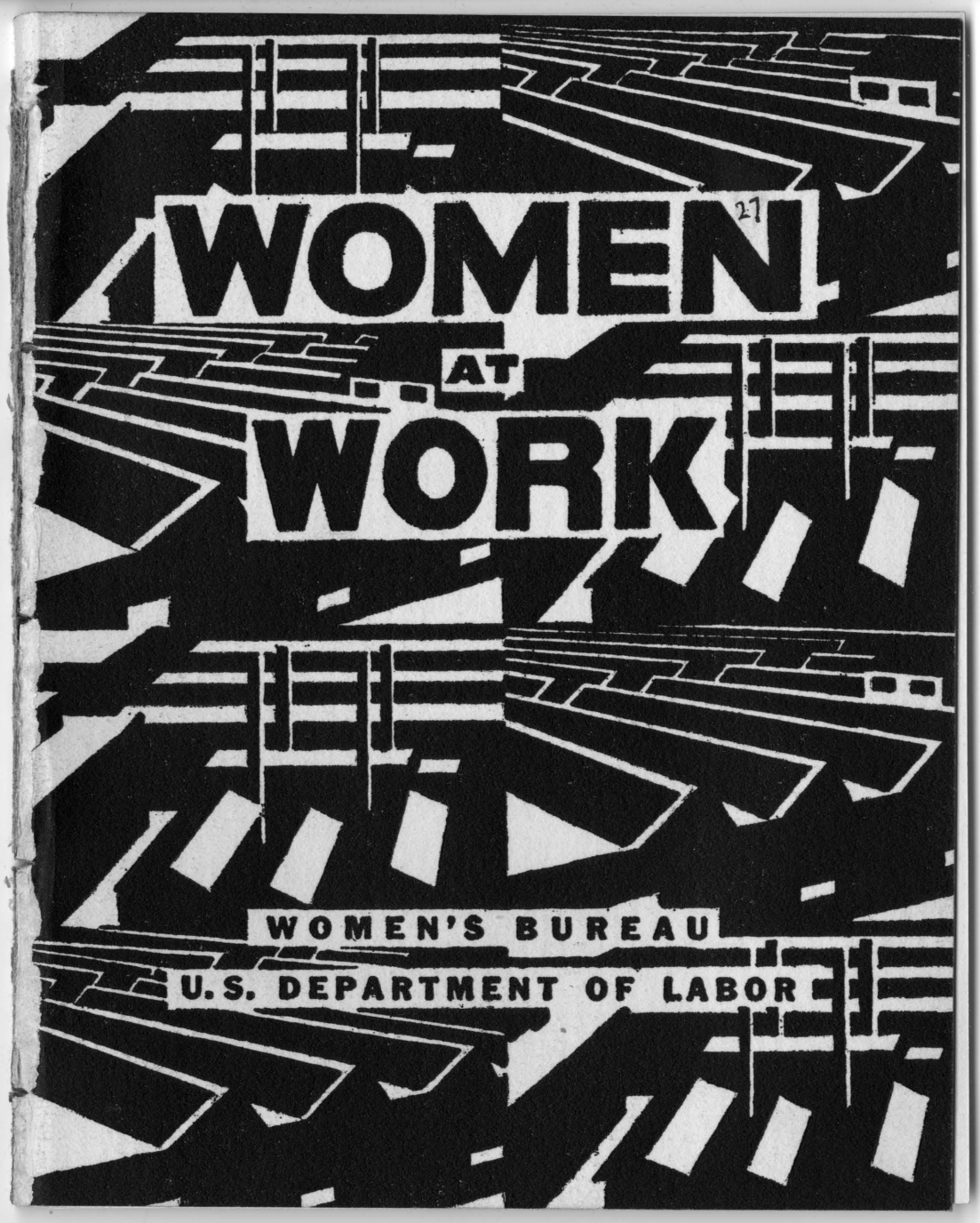

WOMEN
AT
WORK
WOMEN'S BUREAU
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

WOMEN AT WORK

A CENTURY OF INDUSTRIAL CHANGE



UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT
OF LABOR

WOMEN'S
BUREAU

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This review of women's progress in American industry has been written by Eleanor Nelson, of the division of public information of the Women's Bureau. The cover and illustrations are the work of Jean W. Hill

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INTRODUCTION

WOMEN were at work one hundred years ago. Women have always worked. But when this century opened it was within the home that most of them carried on the tasks of providing food, shelter, and clothing. From dawn to dark, women spun, wove, and sewed, cooked, and made butter, cheese, candles, and countless other everyday articles. Nowadays more than 10 million women in the United States leave their homes daily to work for pay. Wherever there is work to be done in our vast industrial system the hands and brains of women aid in doing it.

To tell the story of the changes that have taken place in women's work during the past one hundred years is to tell the story of the industrial expansion of a nation. That women today are contributing their share to the economic maintenance of themselves or their families is not new. But the fact that women in increasing numbers have entered factory or store to work for pay is new. And it is new and characteristic of this century that the individuality of women's work, once expressed in delicately fashioned quilts, smoothly woven clothes, and well-baked food, is lost in industry in the machine labor of making standardized products.

The invention of machines, the growth of a huge industrial system, the development of a vast frontier land, the duration of a Civil and a World War—an economic history of two centuries—all these are part of the story of working women. Running through it all, however, two factors in women's employment have been consistent—an oversupply of women for the jobs available, and lower wages for women than for men.



THE COMING OF THE MACHINE

INTO a world of gardening and raising sheep in the back yard, of grinding flour, of weaving cloth in the "front room", the first machines appeared during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Manufacturers with enough capital to buy machines that were too expensive for individual workers to own began machine production for profit. This system was to revolutionize our whole manner of life.

Many of the earlier machines did work that had always been done by women at home—spinning, weaving, and sewing. Naturally, manufacturers looking for factory operatives turned to women. The change from home to factory work was neither sudden nor complete. While some women were at work in the early textile mills, in many industries only one or two jobs were done in factories at first. The rest of the product was made by the old hand processes at home.

Indeed, women often combined their household duties with working for pay at home.

As the invention of machines went on, as factories grew in size and completeness, work became more and more concentrated. Instead of doing part-time work at home with their own makeshift equipment, women spent the entire day in the factories for wages.

Though the first women to enter factory employment were simply following their work from home to shop, this was only a small factor among the forces that were driving women into industrial employment.

The factory soon showed that it was able to turn out goods more rapidly, more cheaply, and more efficiently than they had ever been produced before. Steam and electricity succeeded water as the source of power. New machines were invented that took over the production of an ever-increasing variety of goods, and new products were created. Meanwhile, women turned to factory employment in growing numbers as it became possible to have a greater variety of possessions by working for wages than by producing articles on a handicraft basis.

The factories, located with a view to available power and future marketing, soon developed communities, and these attracted other workers in various lines of activity. As towns grew in size, many of the older household occupations became impossible. Sheep could not be raised; dairying could not be carried on; even large vegetable gardens could not be planted. But in factories there was a growing demand for labor to turn out increasing quantities of food, clothing, shoes, soap, and other articles. The housewife found it cheaper and easier to buy these things from the stores than to spend many hours making them at home. The work necessary to carry on household activities decreased.

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As a result, many women became surplus labor as far as their relation to the family was concerned. To these women factory work offered the means of supporting themselves and of continuing their contribution to the family income.

The movement was hastened by the fact that men's wages were not high enough to meet the needs and demands of the family. To secure a living for the family the earnings of women were in many cases an actual necessity.

But the place taken by women in factories has been mainly in the unskilled and lower-paid jobs; the skilled and better-paid occupations have remained largely the property of men. As the use of machines has progressed, the dividing of operations has increased tremendously the number of unskilled and low-paid jobs, and these have fallen to women much more than to men.

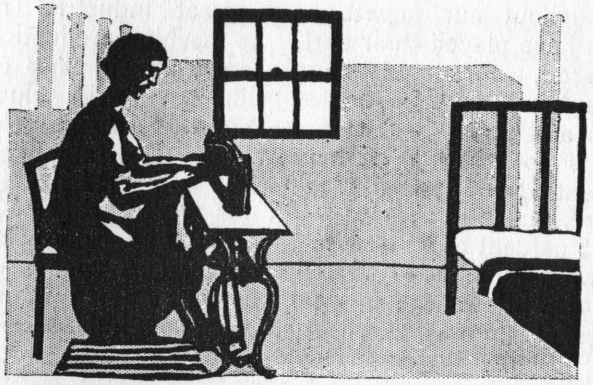
Although today there are still about 3½ times as many men as women in factories, the women employed there are over 1½ millions. It is true that more than half of the women are in two of their traditional industries—textiles and clothing—but there are few factories in which no women work. They have made a spectacular advance in the past 20 years in slaughtering and meat-packing houses, in automobile factories and the rubber industry, in chemical plants, and in electrical machinery and supply factories.

The machine has meant still more to women workers. With mass production of goods, mass distribution is necessary. Goods must be sold to wholesalers and then to retailers. They must be transported from factory to warehouse, to store. Thus the need of clerical workers and salespeople has grown. Today, as a result, about as many women as men are clerical workers. Indeed, more women do clerical work than are employed in factories, and over half a million women are working as saleswomen in stores.

THE COMING OF THE MACHINE

Throughout our growth as a great industrial nation women have played their part. As machine production has progressed, as railroads have opened up all parts of the continent, as the low-roofed village with its clustered houses and shops has been transformed into today's city with its towering skyscrapers, huge department stores, tenement dwellings, and factories, women have turned in increasing numbers to work for wages. In 1870 less than 15 percent of all women 16 years of age and over were breadwinners. Today 25.3 percent of such women—1 in every 4—work for their living. But in too many thousands of cases, at all times, that living has been pitifully inadequate.

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LOW WAGES FOR WOMEN

THE history of women in industry has been darkened by the low wages they have been paid. In an industrial system where the profits of the manufacturer depend on low production costs, the temptation has been to pay the lowest wages for which it is possible to obtain workers. Because there have been many thousands more women ready and eager to work than there have been jobs available, the woman worker has accepted jobs at almost any wage rather than be unemployed. This competition has been made keener and her bargaining power has been made weaker by the fact that the work she has been given to do could be done equally well by thousands of other untrained women.

Moreover, when woman first went into factories to work she was still thought of as part of a family group whose main support came from the men of the household—father, husband, or brother. Her wages were looked upon as extra

spending money, not as earnings on which she had to depend for her support. This idea still prevails with many employers and has had much to do with keeping women's wages at a low level.

Whatever excuse there may have been for this idea in the past, today the wages of most women are as necessary as the wages of most men. If the woman worker is single, she is likely to have not only herself but other people to support—aged parents, young sisters or brothers. As sons leave home more than daughters do, it falls to the daughters to take over the financial responsibility of the family.

If a married woman is working in a factory, a laundry, or a restaurant kitchen, one may be pretty sure that her husband or sons are unemployed, or their wages are too low to properly shelter, feed, and clothe the family. The earnings of unskilled laboring men in general are not large enough to support a family at the American level of health and decency, and the earnings of skilled laborers are so reduced by unemployment and part time that they, too, fall below a decent family standard of living.

The married woman has always played an important part in feeding and clothing the family. In the old days, by caring for a large household by the old hand methods and raising children, she not only was kept busy from sunrise to sunset but she made an indispensable contribution to the economic life of the family.

Today many women still do some manufacturing within their homes—canning and preserving, baking, making clothing and house furnishings. But for many others a system that has taken their work from the home demands that they make their contribution by working for wages. More and more married women are being forced into the ranks of wage earners. In 1890 only 13.9 percent of all women workers were

married, but by 1930 this proportion had risen to 28.9 percent, though marriage had increased only slightly in the general population.

A hundred years ago it was estimated that women's wages in every branch of business averaged less than 37½ cents a day, and at that time a day's work averaged 12 or more hours. Men's earnings were about four times as much as women's. As late as 1863 women in New York had weekly wages of only $2, while their hours ranged from 11 to 16 a day. In 1932 the best available State figures, those of New York and Illinois, showed women's average weekly earnings in manufacturing to be $13.75 and $12.15, respectively. The National Industrial Conference Board gives an even lower estimate of the average weekly wage of women throughout the country—$11.72.

Naturally, the course of women's wages fluctuates, rising in times of prosperity and falling in times of depression. Figures show that the actual money wages of women have risen as the century has progressed, but the cost of living has done the same thing. Some idea of what the wages of today mean in the lives of working women may be had by comparing the New York average wage of $13.75 with the estimate of the lowest amount at which a girl in New York City could get board and lodging only. This estimate was made by the State Department of Labor and was based on the barest and most meager standards. Adjusted to the 1932 cost-of-living figures, the amount required for board and lodging would be $11.63, leaving the average working girl in New York the pitifully small sum of $2.12 a week for clothing, car fare, laundry, recreation, and all other expenses. Other figures have shown conclusively that throughout the Nation hundreds of thousands of working women are paid far below what it costs to live decently and happily.

LOW WAGES FOR WOMEN

Women's wages lag far behind those of men. For the years from 1922 to 1932 figures from the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics show that women's average earnings in 9 important woman-employing industries were only from 45 to 84 percent as much as men's. In over three fourths of the cases women's earnings were less than 70 percent of men's.

In New York women's wages in manufacturing were only 54 percent of men's in 1932; in Illinois they were only 58 percent. Although the difference between men's and women's wages is largely due to women's work being unskilled, even when they work at the same jobs women as a rule receive less pay than men.

That there are many thousands more women anxious to work than there are jobs open for them to fill has been an important factor in keeping women's wages down. When the factory gate shows crowds of women seeking work, those employed are forced by competition to accept low wages.

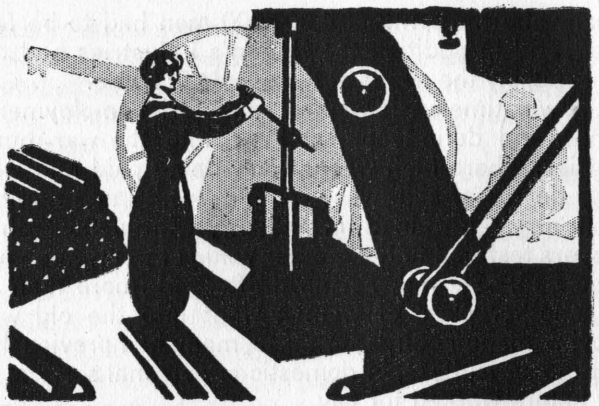
The exploitation of women who have done industrial home work has been especially appalling. In squalid tenement homes that are badly heated and lighted, women driven by family need, and having little or no industrial experience, make or finish garments, string tags, card buttons, hooks and eyes, or safety pins, make garters, knit or embroider, and work on cheap jewelry, lamp shades, flowers, powder puffs, paper boxes and bags, carpet rags, and toys for distressingly low wages. While 14 States have laws that limit the evils of industrial home work, the practice has increased with the general breaking down of employment standards in the recent years of depression. More and more employers, unable or unwilling to meet the overhead expenses necessary in operating a factory, are giving the work out to be done in homes at shockingly low wages.

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To the hardships of the industrial home worker have been added the hardships of the girls and women who work in the sweatshops of our clothing trades. These shops, frequently working on contract for larger firms and competing unfairly with the many employers who treat their workers justly, evade labor laws or "run away" to small communities where regulations are less strict or do not exist. The $2.98, $3.98, and $4.98 dresses that fill store windows today are due to the fact that poverty is forcing large numbers of girls to work for inhumanly long hours and at starvation wages rather than have no work at all.

The terrible consequences of hundreds of thousands of women struggling along on wages that are too low to support them in health or even decency cannot be disputed. The privation and suffering endured by them and their dependents are serious enough, but other grave consequences follow. It is impossible for men to obtain high wages for work that can be done more cheaply by women, and because they are competitors in the labor market women's low wages tend to drag down those of men. As industry becomes more and more machine tending, and skilled jobs become fewer, the wage level of the mass of workers is likely to adjust itself to the low level set for women.

Low wages, moreover, are disastrous to the industrial system itself. As long as the workers, who largely make up the buying power of the Nation, are not paid sufficient wages to buy back the goods they produce, our industrial system based on production for profit cannot operate successfully.



WOMEN WORKERS IN WAR TIME

THE entrance of women into wage-earning occupations was tremendously speeded up by the Civil War and the World War. With the departure of men for the front, women moved into their places in factories and offices. The Nation's work and the new industries created by the war had to be carried on, and women were given the chance to enter trades and occupations never before open to them.

Of the role that women played during the World War we have a dramatic picture. The war itself wrenched the whole industrial machine. In the quick shift from peace to war status women as well as men were rapidly absorbed by the iron and steel mills, metal factories and foundries; they were practically drafted to make munitions and other war supplies. Aerial warfare created a new industry in which women were indispensable, and it expanded the industries that made the materials necessary for aircraft manufacture.

Meanwhile the army of 4,000,000 men had to be fed and clothed, and in addition the Nation's industries had to continue to supply the needs of the people at home.

In the war-time crisis women's industrial employment took two new and definite paths: First, into the war-munitions industries, where high wages were being paid and where a greater degree of skill was required, went large numbers of women already trained in industry; throughout the war employers testified to the greater value of the women already experienced. Second, as the drafts took more men to the front, another class of women went into the old woman-employing manufactures; of these, many had previously been at work in agriculture, in domestic or personal service, or had never before worked for pay.

As a special emergency measure, under the war-labor administration in Washington, there was set up in 1918 a Woman in Industry Service, whose duty it was to set standards for the employment of women in war work. Such an agency had long been the desire of progressive people interested in women workers, but not until the war focused the attention of the public on the importance of women's work was it achieved.

The labor shortage created by the war gave more women than ever before in the history of the country the opportunity to enter factory work. By throwing open to them the iron and steel mills, sheet-metal plants, chemical and lumber mills, automobile and electrical-supply factories, it broadened their industrial horizon.

Many of these war jobs for women, it is true, were of a monotonous, unskilled type, such as tending automatic machines, or turning out, assembling, or inspecting duplicated parts, hundreds of thousands a day, at great speed. But the shortage of labor also cleared their way to many of the skilled

occupations and key positions in industry. In the iron and steel mills and other metal industries, for example, it opened to them the machine shop and the tool room. In other industries, too, women were given work requiring judgment, skill, and precision.

Moreover, the experience of women even in the war-supply industries was to be of peace-time value to them. For in factories making shells, guns, and other munitions women were handling the same kinds of machines and tools as were used by the women who made automobiles, motorcycles, electrical apparatus, and agricultural implements. In the furniture and veneer factories the same kind of work went into peace products as went into airplane parts, munition and tool boxes, or wheels for artillery trucks.

The war-time increase among women workers was not limited to the factories. Thousands more women than ever before became nurses, both at home and overseas. From 1910 to 1920 women school teachers increased in numbers by one third. The number of women telegraph operators doubled. The entrance of women into office work as stenographers and typists, clerks, and bookkeepers and cashiers was spectacular, their numbers increasing by over 800,000. With the surge of women into the newer occupations during the war period came a large decrease in two of their old lines of work—agriculture and domestic and personal service.

Would women remain as workers when the war ended? Many people thought this question would be answered by the return of women to their homes or their old occupations. And large numbers must have returned to their old occupations. But today we know that there are 2⅛ million more women at work than in 1920, immediately after the war.

While some of the most dramatic features of women's war work have disappeared, the field of their employment has

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been permanently and widely expanded. The woman streetcar conductor has practically vanished. Women in overalls turning out shells and guns are, happily, a thing of the past, but from 1920 to 1930 the number of women operatives in plants making electrical machinery, apparatus, and supplies increased by 18,000, the number in plants making chemicals and allied products by 9,700, and the number in automobile factories by more than 6,000.

The war proved that women could do work that no one had ever believed they could do. But it did more. Their substitution for men in carrying through a national emergency broke down many prejudices against their working and changed ideas as to the types of work they should do. What women could do properly and do well in war time became easier for them to do in a time of peace.

Among the permanent war-time gains made by women workers is the Women's Bureau of the United States Department of Labor, which grew out of the Woman in Industry Service of the war labor administration. The function of the Women's Bureau is to "formulate standards and policies which shall promote the welfare of wage-earning women, improve their working conditions, increase their efficiency, and advance their opportunities for profitable employment."

The Bureau investigates and reports to the Department all matters relating to the employment of women in industry. It is a fact-finding agency whose duty it is to study the problems and conditions of women workers, to decide by scientific research and investigation the best standards for their employment, and to make public its findings and conclusions. During the 15 years since the war the Bureau has published 110 bulletins. These are used by students, economists, legislators, labor unions, and employers as a guide in obtaining better standards of employment for women.



THE OPENING OF OPPORTUNITIES

THE change from hand to machine manufacture not only revolutionized woman's economic place in society but made profound changes in her social status. Many customs and prejudices were based on the fact that, in the old days, women's work was that of providing food, shelter, and clothing for the family within the home. Social standards for the behavior of women in regard to work were limited to the household duties of wife and mother. For these duties education was not considered necessary, and a century ago only a single college, Oberlin, opened its doors to women. Affairs outside their homes were not considered the concern of women. They were not allowed to vote and could take no part in legislative matters.

Against this social code came the impact of the machine. As soon as women entered factory employment their social horizon was immeasurably broadened. Now they must work long

hours and under conditions over which they had no control. If these were too long or arduous, their only remedy lay in organizing for collective bargaining and strikes, or in attempting to gain corrective labor legislation. But both these courses involved meetings, speaking on platforms and parading—activities that were not only unusual but absolutely scandalous for women of their day.

Meanwhile, as the wage-earning woman became an accepted part of our industrial life, it was natural that the more intelligent and ambitious women should turn toward the professions and the opportunities of education. Many of these women were not wage earners but had been freed by machine production from long hours of work within the home, and with more leisure were becoming actively interested in the events of the day.

But even here tradition and prejudice stood in women's way—insisting that women's place was the home, and not the lecture platform, the streets, in public life, in college, or competing with men.

During the century women have carried on a struggle to break down these prejudices. The scenes and issues of the feminist movement have varied, but the driving force behind the movement has been unaltered. It has been an effort on the part of women to adjust public opinion to their changed economic status; an effort to share equal opportunities with men in making a contribution to society outside the home, whether in industry, in the professions, or in public life. Though aided in their fight by the economic forces that were driving them, and by social changes that did much to break down old traditions, the gains that women have made have been the result of hard-won battles against hostile and bitter public opinion.

The struggle began simply with an attempt to organize, hold meetings, and speak on the lecture platform for whatever

cause they were interested in. But that women should speak or appear on a platform, whether to improve working conditions, to protest against slavery, or to fight for temperance was a cause of extreme public indignation. In 1837 Independence Hall was set on fire while Angelina Grimke was speaking, the mob incensed partly because a woman was speaking and partly because she spoke against slavery. Persisting in the face of this hostile public opinion, the early women speakers were shamed and ridiculed not only by men but by their sisters.

But the fight of women went on, soon centering around the struggle to obtain the vote, since this would help in the adjusting of other wrongs. The first public meeting to discuss the political rights of women was held in Seneca Falls, N.Y., in 1848, but the suffrage fight began in earnest with the forming of the National Woman Suffrage Association in 1869, which elected Elizabeth Cady Stanton as president and Susan B. Anthony as chairman of the executive committee. In 1878 the first suffrage amendment was introduced into the United States House of Representatives and its wording was never changed from that time until it was passed and made into a law that enfranchised women in 1920. The closing scenes of the fight for suffrage were dramatic. Mass meetings were held throughout the country, accompanied by spectacular street parades and outdoor speeches. A pilgrimage was made to Washington, and women suffragists picketing with banners in the Nation's capital were arrested and carried off in the "Black Maria" to the police station.

But the success of the feminist movement can be measured in more terms than the obtaining of the vote, important as was that step. It can be measured in the opening of educational opportunities to women and in their occupational advancement.

WOMEN AT WORK

When Oberlin College was established in 1833 on a coeducational plan it was the first school in the world to offer a college education to women. In 1848 Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell graduated in medicine at Geneva, N.Y., the first woman physician in the world. During her three years of study there the women at her boarding house refused to speak to her, and meeting her on the streets drew aside their skirts in contempt.

Today many women's colleges of the highest standing have been established. State universities and law and medical schools have opened their doors to women. During the decade 1920 to 1930 the number of professional women increased by 48 percent, until today they comprise more than 1,400,000, only 50,000 short of the number of professional men. Three fifths of these women are school teachers and another fifth are trained nurses, the latter an occupation entered by many women in the World War. But the numbers of women college presidents and professors; librarians; authors, editors, and reporters; and lawyers, judges, and justices—professions more recently opened to women—practically doubled during the past 10 years and represent real occupational gains for women.

Nowhere perhaps has the advancement of women been better shown than in the service of the United States Government. Here the only woman employed before the Civil War was Clara Barton, who in the late fifties worked in the Patent Office. She was dismissed because of her outspokenness in denouncing slavery, and for some years there was no woman in the Federal employ. Then in 1862 the barred door was opened just wide enough to admit one woman. The Secretary of the Treasury of that period, Francis E. Spinner, appointed Jennie Douglas to cut and trim paper currency, work done by hand and until then entirely by men. Secretary Spinner remarked that Miss Douglas' first day's work

"settled the matter in her behalf and in woman's favor." Shortly after, women were introduced into the dead-letter office of the Postal Service, where they opened and returned letters, soon doubling men's output. But many years passed and much legislation had to be enacted sanctioning women's employment, and not until 1919 was it made compulsory that all competitive examinations should be open to women and men alike. From then on women became a really important factor in the Government service.

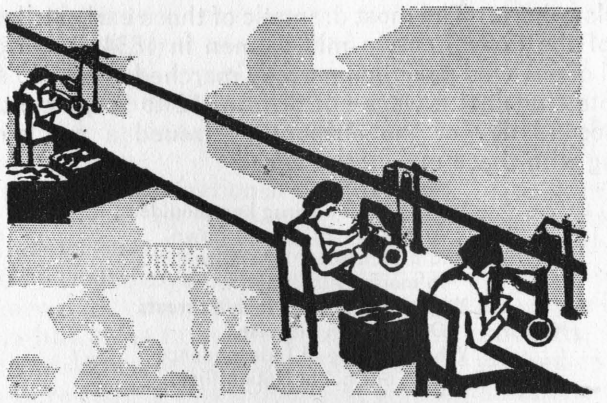
Today men still outnumber women on Uncle Sam's pay roll, and prejudice still stands in the way of appointments and promotions being made solely on the basis of fitness for the job. However, in December of 1932 an Executive order of President Hoover stipulated that appointing officers may no longer specify either sex as preferred, and that appointments must go to the persons highest on the register unless the work actually is unsuited to their sex.

In June 1932 less than 88,000 women, in contrast to 492,000 men, were on the Federal pay roll. Stenographers and clerks made up the great majority of these women, but many held professional and scientific positions, such as librarian, scientist, economist, business or medical specialist, and legal assistant, and many others held important administrative and executive positions.

The change in public attitude toward women's abilities is reflected in the number of women in public life today. With the appointment of Frances Perkins as Secretary of Labor, for the first time in history a woman is serving as a member of the Cabinet; and with Ruth Bryan Owen as minister to Denmark, for the first time a woman is representing the United States at a foreign court. Another historic landmark was passed in November 1932, when Hattie Caraway was elected to the United States Senate by the State of Arkansas.

WOMEN AT WORK

While woman today still has far from an equal footing with man, whether in industry, in the professions, or in government, intelligent and well-directed effort has advanced her a long way toward her goal of standing side by side with him in making the laws and doing the work of the new economic order in which she, as well as he, must work and live.



FIGHT FOR BETTER CONDITIONS

THROUGHOUT our industrial history low wages and long hours have been used too frequently by employers in their efforts to increase profits. For this reason workers have been forced into labor unions to protect themselves. United by their mutual desire to improve their laboring conditions, workers in a trade or industry have joined together in organizations, and through collective bargaining and the strike have fought for higher wages, shorter hours, and better working conditions.

Women early became active in the labor movement. In 1825 the tailoresses of New York formed a union, but the first strike of women occurred in 1828, at Dover, N.H., where three or four hundred women marched out in protest against certain obnoxious regulations. Throughout the thirties there were strikes of tailoresses, seamstresses, cotton-mill workers, and other groups, in New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts,

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and elsewhere. The most dramatic of these early strikes was that of the Lowell cotton-mill women in 1834, when at the signal of a waved poke bonnet they marched out 2,000 strong in protest against a wage cut of from 12 to 25 percent. On the second day of the strike they issued a proclamation closing with these elaborate lines:

Let oppression shrug her shoulders,
  And a haughty tyrant frown,
And little upstart Ignorance
  In mockery look down.
Yet I value not the feeble threats
  Of Tories in disguise,
While the flag of Independence
  O'er our noble Nation flies.

During the forties and fifties, women's organization was most effective in labor-reform associations of Lowell, Manchester, Dover, Fall River, New York, and Philadelphia. Although somewhat humanitarian in spirit and laying special stress on educational activities, these associations, composed chiefly of textile-mill girls, included capmakers, shoemakers, tailoresses, and seamstresses. Through strikes they were able to raise wages and shorten the workday, and successful agitation was carried on for protective legislation. Outstanding here was the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association, which under the leadership of Sarah Bagley secured the signatures of thousands of factory operatives, petitioning the legislature for a 10-hour day. In the first Government labor investigation in this country it sent delegates to urge the question before a legislative committee in the statehouse at Boston in 1845.

The main strength of unionism among women during the next 20 years was in local unions of the various trades. Laundresses, capmakers, printers, burnishers, textile work-

ers, umbrella sewers, seamstresses, tailoresses, shoe workers, and cigar makers were so organized. In 1869 women boasted their first national organization—the Daughters of St. Crispin, a union of women shoe workers comprising two or three dozen local lodges scattered across the country from Maine to California.

Not until the organization of the Knights of Labor, however, which dominated the trade-union scene through the eighties and nineties, was any real effort made to encourage the organization of women on an equal footing and with equal power with men. By then the necessity of organizing women workers had come to be recognized by men unionists. With division of labor, women who traditionally worked for low wages were coming into industry in growing numbers. Men unionists were forced to realize that as long as manufacturers could turn to a cheap supply of women laborers, who could be used to displace them or to break strikes, their own security was threatened. Even more complicating was the fact that recent invaders were their own wives, sisters, and daughters. Clearly, an injury to one was the concern of all. In the preamble to its constitution, adopted in January 1878, one of the principal objects of the Knights was stated to be, "To secure for both sexes equal pay for equal work." It was not until 1881 that women definitely were admitted to the union. By 1886 the number of women members was estimated as about 50,000, but from then on a steady decline occurred.

Since the disruption of the Knights of Labor about 1890 the history of women in trade unions in the United States has been largely the history of women in the various national organizations or local unions affiliated with the American Federation of Labor. This body early put itself on record as recognizing the advisability—in fact, the necessity—of organizing women, and in 1890 the first woman delegate was

sent to the national convention of the Federation from the clerks' union in Findlay, Ohio.

Active work in organizing women has been done by the National Women's Trade Union League, which came into existence in 1903. Patterned on the Women's Trade Union League of Great Britain, its purpose has been to unite in one national organization working women, whether already in unions or not, together with sympathizers of the movement outside the actual labor ranks.

The first large strike in which the league took part was that of the Ladies Waist Makers Union in New York City in 1909, involving 30,000 or more women. From every waist-making factory in New York and Brooklyn girls poured forth, until 75 percent of all workers in the trade had answered the call. During the first 2 weeks from 1,000 to 1,500 women a day joined the strikers. Since that time, the National Women's Trade Union League has sent in organizers wherever it believed them necessary and could do so, the last major effort being in the recent textile strikes in the South.

Besides taking part in specific labor struggles, the league, because its membership has included many influential women outside the actual labor ranks, has been able to publicize trade-union fights and to draw on the active support and cooperation of women's organizations. When organization has seemed too slow to free women from intolerable working conditions, the league has fought for legislation for their protection. It has aided much in bringing to women workers the realization that the suffrage movement was part of their struggle and that in the vote they had a valuable tool with which to better their condition.

Outstanding accomplishments of the league outside the field of organizing have been the following: To ask for the Federal inquiry, authorized by Congress in 1907, into the con-

dition of woman and child wage earners; to lead in the endeavor to establish within the Department of Labor a women's division under a woman chief; to urge the importance of declaring standards for women's work in war time; to send two of its members to the Peace Conference at Versailles to present its reconstruction program; backed by the working women of Great Britain and France, to call the first International Congress of Working Women; and to support strongly the movement for workers' education and training.

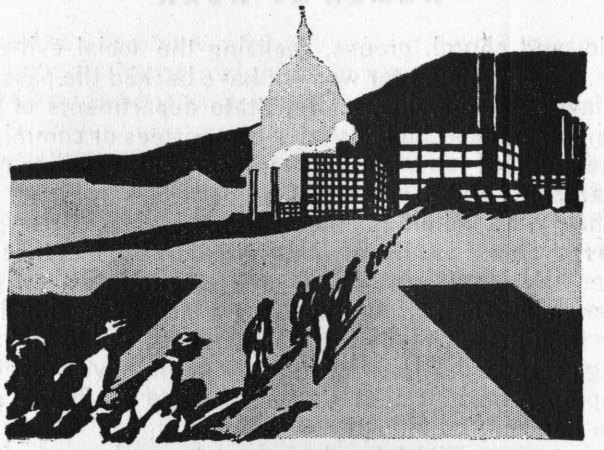
In spite of a definite attempt to include women in the labor movement, their organization has been slow. Today no complete figures exist for the number of women in unions. Probably the most complete figures are those for 1920, at which time only 6.6 percent of all wage-earning women outside of agriculture were said to be organized. Only in the manufacturing industries had the organization of women assumed any substantial proportions (18.3 percent). The clothing industries were most highly organized, with 46 percent of all organized women, and unions of the shoe, textile, and electrical workers were strong, as were the railway clerks, these comprising 35 percent of the total.

There are many reasons for the poor degree of organization attained by women. In the first place, women are concentrated in the greatest proportions in those occupational divisions that are notoriously badly organized even among men—domestic and personal service, clerical occupations, professional service, and trade. Moreover, women play practically no part in mining and building, two strongholds of unionism among men.

In industry women are largely engaged in unskilled occupations that are difficult to organize because in cases of strike or lockout manufacturers can turn to thousands of other workers equally capable of doing the work.

WOMEN AT WORK

The psychology of the working woman herself has been one of the major factors in making organization difficult. Until fairly recently, women have not generally recognized themselves as permanent industrial workers, and they have borne many hardships in industry in the expectation that some day they would marry and leave the ranks of working women. But while it is true that the working lives of women will always be interrupted by child-bearing, it has become increasingly clear that women, whether married or single, are a permanent part of our industrial machinery.



LABOR LEGISLATION

WHILE in the past men have improved their status in the industrial world largely by means of union organization and have preferred this method, women, who have been unable to achieve strong unions, have turned to legislation as a method of protection from long hours, low wages, and bad working conditions.

In this fight for protective legislation many groups have taken part. Women's unions have been backed by the entire organized labor movement. Men trade-unionists have favored shorter hours for women by legislation, in some instances to obtain them for themselves, and, in general, to standardize the shorter hours that the more strongly organized trades have secured by bargaining. The Women's Trade Union League has strongly urged the passage of labor legislation for women and has secured the backing of women's organizations throughout the country. Social, civic, philan-

thropic, and church groups, realizing the social evil of low wages and long hours for women, have backed the passage of such laws. Factory inspectors, State departments of labor, governors, and special legislative committees or commissions for the study of labor conditions, from their familiarity with the hardships and problems of women workers, have urged that their work conditions be regulated by law.

The movement has been greatly aided by the fact that many pioneer and progressive employers, by running their plants shorter hours than those allowed by law, by paying higher wages than those paid by their competitors, and by maintaining high standards of safety and sanitation, have proved that with proper management these steps are profitable rather than a handicap to industry.

In general, special labor laws for women have dealt with hours of work, night work, seating, minimum wage, and the regulation—in some cases the prohibition—of women's work in certain occupations or industries.

The first hour law was passed by New Hampshire in 1847. It applied to both sexes, but it originated with factory girls who were in sympathy with women on strike in Pittsburgh against an attempted increase in their working hours. The first hour law applying to women only was passed in Ohio in 1852, but it was repealed in 1879. Neither of these laws was enforceable, but, once started, the movement gained momentum. The first enforceable hour law for women was passed by Massachusetts in 1879. Today only five States—Alabama, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, and West Virginia—have placed no limits on the daily or weekly hours that women may work.

In 20 States workdays as long as 10 to 12 hours still are permitted by law for women workers in one or more industries. But in 11 States the legal workday for women has been shortened to 8 hours. In 34 States there are no laws specifi-

cally applying to women that limit the number of consecutive days that may be worked, and the laws in 36 States do not require that the working period be broken by time off for meals or rest.

The number of industries or occupations covered in the laws varies greatly among the 43 States where they have been enacted. In some cases they are so limited as to affect only a small part of the wage-earning women. In others they are wide in scope, bringing thousands of women under their protection. Women workers in manufacturing and mechanical industries and mercantile establishments are the groups most commonly covered by the law. Women in the professions, in agriculture, and in private domestic service have rarely been included.

In 32 States and the District of Columbia women still are allowed to work at night, but 16 States have prohibited night work for women—in certain occupations at least. The hours from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. are those in which night work is most commonly prohibited.

The first prohibitory legislation for women dates from 1872, when Illinois forbade women to work in any mine. Today 26 States have regulated or prohibited women's employment in one or more industries or occupations. The most common prohibition is mining as an occupation for women, which exists in 17 States. In 5 States women are not allowed to lift or carry heavy weights. In 5 States regulation of the work of women in core rooms has been set up. Six States have laws prohibiting the employment of women for various periods immediately before and after childbirth.

Forty-seven States and the District of Columbia have enacted laws requiring seating accommodations for women workers.

Home-work legislation, which affects women much more than men, dates from 1855, when New York sought to end

the sweating or tenement-workshop system by prohibiting the manufacture of cigars and other tobacco products in tenement houses in large cities. This law was declared unconstitutional. Later efforts were directed toward regulation and the imposing of minor restrictions through a licensing system. Today 14 States have laws either regulating home work by requiring cleanliness, adequate lighting and ventilation, and freedom from infectious or contagious disease, or prohibiting it entirely.

The purpose of the minimum-wage movement in the United States during the past 20 years has been to secure for women workers by law a wage that will at least insure for them the essentials of living. In the past the course of minimum-wage legislation has been stormy. .

Following the Federal investigation into the condition of woman and child wage earners, Massachusetts in 1912 pioneered in enacting a minimum-wage law. Once started, the movement gained momentum, and within 11 years as many as 14 States and the District of Columbia had followed suit and enacted such legislation.

In 1923, however, a serious barrier was placed in the path of the minimum-wage movement: The United States Supreme Court declared the District of Columbia law unconstitutional in its application to adult women. The court held that the law violated the constitutional right "to contract about one's affairs." Although many students of the subject have agreed with the opinion of the three dissenting justices that the law came well within the police powers of the State, the fact that the highest tribunal in the country found the law unconstitutional seriously crippled for some time efforts for further legislation.

As a direct result of the District of Columbia decision, five States declared their laws unconstitutional. In 1931 only

eight States—California, Colorado, Massachusetts, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Washington, and Wisconsin—had minimum-wage laws for women on their statute books.

The success of these laws in maintaining wage levels varies greatly, from Colorado where the law has never functioned, to California which has been the most progressive in establishing and enforcing wage rates. The Massachusetts law is not mandatory; the names of firms violating the law are made public and enforcement is entirely dependent on public opinion.

With the deep depression of the past three years, minimum-wage legislation has again become a matter of vital public concern. Employers competing for a diminishing market have been forced to cut wages as a means of reducing their production costs. Low-paid home work and sweatshop work have increased.

Driven by a recognition of the undesirable social and economic consequences of wages at starvation levels, several States within the past year have turned to minimum-wage legislation. In Connecticut, Illinois, New York, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Ohio, and Utah minimum-wage bills have been enacted. Today every indication points to a renewed and vigorous effort to maintain by law a living wage for women workers.

But the effort to prevent the devastating effects of wage slashing and sweatshop employment in the lives of workers has gone beyond the passage of minimum-wage legislation for women. On June 16 President Roosevelt signed the National Industrial Recovery Bill—perhaps the most significant piece of labor legislation in the history of our country. Although a temporary and emergency measure, born of the depression, this act puts into the hands of the Federal Govern-

ment for 2 years the power to maintain, on a Nation-wide scale, hour and wage standards for the vast majority of workers, both men and women.

In its broad outlines the act declares that each industry, through its trade associations or otherwise, shall establish a "code of fair competition." In this code minimum wage and maximum hours and production schedules may be fixed and standards set for trade practices. The code then is to be submitted to the President for his approval, and when approved it becomes enforceable by law, with penalties for its violation. If any industry fails to adopt a code satisfactory to the President, he may establish a code for it, and if necessary he may require plants to secure a license to operate. The act expressly guards the right of labor to organize and bargain collectively and prohibits yellow-dog contracts and compulsory company union membership. By setting standards on a Nation-wide scale, employers are freed for the first time from the undercutting of competitors in States with labor laws less advanced than their own.



THE NEGRO WOMAN WORKER

WHILE women workers in general have been restricted by lack of opportunities for employment, by long hours, low wages, and harmful working conditions, there are groups—the latest comers into industry—upon whom these hardships have fallen with doubled severity. As the members of a new and inexperienced race arrive at the doors of industry the jobs that open up to them ordinarily are those vacated by an earlier stratum of workers who move on to more highly paid occupations. Negro women constitute such a new and inexperienced group among women workers.

Added to the fact that they came late into the job market, they have borne the handicap of race discrimination. Slavery placed a stigma on their capabilities and they were considered unfit for factory or skilled work. White men and women, partly because of this and partly because they resented the competition of cheap Negro labor, were unwilling to be

engaged on the same work processes with them. To the Negro woman have fallen the more menial, the lower paid, the heavier and more hazardous jobs. Her story has been one of meeting, enduring, and in part overcoming these difficulties.

Previous to the Civil War few Negroes were employed in manufacturing and mechanical pursuits. As slaves in the South, where more than nine tenths of the Negro population of the United States was to be found, they had worked on plantations—raising cotton, tobacco, sugar, rice, and hemp; or had done the household service of maids, cooks, washerwomen, and seamstresses. Some Negroes had gained industrial experience as slave labor in cotton, tobacco, and bagging factories, in iron furnaces and charcoal plants, but their numbers were small, as the industrial development of the South was almost negligible at that time.

With the close of the Civil War and the freeing of the slaves, the majority settled down as farmers or share-croppers. Others turned to domestic and personal service. Both these types of work they had done formerly as slaves.

White men and women were entering industry in increasing numbers, and because of their priority and because of race consciousness, factory opportunities were restricted to the whites. Thus, manufacturing was closed to Negro women, whose employment was almost entirely limited to farm work and domestic and personal service—a condition that continued down through the years. As late as 1910, 95 percent of all Negro women workers were in these occupations. Up to the time of the World War the only manufacturing industry to employ any large number of Negro women was the making of cigars and cigarettes.

With the shortage of labor created by the World War, the opportunity came for Negro women to join the growing army of American women in industry. They entered in large

numbers those occupations that white women were leaving as new opportunities opened. In other cases Negro women filled the places of men who had gone to the front. The greatest gains were made in textile and clothing factories, the food industries, tobacco factories, and wood-products manufacture. The war industries, too, recruited Negro women in the making of shells, gas masks, and parts of airplanes. The census of 1920, taken immediately after the war period, showed that Negro women in the manufacturing and mechanical industries had increased by over one half. In the professions (as teachers), in office work, and as salesgirls, Negro women also found new work opportunities during the war.

With the return of men from the front and the end of the labor shortage, many of these gains were lost. According to the census of 1930, however, Negro women have increased their war gains in trade, professional service, and clerical occupations. While small numerically, these large proportional increases represent real achievement in the occupational progress of Negro women. That they are finding a place in the growing laundry business is shown by the fact that about 30 percent of the women laundry operatives are Negroes.

The wages of Negro women workers have been on even lower levels than those of white women. A study of Negro women in 15 States, published by the Women's Bureau in 1929, shows that in only 2 of 11 States was the median of the week's earnings—that is, one half of the women receiving more and one half receiving less—as high as $9. In 4 of these States the median of the earnings was below the pitifully small sum of $6.

Scattered wage figures of a more recent date are found in Women's Bureau studies of women in slaughtering and meat

packing and in the cigar and cigarette industries. In the first, the wages of Negro women compare favorably with those of white women, but in the second the median earnings of Negro women, most of whom stripped the leaf, were $10.10 in cigars and $8 in cigarettes. For white women, most of whom were makers and packers, the corresponding medians were $16.30 and $17.05.

In the fight to improve their working conditions through organization, Negro women workers have met with even greater failure than have women workers as a whole. To an even greater extent than all women workers, they are concentrated in the unorganizable and unskilled occupations, and few unions have made any attempt to include them as organized workers.

In the garment trades the influx of women workers began in Chicago in 1917 when Negro girls were brought in as strike breakers, and some 500 remained in the trade when the strike was finally broken. Negro women were also used as strike breakers in New York and in Philadelphia, as well as in the less important garment centers. On entering the needle trades the overwhelming majority of the Negro women worked at the unskilled jobs. But in spite of this, both the International Ladies Garment Workers and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers have made every effort to include them in the unions. However, none of the unions that are open to Negroes have made much progress in organizing Negro women workers.

Today almost 2,000,000 Negro women are wage earners. Their employment is so general that 39 are at work in every 100 who are as much as 10 years old. This is practically double the percentage of white women. Nine tenths of the employed Negro women are in agriculture or domestic and personal service. The majority of the others are in the manu-

facturing and mechanical industries. The industrial depression that has devastated the lives of millions of workers has fallen with particular severity on the Negro workers. Although not giving figures by sex, a recent study made by the National Urban League has shown that the proportion of Negroes is much greater among the unemployed than among the employed. One result of the depression, according to reports from various cities, is that Negro waitresses and other domestics are being displaced by white workers. Not only has the Negro worker taken the ragged edges of employment in times of prosperity, but in times of depression her unemployment is the most acute.



THE IMMIGRANT WOMAN WORKER

THE immigrant woman at Ellis Island, looking beyond the Statue of Liberty to America—the land of promise—has become an epic figure. During the past century many thousands of workers yearly have come to the United States. The tide of immigration has been full in times of prosperity and has ebbed in times of depression or war, but throughout the century the work of the immigrant has gone into the building of our national life.

Always the numbers of women immigrants have been appreciably smaller than the numbers of men, but much immigration has been by families. Then, too, women left in the old country have joined their families or friends after these have settled and found work in the United States. Today, of our nearly 11 million women workers, a million and a quarter are foreign born.

The history of immigration in this country divides itself into two definite periods, popularly called that of the "old" and that of the "new" immigration.

Until 1896 the majority of the immigrants were from northern and western Europe—chiefly the United Kingdom, Germany, Scandinavia, and Switzerland. Dissatisfied with economic, religious, or political conditions at home, these people turned to America as a place of opportunity. Here in the West land could be had free and in the industries of the growing cities there was a demand for foreign labor.

In 1896 the new immigration from southern and eastern Europe overtook and passed the old. In 1910 the new constituted 70 percent (practically 71) and the old—that had been well over 90 percent of the total—now was less than 20 percent.

The adjustment of the earlier immigrants was not difficult. Largely from rural communities in Europe, the majority turned to farming in the United States, settling in colonies and living much as they had done in Europe. Many of them speaking English, and the others the more familiar of the continental languages, they were culturally closely allied to the American people and easily assimilated.

As the United States changed from a country characterized by a simple rural environment to a complex industrial and urban society, fewer advantages were offered the immigrant workers. There was no longer a great frontier to be reached by the construction of railways, canals, and highways, and offering free or cheap lands. The factory smokestacks of our great industrial cities were beginning to blacken the skies, and into the foundries, the factories, the sweatshops, and mines went the immigrant workers.

The northern and western Europeans, in whose countries opportunities had become almost as favorable as those in the United States, were less tempted to emigrate. But from southern and eastern Europe, chiefly Italy, Austria-Hungary, and Russia, came the unsuccessful and the oppressed, to

whom America offered a "way out." These more recent arrivals were largely unskilled peasants with a rural social heritage. From the outset their adjustment to a complex urban environment was filled with hardship and difficulties.

At first our welcome to the immigrants was almost unlimited. We were in a period of national building and expansion. But by the time the new immigration had set in immigrant labor had begun to be felt as competitive in the American labor market. The conviction grew that the labor market was already overstocked. In 1882 the Federal Government assumed control of immigrant regulation. The first law excluding large groups of immigrants on the basis of being physically, mentally, or morally unfit was passed.

In the process of legislation there was created by an act of Congress in 1907 a commission to make "full inquiry, examination, and investigation * * * into the subject of immigration." The report of this commission, comprising 42 volumes and not completed until 1911, furnished an exhaustive study of the immigration question. Beginning with conditions in Europe, the survey followed every phase of the subject. Original information, excluding existing data, was secured for more than 3,200,000 individuals.

For many years our national immigration problem has been one of exclusion, selection, and deportation. In 1917, after a 25-year struggle, when sentiments of nationalism and self-protection had been aroused by the World War, a severe limitation was set up with the passage of the immigration law embodying the literacy test, over President Wilson's veto. From this time on many Americans wanted to exclude all further immigration, but this plan was abandoned for the quota acts of 1921 and later years, which limited the immigration of aliens of any nationality in one fiscal year to certain percentages of those already in the United States. The cutting

down of this large supply of cheap labor did much to make permanent the war-time employment gains of women and encouraged their further employment.

That manufacturers could turn to a continuous supply of immigrant labor throughout our period of greatest industrial development did much to accelerate that expansion. A very large percentage of the new immigration has been common labor, having no definite occupation or skill. As factories have developed, these men and women have fitted into the unskilled work of industry at low wages. Ignorant of American ways and lacking factory experience, in each case the most recent arrivals in the country have entered industry at the very lowest level, doing the least desirable work. Like the Negro worker, the immigrant has fallen heir to only the ragged edges of employment opportunities.

In the life of the immigrant woman the problems of the immigrant in industry are combined with the problems of the woman in industry. In 1930 there were in the United States 6,139,000 foreign-born white women 10 years of age and over, of whom 1,156,000 (19 percent) were gainfully occupied. Largely concentrated in the Middle Atlantic States, the greatest proportion (two fifths) of the foreign-born white women were in domestic and personal service. The next largest proportion, well over one fourth, were in the manufacturing and mechanical industries. Of the latter, clothing and textiles had the largest proportions, 26 percent and 23 percent, respectively.

An interesting picture of what these women are doing and how they have found their place in American life has been given us by the Women's Bureau in a study of over 2,000 foreign-born women wage earners in Philadelphia and the Lehigh Valley, Pa. These two regions were considered typical communities from the standpoint of the foreign born

and their problems—Philadelphia a big city with many diversified industries and a large proportion of immigrants, and the Lehigh Valley a locality with a few predominating industries for women, chiefly cigars and textiles, and with concentrated groups of foreign-born labor.

Less than one tenth of the women studied were of the old immigration, the vast majority having come from the countries south and east of Germany. Poland had been the homeland of the largest number, but Austria, Hungary, Italy, Yugoslavia, Russia, and Czechoslovakia were well represented. In Philadelphia the leading foreign nationality was Polish, but in the Lehigh Valley most of the women were German. The importance of economic dissatisfaction as a motive for immigration was shown by the fact that "better living" was the reason given by so many of these women for leaving the old country. The longing for "a nice home" was mentioned frequently. With high hopes and expectations, they had come to America to seek good jobs. A country of better opportunity, higher standards, less militarism, more freedom, was their goal.

The speed with which they had found jobs on arrival was astonishing. The majority were young, nearly three fifths being 18 or under when they arrived, and only about one tenth had had any real industrial experience in their native lands. The great majority of the women who reported having worked in the old country had toiled on farms or in private homes. After their arrival here jobs were more often procured through the efforts of friends or the blind workings of chance (three fourths having secured their jobs in these ways) than through qualifications of skill and experience. Into cigar, clothing, and textile factories large numbers of them had been drawn, not through special aptitude for such types of work but through the need to get a start in the new

life, to make sure of a pay envelope, and to earn a bare livelihood for themselves and their families. Only 11 percent gave as a reason for choice of job, "trade or work I knew."

Over half of them had remained in the same job and occupation for years. For these it was a case of once a spinner, weaver, cigar roller, power-machine operator, always such a worker.

The slight degree to which real assimilation had taken place was reflected by the fact that 37 percent of the women in the study who had been in this country at least 10 years were unable to speak English. The illiteracy rate was high. About one sixth were unable to read or write in any language.

Only 18 had become naturalized citizens by their own efforts. One of them, a silk weaver of 48 years who had recently received her citizenship papers, boasted she was "the first lady to get them in Berks County; it was in the papers about me."

A large proportion of the women (74 percent) were or had been married, and usually the husband and wife were both working. Many of the husbands were unskilled wage earners.

When a girl tells how she left one factory for another because she could earn 2 cents more per hundred for the cigars she rolled, the importance of the pay envelope in the lives of these women is realized. Wages were very low and hours were long; 37 percent of the women in the Lehigh Valley worked more than 10 hours a day, and in both sections long hours and overtime varied with part time and half-filled pay envelopes was the story of the immigrant women.

"Have to like it, it's daily bread," was the attitude of the majority of the women toward their jobs. That the women fortunate enough to have secured jobs with good working conditions appreciated them was indicated by such comments

as, "They treat the women nice, no boss holler, no boss yell"; "There is a bench for each loom and a chance to sit."

Despite the failure of these immigrants to find riches or even the "nice home" of their dreams, and notwithstanding their struggle to keep a firm foothold in the wage-earning arena, most of them were glad to be in America.



THE WOMAN WORKER TODAY

AS THE hundred years of our survey have closed, women workers have been caught in the deep industrial depression of the past 3½ years. Problems that they have faced through the century have been intensified. Many gains obtained in good working conditions have been lost. Unemployment, which has always been present to some degree, has been devastating the lives of millions of workers for the last few years. In April 1930 over half a million women were either unemployed and looking for work or on payless lay-off, and at that time we had undergone only half a year of the depression. Today the number of jobless women has swelled to 2,000,000, according to a conservative estimate made by the Federal Women's Bureau.

This is not our first depression. Our industrial history throughout the century includes a number of similar but less acute periods. One fundamental cause has been the same in

all such crises: The fact that the mass of workers cannot buy back the goods manufactured, and production and consumption are thrown out of balance. Since people who earn little can spend only what they do earn, periodically the goods already on hand cannot be sold. Factories close down. More workers are without wages, less and less goods can be sold, and the vicious round of overproduction, underconsumption, and unemployment sets in. Today's depression has been deeper, more undermining to our whole economic structure, and more destructive to workers than any that has gone before.

Widespread unemployment and the suffering it means to workers is the most serious aspect of the depression. But even those women who have held their jobs have undergone severe hardships. As facts and figures become available showing us what has actually been taking place during these last years, it is clear that this business depression has seriously lowered standards of employment, which at best were never high enough. The general tendency on the part of many manufacturers is to cut wages, lengthen hours, and fail to meet such employment requirements for industrial safety and sanitation as their State laws may specify. Even the large number of employers who have struggled desperately to maintain their own high standards are finding that they cannot withstand the cut-throat competition with sweatshop manufacturers for today's diminishing market.

A breaking down in wage standards is particularly serious for women, since, as we have seen, their wages have always been lower than men's. That this is taking place, however, is shown by the decided drop in women's wages from 1929 to 1932 recorded by figures from New York and Illinois and others collected by the National Industrial Conference Board. Recent figures from studies by the Women's Bureau show

that not only have the medians—one half receiving more, one half less—of women's wages fallen, but the low extremes that these figures represent are pitifully inadequate. In a recent study of the Connecticut sewing trades many young girls were receiving such meager sums as $2 and $1 a week, although the median of all the wages paid was $12.35.

Unemployment, part-time work, and low wages mean that the workers are being driven to increasingly lower standards of living. A realistic picture of what this means in the everyday lives of women workers is shown in a study made by the Bryn Mawr summer school workers and published by the Women's Bureau in 1933. Out of the experiences of these women, stories are told of less food, of inadequate clothing, of searching for lower rents and cheaper living quarters, of taking in lodgers, and of falling behind in rent and mortgage payments. These have become common in the lives of women workers.

In spite of lowered earnings, slack work, lay-offs, and shutdowns, we have the illogical situation of women working long daily hours during the time when they are employed. The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics has shown that in cotton mills women actually worked, on an average, an hour a week longer in 1932 than in 1930, though they earned much less. In its study of the sewing trades of Connecticut just referred to, the Women's Bureau found that about 14 percent of the women reported had worked 52 hours or more.

For further evidence of the breakdown in industrial standards which has taken place during the past few years we have only to turn to recent statements of State departments of labor. Here are reported a greater demand for their services during the depression and increased difficulty in keeping up the standards in hours, wages, and industrial safety and sanitation that their laws may require.

Something of the job experiences of many women during the depression is typified in the case of Mary Smith, recorded by the Bryn Mawr summer school workers. In the automobile shop where she made dashboard equipment, work became slack, then partial employment was followed by lay-offs, and in 1931 Mary Smith became one of the thousands of unemployed workers. For months she went from factory to factory looking for work, but everywhere came the same answer, "No help wanted." In desperation, she went home to her family in the country. But here, too, she found a struggle for livelihood, for farm crops could not be sold at prices that would decently support the family. Mary Smith's solution finally came, as has that of many other workers, in obtaining a job doing housework. But even opportunities in this field now have become hopelessly scarce and wages are low.

During the decade 1920 to 1930 the number of women in domestic and personal service has swelled by practically a million. Trained or untrained for the work, women thrown out of other employment turn to housework. Here standards of employment have always been low. Domestic workers have never been able to gain standardized working conditions through organization, nor are they protected by legislation. With the onrush of women into this occupation, competition forces the conditions of work even lower. Such a story is told in reports from employment agencies. Employers are found to be offering gradually diminishing wages though expecting as much or even more of their domestic workers than before, while the applicants for work feel the futility of making a firm stand for wages such as they have received in the past.

Among the applicants at employment offices, today finds an almost unprecedented proportion of "white-collar workers." Going from one employment office to another in search of

work are women who have successfully carried on business organizations of their own, teachers, personnel managers, translators, correspondents, junior executives, and office workers of all types. The extent to which this group of workers is being forced into the ranks of the unemployed in New York is shown by the fact that at the State employment office in September 1932 there were 21 women clerical workers registered for every job available.

With a scarcity of jobs, an attack has been made on the married woman and her right to work has been challenged. Sometimes wholesale dismissal of married women workers has taken place. When unemployment is widespread this is particularly devastating to the lives of many of these women. At this time the burdens of family support, which many of them bear, become greater and their wages become even more necessary to themselves and to their families.

The older woman, too, suffers in the increased competition for diminishing jobs. Many factories will not hire women over 30, and when lay-offs occur they fall most heavily on the older workers. In the professions the older woman is more secure. Here her value is increased with work experience and she is not worn out like a piece of machinery. But even in the professions it is practically impossible for the older woman who is out of work to again find a job.

Less tragic than that of the older worker who has lost out without the possibility of ever getting back into employment, but discouraging and demoralizing, is the prospect of the young girl seeking work for the first time. Each year thousands of girls leave school to become wage earners. When unemployment is acute their position is nearly hopeless, for while shrinking family incomes drive them to look for work in increasing numbers, as forces are reduced any openings that exist can be filled with more experienced workers. Even

those who are fortunate enough to finish college face a dreary prospect when they enter the market for jobs.

The fight for better working conditions has been as long as our industrial system itself. For decades labor unions, political parties, and many independent organizations have co-operated in the difficult struggle to insure for workers hours, wages, and standards of employment that will make possible healthy and happy living. Since for millions of workers this goal has never been achieved, our present breakdown in what standards did exist is doubly serious.

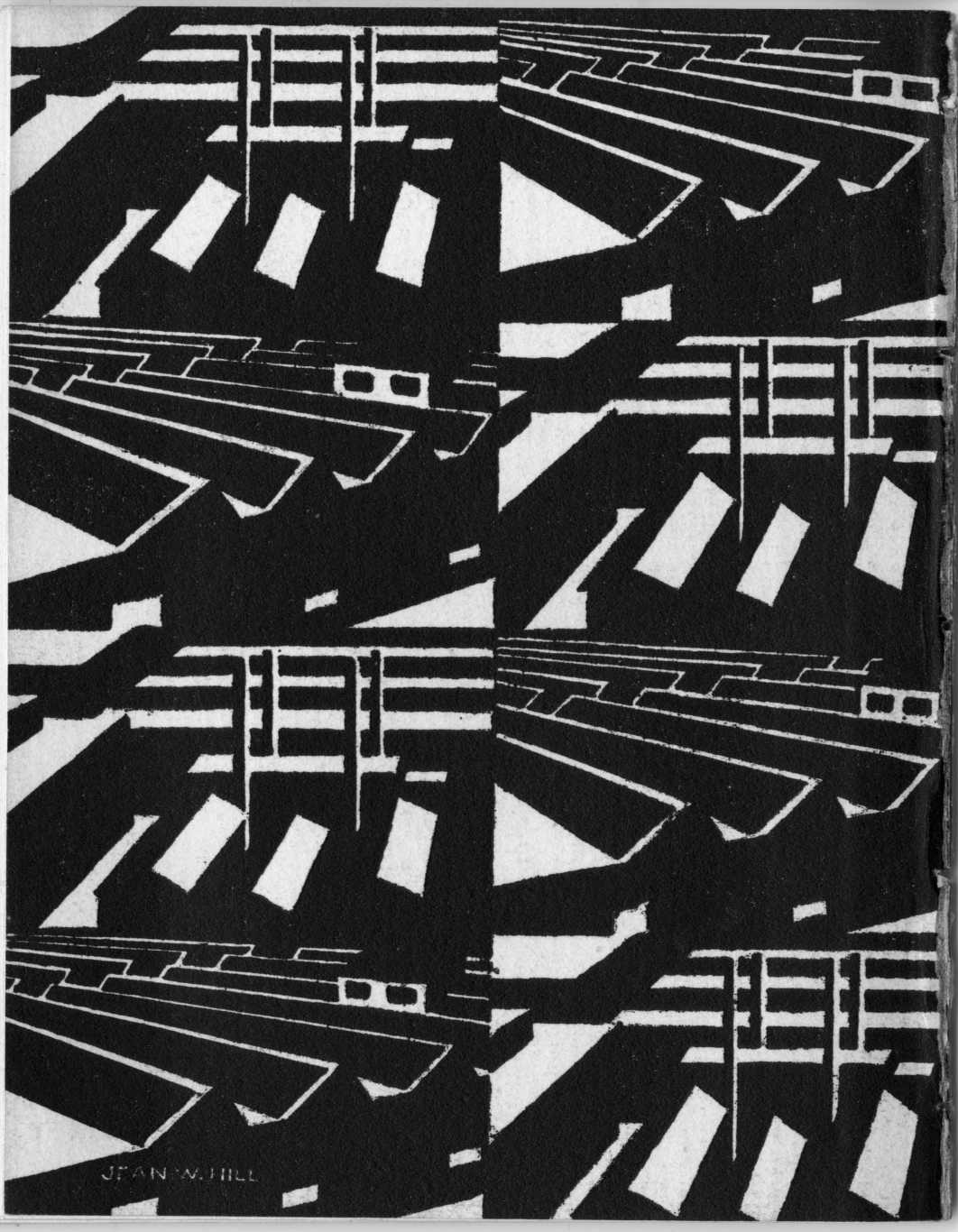
During the present period of unemployment no standards have been secure. Even when upheld through legislation or by strong trade union organization, serious breakdowns have occurred. In few instances have the workers themselves been able to organize against today's lowering of working and living standards. Employers forced by competition to seek economies in production know that thousands of unemployed workers, outside factory gates and eager for jobs, bring down the cost of labor. Thus they too often have been able to slash wages and lengthen hours without arousing effective resistance.

But against the conditions of the depression an increasing volume of protest has arisen from workers' organizations. They have received marked assistance through the activities of progressive women's organizations. Strength to the movement to safeguard the interests of wage earners has been added by the growing popular recognition of the fact that the purchasing power of the great mass of people must be maintained if our industrial system is to function.

Legislation has been passed on a Nation-wide scale in an attempt to restore both industry and workers from the ravages of the depression. The National Industrial Recovery Act is an effort directed toward taking wages and

hours of work out of the competitive field. If through this legislation workers can be assured of living wages and a short work week, we shall have made progress toward guaranteeing them some security. In a number of State legislatures efforts have been made to pass more adequate labor legislation. Bills have been enacted or are being considered dealing with unemployment insurance, old age pensions, minimum wages for women and minors, shorter hours for women or for both men and women.

While the century has definitely established the fact that women as well as men must work outside their homes for pay, while the greater part of the battle to open occupational and educational opportunities to women has been won, there remains to be accomplished for both sexes a readjustment within the economic world that will allow every willing worker a job and security.


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