12 children, which for a period of 20 years took all of her time and strength, now seems rather antiquated since women today are themselves able to determine the number of their children.

It is hardly to be expected that the one - or two - children system prevailing today lays claim to all of a woman's strength and working ability in her rôle as a mother. The short limited period during which, because of her motherhood, she is incapacitated from working outside the home, a competent substitute ought to be provided for her, just as when she is away from work due to other illnesses.

Before I proceed further let me reiterate the simple fact that today there are millions of women engaged in earning their own living. Among them a large number of mothers are the sole support of their children. Life demands this contribution of labour from woman, for in many cases she is the family provider according to law. Finland's new marriage law provides that the woman as well as the man contribute to the family budget, either through money contributions, through work at home, or otherwise. In other words: the wife has equal responsibility with the husband for the family support. This law by no means pertains to assured support for the women, but, on the contrary, to increased duty of support and responsibility on her part, but is, however, so new that it has not yet succeeded in reaching the general consciousness.

Society has always been willing to bow before "hard necessity", such as when a single battle has made thousands of women widows and thousands of children fatherless, calmly trusting to the mother to manage to support herself and her children, although it is not an easy task for a widow or divorced woman to get back a place from which she has once been ousted. Therefore, every law which renders difficult or robs a mother of gainful occupation is a blow at her rights as a citizen to work in order to support her family if necessary without any special restrictions.

Among the many problems that meet the thinking person of to-day none is more important than this. The position of women in the labour market, the whole problem in itself becomes peculiarly our own, if we realize that it forms the very basis of our existence. If we consider the mother's attitude towards work desirable or not is neither here nor there, for we must accept matters as they actually are rather than discuss how they ought to be.

The old cliché "Woman's place is in the home" is no longer of any value in view of the fact that in order to have some sort of a decent home a great many women are dependent upon the money they can earn. Work outside the home is essential for them if they wish to attain the simplest needs for their families or to keep up a certain standard. Even men must admit that there is little to do in the home compared to former days and that a mother cannot devote herself solely to the home if the husband's income is insufficient to support his family, even if we ignore the right of every person to be at liberty to choose work that is available or in which he or she is interested.

The problem has become further intensified because of the present world depression and the keen competition arising therefrom. Therefore, from the economic as well as the social point of view it demands our special attention, for it concerns not only the individual, but international, social law-making.

It is undeniable that present events and circumstances have made this question an actual one. We too are keenly aware of the situation; in Finland, for instance, statistics show that in 1920 in Helsingfors 10.8% of the married women were engaged in work outside the home, while ten years later, in 1930, the number was practically doubled, or 21.1% (of whom about $\frac{1}{2}$ belonged to the working-classes).

This increase is, no doubt, largely due to the disorganized economic conditions prevailing, but also depends upon the fact that an increasing number of women with higher education and with years of expensive preparatory training behind them hesitate to

waste their knowledge to no purpose. Economic necessity, a personal interest in their work or profession, these are the main incentives for woman's work outside the home and as such we must respect it.

One is still inclined to disregard this individual and civic right of every woman to self-determination regarding her work, and as heretofore one constantly resorts to legal restrictions in order to circumvent her.

The International Labour Office and woman's work.

As far as protective measures are concerned, it would be more logical for all such measures to be based on the type of work and not on the sex of the worker.

Mr. Albert Thomas, the former head of the International Labour Office, theoretically indicated this view-point when he wrote: "In former days the community had difficult and dangerous tasks performed by convicts; nowadays the problem is a different one - an awakening conscience demands that no special class of society be exposed to vocational dangers and illnesses but that one must seek to overcome the evil".

Thus one was justified in supposing that the Labour Office, whose aim it is to safeguard the interests of the workers, both men and women, would follow these principles in international legislation at least and as far as possible pattern laws on past experiences, with an eye to present-day needs. But nothing new was accomplished - one discussed and decided matters according to old, worn-out procedure.

One still considered that women must be "protected" by various restrictions, without the slightest regard as to the effect of such legislation on their earning powers and their whole economic position, while men were permitted to expose themselves to risks of all kinds, for they demanded the right to draw higher wages and run whatever risks they chose.

With such phrases as "the good of the race", "the duty of the state", etc., the greater part of all protective legislation for the benefit of women, based on well-meant regard for their health and morals, has been formulated, so as, as the phrase has it, to protect the coming generation through the mothers. The eagerness with which men by means of legislation have theoretically shown their concern for woman's morality is in truth touching. Did they evince the same concern outside her working-field the question of protecting her on moral grounds would probably never have been raised. That the father's health is an equally important factor never seems to have been considered.

In Washington, in 1919, there followed in quick succession the conventions regarding night-work and protection for mothers, forbidding them to work for a certain period before and after childbirth.

The Night-Work Convention was adopted without any reference to existing health statistics, such as those from England, where during the duration of the war women were no longer debarred from night-work, and which showed that, with higher wages, improved factory and living conditions, the health of both mothers and children had been materially bettered in spite of increased speed and pressure. At the close of the war, when men resumed their positions and women workers were once more crowded out or went back to starvation wages, the sanitary and living conditions of the women and children were correspondingly lowered.

Later on, in 1921, the Lead-paint Convention was adopted, under the all-inclusive heading of "dangerous trades", under whose shadow so many women have been shut out from lucrative employment.

Conventions adopted with special reference to mothers.

As a reason for the Lead-paint Convention and the consequent working restrictions for women, it has been stated primarily that women are more susceptible to lead-poisoning than men. Through subsequent investigations - which for lack of space I shall not go into now - this statement has been refuted. Secondly, it is maintained that through the mothers a new generation is injured, and, thirdly, that lead-poisoning leads to miscarriage.

Here also new investigations prove that in this respect lead-poisoning is equally dangerous for the father and liable to lead to miscarriage. Thus, as poisoning can attack women through the man even though they have not been exposed to lead-paint, the danger through him may be considered even more serious in that a larger number of germs are destroyed, while in a woman only her own foetus is sacrificed. Such laws satisfy the public conscience, but the danger to health remains unaltered.

In spite of these new investigations what steps has the International Labour Office taken to revise the convention? The answer is a negative one.

The results of all such legislation for the "benefit" of women, even after science has succeeded in eliminating the poisonous element or in substituting a less dangerous one, have been to strengthen the old tradition that such work is not "woman's work", that the by-laws of the trade unions exclude women, and that men continue to have a monopoly.

In England, for instance, the Civil Department has sent out circulars to all lead-paint workmen giving detailed advice to safe-guard their health and which, it is maintained, if followed, will make working with lead-paint absolutely free from danger. And yet women are not permitted to engage in this lucrative and admittedly safe occupation. Through the mothers, bearers of a new generation, one discriminates against all women, the future mothers.

The so-called protection of mothers, debarring them from work for certain periods before and after childbirth.

We come here to one of the most debated points within so-called protective legislation, calling forth divergent opinions and much misunderstanding.

Different countries have introduced different time limits, some with full compensation, others with a minimum, and advanced in part by employers and the state, some with no compensation whatever as in Finland.

O.D.I. opposes all such legislation, not only because it does not represent actual protection, restricts women's individual freedom and their rights as wage-earners, but also because such drafts on the employers make women less desirable as workers, thereby greatly affecting their earning powers.

Due to these laws she is perforce obliged to give up easy and well-paid work in hygienic surroundings and, destitute and in enforced idleness, seek casual, poorly-paid work, such as scrubbing halls and offices, doing heavy washing, etc., which is in truth "permitted" but is uncontrolled and frequently detrimental to health, and that at a time when proper food and a regular routine is most important for her and her child.

To what absurdities such legislation can lead I shall illustrate with several examples, one from Finland, where we have a four-weeks' restriction of all factory work after childbirth, without any compensation whatever: A janitor's wife worked at a factory pasting on labels - surely the easiest work imaginable. After the birth of her child she took on her husband's work in

her spare time, so that by work outside he could eke out the family income. The janitor's job included shovelling coal. After four weeks she returned to her old job and burst out: "Thank God, at last I am back at restful work".

Another example is well illustrated by Denmark's law in reference to teachers: If a teacher is pregnant she must leave her position 3 months before delivery, as she is considered unfit to be seen by school-children. Exemption may be granted if she appears before the school-board to show herself and is perhaps graciously permitted to continue teaching for a little while longer.

Apparently one has not stopped to think that children may see their own mother at home in this improper condition. Surely, it would be best to shut away women during their period of pregnancy.

Is this not proof sufficient how high this "sacred motherhood" is regarded by the very men who wish us to give up our freedom and economic independence, since they evidently consider it improper for children to see a pregnant woman in their midst?

The O.D.I. considers the hygienic importance of prohibitive legislation as of negative value. It is hygienically dangerous because it is an equivocal measure, preventing really effective measures from being taken, and because it has a detrimental effect on woman's economic position. Therefore, we are justified in striving for the repeal of all such laws as our aim is to secure decent living-conditions for all women in order that healthy and happy children may be born into the world.

All international Conventions ought to be built on tried and unprejudiced experience instead of on worn-out traditions and pharisaical thinking.

Experience in England has shown that prohibiting prospective mothers for a certain period has been valueless as a protective measure. In 1891 a law was adopted forbidding work for four weeks after confinement, but this law was and continues to be a dead letter. This was clearly shown in a circular sent out twelve years later, in 1903. In 1913 the first law granting mothers compensation during enforced periods of idleness was passed and within 2 years' time only 8 cases of transgression of the law were recorded. Debarment from work does not, however, exercise control over either the employers or the women workers. The granting of compensation is a step in the right direction, and the women have shown their willingness to give up work for the time demanded. Their free choice in the matter - to accept or reject, forms the flexible regulator needed, adaptable to different circumstances.

Some women are so well and strong that they do not require the same interval of rest as other women. The former can resume work earlier than the stipulated period, the latter may need a longer time to recuperate, but the interests of both ought to be considered.

That no mother takes up harmful work unless she is forced to through dire necessity is a self-evident fact too obvious to occur to the law-makers. But a law that forces a mother and her child to starve and freeze is poor protection.

No curtailment of the right to work.

This is the decision the O.D.I. has adopted as its leading principle. Concerning disability due to pregnancy or confinement, the O.D.I. maintains that the rights granted by law to employees in every country in case of illness shall also be granted to women unable to work because of maternity.

The O.D.I. wishes to make it clear that it in no way opposes special benefits or insurance aid to women who are about to become mothers if the conditions surrounding such aid are beneficial and not restrictive.

The O.D.I. has been happy to note that so many women physicians have shown themselves in agreement with our aims and point of view. Many gynecologists have emphasized the fact that pregnancy ought to be considered a quite normal proceeding and that it is the sensible thing for healthy pregnant women to carry on their usual daily routine. Naturally there are less normal cases which preclude all work, but these must be treated individually, irrespective of any proscribed period of rest.

International Congress of Women Physicians in Vienna, 1931:

The question of protective legislation from the social-medical point of view.

From this we see that this question is considered of extreme importance, arousing international interest at the present moment. That opinions are greatly divergent and that a uniform solution is difficult to reach we know beforehand. The Latin countries continue to work for special and wide-reaching protective laws for women. In opposition to them stood the Scandinavian countries and Finland, who formulated their opinion thus: "We consider that all legislation regarding dangerous trades ought to be as effectual as possible, irrespective of sex". The British and American delegates supported the Scandinavian resolution.

At said Congress, Dr. Balfour, who had long served in India, stated that among 250,000 women textile workers, with excessively long working hours, she had not noticed ill effects from overwork in her confinement cases but, more so from undernourishment and early marriages.

The International Labour Office's Encyclopaedia of Industrial Hygiene.

In this connection I cannot refrain from touching upon this work on hygiene, pathology and social welfare in industry, a work which according to the Labour Office ought to be in possession of every organisation interested in hygienic conditions in industry. Turning to the chapter entitled "Woman's Work" and glancing at the profuse illustrations, one gets the impression that pregnancy is a prevailing condition among women workers: women in the last stages and in the most awkward postures are shown to illustrate the irrelevant statements of supposed experts, such as:

- (1) The injurious effects of labour (industrial) on the female organism is established.
- (2) The injurious effects of employment (industrial, on women) is proved.
- (3) It is proved that the rhythm of machinery is not adapted to the female organism.
- (4) Intellectual work is said to be a still heavier cause of sickness among women.
- (5) The same holds good for those engaged in office work.
- (6) Fatigue and over-pressure of work are, without doubt, a greater source of female sickness than poverty.

and finally the article proposes that further restrictions should be placed upon the right of women to engage in paid work.

To judge from the above it would seem that only unpaid work is healthful for women and one asks oneself, says one woman physician, what trade is left that may not be considered dangerous. According to statistics the least dangerous profession apparently is the ministry, but here too, though for other reasons, women have been debarred in most countries.

The Open Door International declares that the publication by the International Labour Office of this article, which purports to be scientific and objective, is a grave dereliction of the public duty imposed on the International Labour Office by the Peace Treaties since the article is in fact pseudo-scientific and propagandish in character.

The Open Door International, therefore, has called upon the International Labour Office to withdraw from its Encyclopaedia the article entitled "Occupation and Health".

The injurious effects of labour (industrial) on the female organism

is set forth by whole series of statistics, but no statistics call attention to the foremost reason for these ill effects, i.e. the low wages paid to women workers. In starvation wages and all the dire results: insufficient food, miserable housing conditions, ceaseless worry for the morrow as well as overstrain and a lack of joy in their work, herein lies the most serious danger to prospective mothers. It is poverty which undermines physical vitality.

Hitherto, when it came to adopting practical measures for regulating women's work, the International Labour Office worked on the lines laid down by their former chief, Mr. Thomas: Women must as far as possible be debarred from factory work, which is prejudicial to their health. One wonders what the powers-that-be would have to say to the observations of Sherwood Anderson, an American author, who comes to quite different conclusions after a thorough study of men and women workers in relation to the machine. "The machine", he says, "is stronger, more beautiful, more complete in comparison with man. It humbles man, squeezes all self-confidence out of him. Woman on the other hand can handle a machine with greater confidence, for she knows that when all is said and done, it can never give birth to living young".

The International Labour Office has always been aware that protective measures must be adopted internationally so that the nations adopting same will not run the risk of being outdistanced industrially by the others, but one does not seem to realise that if protection is confined to but one sex the unprotected sex will win in unfair competition over the protected. The danger of an organisation like the I.L.O. is that it easily becomes a hotbed for mechanised ideas and separate interests, instead of a world forum where new ideas and conceptions are worked out and effectuated for the benefit of humanity.

How many senseless laws concerning women have not been adopted whose consequences have simply been disregarded. All special laws for women, whether they concern mothers or unmarried women, are contrary to the principles of equality, and both in content and in form insult the conception of justice on which we have built our social order during the last decades.

It is in truth high time that we seek to get clearness in these matters and to separate the question of unemployment from that of the human right to work. The same rights should be granted to all citizens and the privilege to work and earn a living not be made dependent on private conditions or sex.

Motherhood used as an excuse to curtail woman's work is an invidious attack against marriage as well as against the brave efforts of young women who turn to vocational work, for it is obvious that the interest given to steady, permanent work is vastly different to that given to casual or temporary work from which one may be ousted upon contracting marriage.

Not only is it a question of economic values but it touches on far deeper interests. The struggle of men against women especially mothers in the labour market has its root - let us say it first as last - in their desire to maintain control over the mother and child; either man is forced to give up his control voluntarily or to continue it by enforced measures. The more victories we win, the harder will be the struggle for enforcement.

Our victories in the field of social equality have not succeeded in driving this victory home in men's consciousness. The way is still long for men are imbued with the idea of woman's inferiority and seek to take advantage of it.

If women are fighting for economic liberty and the right to determine their own life and career it is first and foremost a fight for their dignity as human beings, for them economic independence is a sine qua non, so that they may realise their own personalities and develop all their talents. Moreover, we all need the incentive that lies in open competition.

The development of all our strength and energy benefits the home and motherhood.

The thorough training and many-sided experience that a woman gains through a wider contact with reality have their influence on the home in the shape of better organisation and a deeper insight and understanding in the child's education. Instead of opposing women's entry into vocational fields society ought rather to encourage and help them as much as possible in their heavy and double burden of caring for the home and earning a living outside it.

A step in the right direction is the establishment of children's crèches, kindergartens, milk-stations and information centres for needy mothers, but all this must be on a more extensive scale. Some form of financial aid or mother insurance, without restrictions, ought to be introduced so as to compensate her for a loss in income she can so ill afford.

The child's position and its rights in a social world.

When one speaks of the mother as a wage-earner one cannot ignore this important question. The heart aches in contemplating it. Every child ought to have the right to its mother, but not even this right has been granted to all children today. In my mind's eye I see a propaganda picture by the Russian painter Komarow, entitled "The Infants' Protest Meeting", executed for a woman doctor, Dr. Lebedev, who runs a hospital for women and children in Moscow. Underneath the picture we read: "We demand healthy parents, mother's milk, fresh air and sunshine, and clean, dry diapers". All this the child has a right to ask of society. Besides it has the right to demand that in exchange for honest labour the mother will be given a wage sufficient for the needs of both. For the infant it is still more important to be assured of security through the mother's work outside the home than to be deprived of that security with the privilege of being nursed at a meagre and famished bosom.

Rare indeed is the spectacle of a woman who neglects her babe. Even if circumstances force her to work outside the home, she continues to exert a beneficent influence on the home, for what we love we always devote time to.

How many women there are who have not the slightest aptitude or inclination for housekeeping, yet show decided talents along spiritual, artistic, social or industrial lines. If such women are bound only to the home their personality becomes warped and misdirected. Their energy is wasted and they are poor housewives, while had they been able to develop their gifts they would have amounted to something worth while. Motherhood and intellectual work do not preclude each other; at the most they can impose difficult living conditions upon the individual. Experience shows us that here as in most cases a great deal depends upon the character and strength of the individual.

Life means work and achievement, work in sorrow and in joy - what we do is not so important as how we do it. A wife and mother who glories in her work spreads joy and happiness around her. She is able, be she a wage-earner or not, to do wonders, to create a real home, an abode of peace in the midst of the turmoil of this world.

The main thing, therefore, is that woman be permitted to choose the work to which she is adapted and which interests her. It has often been pointed out that until now the mother has been classed with the child in all legislation. Her right to determine her own life has not been considered. It is time for her to take her place beside the man as an adult person and free citizen and that all regulations and legislation regarding her work be based on the kind of work and not on the sex of the worker.

May we women be ceaseless in our efforts to attain within ourselves true motherhood and gather all our strength and energy to use them for the good of the home and of society.
