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WOMEN IN INDUSTRY



SOCIAL ACTION SERIES NO. 14

By

MEMBERS OF N. C. W. C. SOCIAL
ACTION DEPARTMENT

The pamphlets in the *Social Action Series*, of which this is the **fourteenth** number, are edited by the Social Action Department of the National Catholic Welfare Conference. They represent an effort to present to the general public, and especially to Catholics, a discussion of current economic facts, institutions and proposals in the United States in their relation to Catholic social teaching, particularly as expounded in Pope Pius XI's Encyclical "Forty Years After—Reconstructing the Social Order" (*Quadragesimo Anno*). In the spirit of that Encyclical they are urged upon and recommended to individuals, study clubs, discussion groups and school classes.

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Facts—Figures—Problems

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MEMBERS OF THE N. C. W. C. SOCIAL
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Social Action Series
No. 14

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FOREWORD

A brochure entitled "Women and Industry" was published more than a decade ago by the National Catholic Welfare Conference. This present pamphlet represents an abridgment and a revision by members of the N. C. W. C. Social Action Department staff, which brings up to date against a background of Catholic social teaching facts and figures regarding the millions of our working women, their place in the national economy, their effect upon society, and their many particular problems.

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL ACTION
NATIONAL CATHOLIC WELFARE CONFERENCE

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Women in Industry

Facts—Figures—Problems

I. WHY WOMEN WORK

THE answer to the question why nearly eleven million women in the United States are working is simple, though it has a complex background. They work because they must. They work to eat, to clothe themselves, to put a roof over their heads. Many must support still others besides themselves. Some, indeed, are supported in small part by others; others work though well-supported by others. But these are exceptions. According to studies compiled and analyzed by the United States Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor, more than one-fourth of the women workers in the United States are heads of and the entire support of families of two or more. In practically one-sixth of all urban families in the United States, the only wage earners were women (not necessarily only one woman). Well over a third of all wage-earning women are homemakers as well. Many women not the sole support of their families have one or more wholly or partial dependents. An examination of thirty-four studies in different cities among all classes of working women, shows that 59.6 per cent of the women questioned were contributing to the maintenance of dependents, in some cases in addition to those for whose complete support they are responsible. These women, and the women who have only themselves to support, work because of their own economic dependence or that of their fathers, their husbands or their prospective husbands.

We know of the large numbers of unemployed men who are fathers and husbands and brothers, the uncertainty of their employment in recent years and the emergency level of work-relief pay. And when we start counting heads in American industry, we find that at least half of the men who are working are not receiving a living wage.¹ We know of

¹ See "Wages and Hours of American Labor," by F. J. Haas. Social Action Series, No. 3.

the bankruptcy of farmers and the miserably low income they have been making for years. It is all this that brings by far most of the ten and three-quarter million working women in the United States into working life.

Yet the social changes of the past century and especially of the past fifty years are responsible too. This includes our whole history during that time, from the invention of machines and lack of adequate man-power to run them, to the demands of an expanding country and a growing population, and to the necessity for furnishing materials in the Civil and World Wars when men were fighting. One of the changes is that due to our great machine, technological and service development, there is less work to be done at home. Families now buy more of their clothes, food and household goods, partly or wholly ready for use, and are under constant pressure by advertising, etc., to do so. A good thing in countless ways, it has meant that women have less to do at home and that it costs more in money to support a family. In such a case, when the wages and salaries or other income of the men have not gone up in the same proportion, there is nothing for the women in the family to do except search for work to support themselves, and to help support the family.

This general situation has a cumulative effect, especially in the opportunities of women to leave industry by marrying. The cost of supporting a family and the low wages of young men; the desire on their part to wait until they can support a wife in greater comfort; the hesitation of self-supporting women to face the sacrifices of marriage, which because of the husbands' low wages may entail continued gainful work on the part of the wife; and other facts, conditioned by the economic situation, by education, by opportunities for sociability and the like, are all contributing factors. The result is that, generally, women, when they can get a job, go to work early in life. Even when they marry, they must often do gainful work of some kind.

Behind it all is the fact that from the Industrial Revo-

lution on, industry has called on the work of women. There is work for women to do that in part suits their nature, suits also our standard that women should not do outside or heavy work, and that does not require a period of training and the ambition to rise in a business world. Most women in going to work look forward to a speedy departure from it by marrying. They look for a job they can fill without an apprenticeship or a long course of training; and industry, trade and the services are filled with such positions. Industry takes advantage of them. Employers hire them for the very reason that they will fill these positions well and often without much thought of promotion to better work or higher wages.

Employers have found them willing thus far, for the most part, to accept low wages and work long hours, to be little regardful of their own health and welfare at their work, and to be satisfied to take and keep the blind-alley jobs that must be filled somehow in American industry and trade as it is now organized. They have not usually fought enough to protect themselves and their companions, both men and women, among the working people. Centered in the thought of soon leaving work, interested in marriage, inclined to over-estimate small personal kindnesses, timid and fearful of being discharged, they continue to bear unwisely wrongs that strike at their whole future happiness.

At the same time, due in part to the general literacy and the increasing higher education, and also in part the cause of the education, many occupations formerly closed to women have been opened to them. Teaching, trained nursing, secretarial work, research, newspaper work, the more skilled sales lines, social service, politics, the medical and legal professions, supervisory positions, leadership in the labor movement, etc., are taken by the better trained and more able. Some women in these occupations wish to continue at work. Others prefer marriage, children and home life. But to both classes the opportunity has been given of doing useful, satisfying work outside of marriage,—something rarely enjoyed

before the dawn of this generation. They support themselves and do satisfying work outside of home life. Yet these are exceptions, and must come second. The normal, average working woman is the one who works because she must work to live in the circumstances of every-day life, who works in factory, store, office, school, hospital, in kitchens, in restaurants and beauty parlors, who finds it hard to protect herself against injustices, and who looks forward to a normal marriage, children and a home life.

II. WHAT THEY DO AND WHO THEY ARE

Ten and three-quarter million women in the United States are recorded by the Census Bureau in 1930 as having been gainfully occupied. Numerous others, doing gainful work not their main source of income, are not included in this record. Out of every hundred of them, 8 are in agriculture, forestry and animal husbandry; 17 are in manufacturing and mechanical industries; 12 are in trade, transportation and communication; 14 are in the professions; 30 are in personal and domestic service and 18 are in clerical occupations. A few are in mining and other occupations.

In city industry and trade, while found in the most unlikely occupations, they tend to concentrate in certain lines of work. In factories, they are chiefly in textiles, clothing, food, leather, cigars and tobacco. In transportation and communication, they are largely telephone operators. In trade, they are mostly clerks in stores. In the domestic and service occupations most of them are cooks and other domestic servants, but there has been a great increase in recent years of those working in laundries, beauty parlors, etc. Two-thirds of them at clerical work are stenographers, typists and general clerks. It is in this field that the greatest increase of women workers has occurred—over a million in two decades. In the professions, three-fourths are teachers and nurses. When they are employers or self-employed, they are usually dress-

makers, seamstresses and milliners, although due to factory processes there has been a decline in these occupations in recent years.

Few, however (only 4.3 per cent in 1930) are employers, managers or self-employed in city work, and a very small proportion (only 2.8 per cent exclusive of teachers who are not in colleges, and nurses) are salaried supervisors or in the professions. Four out of five of them in city work are wage workers, or salaried workers below the line of supervisors. Nearly the opposite is true in agriculture, where only one in nine work for wages—though three times that many are unpaid family workers.

The labor problem is largely that of wage and salary workers in city industry and trade. These occupations set the pace that nearly all other kinds of work follow. Women are wage and salary workers along with men. There is, then, not only the question of their relation to their employers and their relation to one another, but their relation also to men in the same social status. They compete directly for the jobs of some men, and this means that indirectly they are in competition with all men. Since so many of them must work and can work for less than men, a certain economic struggle between men and women results. Women are both helped and harmed in this struggle. When in direct competition with men, their wages are apt to be higher, skill and type of work being considered, than when they compete solely with women. Their wage approaches the wages of men which, because of the greater needs of husbands or prospective husbands and fathers of families, because of their greater interest in their working conditions, their greater courage in asking for wage increases and resisting wage cuts, and their fuller right of choice between different kinds of work, are usually higher than the wages of women. The women share somewhat in this advantage. On the other hand, men are inclined to resent the competition of women precisely because they will work for lower wages and thus by competition reduce

men's wages too. This rivalry, and the disinterest women, wishing to escape their jobs as soon as possible, have in their working conditions, rebounds upon women again, since the reduction of men's wages gives them less opportunity to marry, and when they marry, less money to meet the needs of family life. Thus the presence of so many women in industry, indifferent to or passively resentful towards their working conditions harms them and future generations.

It is the more important because working women come from all groups in the country and the effect is country-wide. They are white and black and brown, native-born and foreign-born and of every racial stock, girls and women, unmarried, married and widows. There is no typical working woman.

Certain characteristics, however, stand out. In age they are younger than working men. Over a third of them are between sixteen and twenty-four, and over two-fifths are between twenty-five and forty-four. Yet over two million are over forty-four, and over a third of a million are under sixteen.

Seventy-one out of every hundred are native-born white women; eleven are foreign born white. The remaining eighteen are nearly all Negro women. Of the Negro women and girls in the United States, 39 out of every hundred are gainfully occupied, one out of every six of the foreign-born, and one-sixth of all the native-born white women. The native whites are scattered throughout all lines of work. The foreign-born are divided mainly between domestic service and factory work, and Negroes between domestic service and the farm. The lot of the Negro woman worker is particularly hard. She is usually the last to be hired and the first to be fired, and her wages are below that of the white worker. Of the states in which the largest percentage of women are employed, six out of ten are the northeastern cluster of states from New Hampshire to New Jersey. The other four are southern factory states. Remembering that few Negro women are in city industry and trade, and remembering the dominant racial stock and religions of the southern factory states and the

northeastern clump of states, it appears that the ones chiefly involved in city work are Catholics, Jews and the poor whites of the southern factory towns. The problem is not solely a Catholic problem, but it is ours very definitely.

A still more serious question arises in the number of married women who are now engaged in gainful work. Since 1900 their proportion has increased by 60 per cent and in numbers has quadrupled, while the total number of married women increased only by 23 per cent. A large majority of the foreign-born women workers are married, with their husbands working as well, and the great majority of the Negro workers are married or divorced. Over a fourth of all working women are married (not widows or divorced) and if those who are doing supplemental work are counted, the proportion is still higher. Once in this country when women married, it was rare for them to continue at work. Now three out of ten are gainfully employed. In factory towns, it is common for women to marry one day and go back to work the next. In office work and in stores, and, indeed, in all occupations, the same fact is coming to prevail. Some welcome this as a sign of women's independence. It is, rather, a sign of dependence on an unjust and inadequate industrial system.

III. THEIR FREEDOM

Women have the ethical right to marry or not. To make this good in practice, they should have a way outside of marriage to support themselves and develop their talents. The industrial-commercial system has given this opportunity abundantly. This is a gain in freedom. But certain vital abridgments exist upon the freedom of women.

The first is that many have fewer opportunities, and those are delayed, to marry; and when they marry some must still continue to work. The second great abridgment upon their freedom is common to propertyless employees who do not control whether they are to work, how they are to work, or un-

der what material conditions, or what their wages will be. This means, too, a lack of freedom over recreation, social status, opportunities, etc. Several degrees of this loss of liberty occur.

To judge the freedom of a woman working within any occupation and concern, these questions are the test: What control has she over her wages and salary? What right has she to join an effective labor organization? What control has she over the hours she works? What control has she over the methods of her work? What control has she over the work she is to do? What control has she over those financial, purchasing and sales policies of the concern and of industry generally which determine largely whether her job is to continue? What control has she over whether she is to be discharged summarily? What control has she in such a case of the chances of getting a job again? What control has she over the health and safety of her work? What control has she over its moral dangers?

The Standards

Before noting the material conditions of working women in the United States, it is well first to see the standards laid down by Catholic social teaching in Pope Leo's Encyclical on the Condition of Labor, Pope Pius XI's Encyclical on Reconstructing the Social Order, the Bishops' Program of Social Reconstruction, and the Pastoral Letter of the American Hierarchy.

Women should receive "wage rates that will be at least adequate to decent individual support." (Bishops' Program) "A living wage includes not merely decent maintenance for the present, but also a reasonable provision for such future needs as sickness, invalidity and old age." (Pastoral Letter.)

"Those women who are engaged at the same tasks as men should receive equal pay for equal amounts and qualities of work." (Bishops' Program.) "A living wage is not necessarily the full measure of justice. In a country as rich as

ours, there are very few cases in which it is possible to prove that the worker would be getting more than that to which he has a right if he were paid something in excess of this ethical minimum." (Bishops' Program.)

"Such wages . . . as offer to the greatest number opportunities of employment and of securing for themselves suitable means of livelihood." (Reconstructing the Social Order.) "Wealth . . . constantly being augmented by social and economic progress . . . must be so distributed among the various individuals and classes that the common good of all . . . be thereby promoted." (Reconstructing the Social Order.)

"In all agreements between masters and work people, there is always the condition expressed or understood that there should be allowed proper rest for soul and body. To agree in any other sense would be against what is right and just." (The Condition of Labor.) From the duty of worshipping God "follows the obligation of the cessation of work and labor on Sundays and certain holy days." (The Condition of Labor.)

Their Material Conditions

Do the facts of the condition of working women in the United States conform to these standards of Catholic social teaching?

An estimate of the usual level of women's earnings has been made by the United States Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor from recent studies by various sources (*Women in the United States*, 1937). They are as follows:

Domestic and Personal Service:

Homes (cash wage), \$5.79 and \$15.65 a week.

Beauty shops, \$14.25 and \$15.54 a week.

Hotels and restaurants, \$5.75 to \$16.25 a week. The potential average for the year (based on 52 weeks), \$299 to \$845.

Laundries, \$6.67 to \$13.42 a week. The potential average for the year (based on 52 weeks), \$347 to \$698.

Clerical Occupations:

\$16.15 (clerks) to \$28.65 (secretaries) a week; \$1,253 to \$1,881 a year.

The potential average for the year (based on 52 weeks) in seven cities, \$1,188.

Manufacturing:

Recent figures for various industries, \$12.46 to \$29.29.

Professional Service:

School teachers, \$999 to \$3,300 a year, the last for senior high school teachers with M.A. degrees.

Trained nurses, \$1,620 to \$2,300 a year, the minimum and maximum civil service entrance salaries.

Librarians, \$1,110 to \$1,957.50 a year, the last for branch librarians.

Trained social and welfare workers, \$1,650 to \$3,300 a year, the last for supervisors in largest agencies.

Home economics extension workers, \$945 to \$3,950 a year.

“Decent maintenance for the present,” according to recent wage orders based on hearings to determine this standard for a self-supporting woman, has never been fixed as low as thirteen dollars a week. The wages provided for women in retail trade are \$16 for a 42½ hour week in Utah and \$17 a week, ranging from 40 to 48 hours in the District of Columbia. In the hotel, restaurant and allied industries in the District of Columbia minimum wages have been fixed at from \$13.25 for waitresses, excluding tips, to \$17 for telephone operators and clerical workers. These figures, of course, represent a compromise. A wage of \$18 for 48 hours for all women is fixed in Nevada law. The New York Department of Labor recently stated that a woman working in New York who lived alone needed a minimum salary of \$23.36 a week, or \$1,215 a year. If she lived with her family she would need \$20.73 a week, \$1,078 a year. Compare these figures with the ones given above, and remember the number of women who support others than themselves, and then recall that even in 1929 the productive capacity of the country,

which is much greater now, was sufficient to have given each family \$2,500 a year.

That women, whose general wage levels for all occupations are much lower than men's, make less than men in the same occupation, even under certain trade union agreements, is a known fact well documented by studies of the Women's Bureau. For instance, the agreement for the textile, dyeing and finishing industry for 1936-38, continuing for the most part earlier rates, fixes the hourly minima for men at 66 cents and for women at 48. This spread is too large to make up any difference in occupation. In Butte the wage for men head markers for laundries under a union agreement is 62.5 per hour, that of the highest classification of four head markers for women is 52.1 per hour. The spread is even much greater where there is no union. Such a difference exists almost generally. This is due in large part to an undervaluation in money terms of women's contribution to the economy either of the family or the nation, which has its partial origin in the days when women's contribution consisted of purely home manufacture and services.

Industrial homework also is largely responsible for depressing women's wages, and indirectly then, for depressing men's. This system consists in the giving out from the factory, either directly or through contractors or even by mail, of articles to be made in whole or in part or of processes to be done in homes. It has been estimated that such work is done in more than 75,000 American homes and involves not only women but children at long hours and low pay. The actual pay for the processes when done at home is much below what is paid in the factory. A New York survey reported that the average wage even in good times paid for a week's skilled needle work brought as low as \$6.85 and even \$4. Even less than that has been received for a week's work in less skilled typical home-work industries.

Women share in the general unemployment. From Government figures it was conservatively estimated that at least

two million women were out of work during the worst of the depression. In 1934 it was reported by the FERA that 30 per cent of all persons on relief in towns and cities of over 2,500 were women who were normally employed. Though available figures on the whole indicate that smaller proportions of women than of men were out of work, still there were certain industries, such as woolens and worsteds, and certain industrial areas in which women were the greatest sufferers. The United States Employment Service recently has analyzed its figures as to persons newly applying to public employment offices for work in the two years ending June 30, 1936. The new women-applicants numbered nearly three million and formed 27 per cent of all applicants. This indicates in some degree the pressure the Depression put on some women who would not normally work to seek employment outside the home.

Forty-three states have today some legal regulation of daily or weekly hours (or both) that women can work in certain occupations. Four states, Alabama, Iowa, Florida and West Virginia have no statute in this regard. Indiana has a law prohibiting night work but places no regulation on the day. Twelve states have an eight hour day. Some states have a ten hour day and a considerable number permit daily hours in excess of ten, ranging all the way to a 12 hour day, as in Louisiana. In all the laws certain industries are specifically exempted and a day's work for women may vary from 8 hours in 10 states to $8\frac{1}{2}$, 9, 10 and even 12 in other states.

Women do not suffer physical injury in industry as often as men because they are not employed in the more dangerous industries. But in factories they encounter the same dangers as men and accidents among them are not infrequent. In dangers to health they meet all the normal hazards of factory industry, in not one line of which is there freedom from some disease peculiar to the occupation. They meet also the dangers to health that come from low wages and long hours.

IV. ORGANIZATION

Pope Leo's Encyclical on the Condition of Labor indicates the first method the working people are to follow in obtaining just and fair wages, hours and working conditions. He says: "In these (questions of wages) and similar questions—, such as, for example, the hours of labor in different trades, the sanitary precautions to be observed in factories and workshops, etc.—in order to supersede undue interference on the part of the state, especially as circumstances, time and localities differ so widely, it is advisable that recourse be had to Societies or Boards . . . or to some other mode of safeguarding the interests of the wage earners." "The most important of all" these Societies or Boards, he says, is the labor union.²

The logic back of the labor union is simple and inescapable. Employers are stronger than employees because they own the means of the employee's livelihood; and more persons are in search of jobs than there are jobs. The employers can therefore beat down wages, increase hours and give less care to working conditions if they have single, disunited employees to deal with. Therefore, unions, and unions on a wide scale because the competition for employees' jobs and the competition for the sale of their products is on a wide scale. The labor union is the normal way of obtaining a measure of freedom on the job, as well as just wages, hours and working conditions, and the recent National Labor Relations Act has secured the right to this way of obtaining them, and has provided an orderly method for determining who is to represent the employees.

The union is also a first and necessary step toward the cooperation of all groups in an occupation or industry and then, by industries, in the country and the world, which Pius

² The Catholic doctrine on labor unions, as elaborated by Pope Pius XI and emphasized by the Hierarchy of the United States is expounded in two other pamphlets of this Series by Monsignor Haas: "Wages and Hours of American Labor" and "The American Labor Movement."

XI advocates in his "Reconstructing the Social Order": "The reestablishment of vocational groups" (*i. e.*, democratically organized industries and professions) for "the directing of the activities of the group to the common good."³ But this new democratic social order cannot be attained save by growth through labor unions and other organization in industry.

The necessity for union membership applies to women as well as men, to clerical workers as well as to manual workers and to the professions. It is particularly applicable to women because they are the most consistent underbidders in the labor market, which debases the standards of all workers.

Women have not in the past organized in anything like the proportion that men have. Of the nearly eleven million women workers, not more than two and a half per cent are unionized. Of the organized women in factories, most are in clothing, where 90 per cent of the garment workers are in unions, in textiles, cigar and tobacco and in shoes and book binding. The fact that so many women are unskilled workers, together with the fact that they are in and out of industry depending upon home conditions, has accounted for the difficulty of organizing them in the past. However, in the present drive for the unionization of whole industries, women have shared in the benefits accruing to the industries organized. But for the most part women are still overworked and underpaid in industry—conditions which unionization would better. This applies to the white collar jobs—clerical work in offices (where there are 1,400,000 women employed), clerical work in stores, teaching and nursing, to domestic service and the service occupations, such as laundries, beauty parlors, etc. A start has been made in all these fields, resulting always in improved conditions—for instance in beauty culture (which has grown from hiring 5,500 women in 1900 to 113,000 in 1930) the union agreement calls for a flat \$15.00 a week wage for white and colored workers, plus 50 per cent

³ For a description of the occupational group system as it might apply to American life, see "New Guilds," and for the part unions are to play, "The American Labor Movement."

of everything over \$30.00 a week brought in by the operator to the establishment, while the median wage as noted above was only \$14.24. In "white collar" work, the standard set by the unions range from \$20.00 to \$35.00 for a thirty-five hour week.

Active in the promotion of unions for women is the National Women's Trade Union League of America. This organization is a federation of trade unions with women members, with an individual membership of those accepting its platform, which includes besides organization, the shorter work-week in order to spread employment and increase individual workers' leisure; a standard of living commensurate with the nation's productive capacity, and equal pay for equal work, regardless of sex or race.

V. LEGISLATION

Many working women find it impossible to wipe out their injustices through the labor union alone at this time. They stand in need of further help. According to Catholic social teaching, the Government should help and protect them.

Three sentences from Pope Leo's Encyclical on the Condition of Labor are compelling. "Justice demands that the interests of the poorer classes should be carefully watched over by the administration so that they who contribute so largely to the advantage of the community may themselves share in the benefits which they create,—that being housed, clothed and enabled to sustain life, they may find their existence less hard and more endurable. . . . Whenever the general interest or that of any particular class suffers, or is threatened with mischief which can in no other way be met or prevented, the public authority must step in to deal with it. . . . Poor and necessitous wage earners who are undoubtedly among the weak should be especially cared for and protected by the Government."

Pope Pius XI becomes even more specific in his statement

of the need of Government help. "Wage earners . . . should be especially cared for and protected by the Government." "These laws concern the soul, the strength, the housing, workshops, wages, dangerous employments, in a word, all that concerns the wage earners with particular reference to women and children." The Bishops' Program which was issued in 1919, as has been noted above, advocates minimum wage laws for women which will provide for wage rates "at least . . . adequate to the decent individual support of female workers." These minimum rates should be gradually raised to meet such future needs as "sickness, accidents, invalidity and old age." Until minimum wages reach that point, the Bishops' Program says, a system of insurance against these contingencies is called for.

Traditional opposition to laws for working women as class legislation has been overcome to a large degree, with the recognition that class legislation in the form of tariffs, subsidies, etc., has always existed and that class legislation is particularly needed by classes which have no other means of protecting themselves. In addition, the effective work of the United States Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor, and that of various state Departments of Labor and the pressure of organized labor, have been instrumental in promoting legislation for women.

The National Women's Party group objects that protective legislation handicaps women, prevents them from taking any job available by making certain conditions of employment illegal that are legal for men, and coddles them into a loss of self-reliance. This group of women favor a so-called "Equal Rights" amendment to the Federal Constitution, hearings on which have frequently been held before a sub-committee of the Senate Judiciary Committee. This proposed amendment would wipe out all existing laws on rape, seduction and the like and prevent any state from passing them again, and erase existing legislation and bar future legislation to protect women at their work.

Protective labor legislation does, indeed, handicap some women, but for the few who are harmed, millions are helped. Some women, too, are "coddled into a loss of self-reliance" by protective legislation, but the bit they get by protective legislation means just enough more physical and mental strength, time and money to encourage by far the most of them. The law gives them their start towards personal emancipation and towards satisfactorily safeguarding their whole future health and happiness.

The truth in the Women's Party contention is, however, one that needs expression. Women are unjustly discriminated against and they consent to the discrimination. These discriminations need to be revealed and opposed at every step and interest and courage aroused in women to defend themselves and their rights personally and through organization.

Another objection to protective regulation that is frequently raised, and was brought out in the debate on the national wages-hours bill before the special session of Congress last December, is that it is a bar to prosperity. This objection is without foundation. A living wage, a reasonable work day, and sanitary and safe work will not break the United States. When directed against any proposed piece of state legislation, the argument is stronger since other sections of the country, not covered by similar legislation are given an advantage in competition. Yet the legislation ought to be passed on grounds of justice, and employers should aid it, and should help to pass similar legislation in other states precisely because of the difficulties involved in varying state laws under our nation-wide industrial operations. The NRA, with its codes, was a legal effort in this direction, and the condition of all workers, particularly women and children, was greatly improved during the period in which the codes were operative. Moreover a certain living standard of wages, hours, sanitation and safety renders employees physically stronger, more efficient and willing to work.

An effect of the hours legislation which has been cited

above has been to increase the number of women employed in the same industry, even though men are required to work longer hours in that industry. However, as has been seen, in some of the states and in some industries women are permitted to work as long as 12 hours a day. Here again the necessity of some Federal minimum, as in the proposed Federal wages-hours legislation. This, in its extension to both men and women, would do much to relieve unemployment as well as provide the humane standards possible through our marvellous technology to those already working.

Nineteen states and the District of Columbia have laws which in some way order one day's rest in seven for women. However, it is not uncommon in the hidden occupations, such as hotel work, and in some branches of the retail trade, for women to work every day in the week. Sunday work is reasonable in some of these occupations, but it is not right either that Sunday work should prevent the fulfillment of religious obligations or that a person should not have one day off in the week to rest. Laws prohibiting night work for women prevent physical and moral dangers, and for the most part reflect the attitude of industry and employers generally to women working at night.

Other necessary laws applying particularly to women are those preventing them from working in mines and other dangerous occupations, safety and sanitation investigation, laws on work periods before and after childbirth, good child labor laws, laws on industrial home work, laws safeguarding the more serious occasions of sin, laws compelling the payment of wages, mothers' pensions and aid to dependent children. The Social Security Act and the National Labor Relations Act are the chief recent measures now benefiting both men and women workers, the former having an especial effect on home life.

Minimum wage laws for women, which compel all employers to pay a living wage, the amount being determined usually by a board of employers, labor unionists and outsiders,

are closely connected historically with the Catholic social teaching in the United States. Monsignor John A. Ryan advocated it more than thirty years ago in his "A Living Wage" and helped administer the law in Minnesota. Father O'Hara of Oregon, now Bishop O'Hara of Great Falls, and Episcopal Chairman of the N. C. W. C. Social Action Department, worked for the passage of the second law to be passed—in Oregon—helped administer it and defended its provisions before the Supreme Court. Dr. Charles P. Neill, as United States Commissioner of Labor, prepared the monumental report on Women and Child Wage Earners in the United States, which called attention to the dire need of working women.

On March 29, 1937, the United States Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the minimum-wage law of the state of Washington,⁴ thus reversing its decisions in the cases of *Adkins v. Children's Hospital* and *Morehead v. People et al ex. rel Joseph Tipaldo*. In these decisions the due process clauses of the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments were invoked to prove that "freedom of contract" had been violated by statutes which required the payment of minimum wages determined by the cost of living.⁵ This new decision removed all doubt concerning the validity of minimum wage laws for women, and activities for their extension were undertaken immediately. Before the Supreme Court decision, seventeen states had minimum wage laws, two of which had not been in operation due to lack of appropriations. At the end of 1937, twenty-two states,⁶ the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico had such legislation.

The minimum wage law of Oklahoma has gone farther than that of any other state in that it applies to men as well as to women. As yet, however, none of the recommenda-

⁴ *West Coast Company v. Ernest Parrish and Elsie Parrish*.

⁵ See "The Constitution and Catholic Industrial Teaching," by John A. Ryan. Social Action Series, No. 8.

⁶ Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, Washington and Wisconsin.

tions of the eight wage boards thus far convened have been approved by its State Industrial Commission. When they are, a large proportion of the wage-earning men and women in Oklahoma will be covered by minimum-wage orders.

The necessity for national minimum wage and maximum hour standards for men as well as women has come to be widely regarded, since the Depression, as of vital importance not only to the well-being of the individuals themselves concerned, but also to industry and the nation. The Black-Connery bill to provide such standards was defeated in the House after passing the Senate in the last session of Congress, but there are hopeful indications that a similar bill will soon be enacted.

VI. DO TOO MANY WOMEN WORK?

It is an old-fashioned view nowadays to protest against so many working women. It is old-fashioned because they must work to live, and because employers want them to work, and because their work is needed. It is also a wrong view if it goes to the point of desiring a social system in which they could not work, since women have the ethical right to the opportunity to support themselves and do satisfying work outside of marriage and the convent.

But the old-fashioned view may come to be the new-fashioned view. For our economic system can be organized so as to need even fewer workers and so as to pay all of those who work a decent living wage. When that day comes, fewer women will be in industry and trade because their fathers and husbands will be able to support them and because so many hands will not be required to supply our needs. More women will be in the home, and they will have more time and money for the proper rearing of children, for self-culture, and for activity as citizens and units of society. The importance of this is unquestioned. It looks to a different ordering of society in which industry and trade will be more efficiently organized and in which all who work will get a

reasonable share of the great productivity of our country. It is important because it opens the way for a greater regard for home life and the good of society than is known in an age when it is the normal and expected thing for women to leave the home and take up petty, monotonous, stop-gap jobs. More of them will be left free, when they do not marry, to enter more satisfying and better paid jobs.

Much of the problem of working women resolves itself into a question of how to solve the general industrial problem and especially of how to obtain for all men employment, and at least a family wage. According the United States Department of Labor, between \$1,200 and \$2,000 a year per family is necessary for minimum life and decency. Yet in 1929, the year of our greatest prosperity, a fifth of our families received less than \$1,000 a year and two-fifths less than \$1,500, and in 1935 and 1936 over one-half of the families in the United States were living on less than \$1,250, and a third on less than \$1,000. In 1932, nine out of ten families did not receive the health and decency standard of \$2,000. If the men wage earners made a family wage, few of their wives, who count up to nearly four millions in gainful occupations would attempt work outside of their home duties, but would stay at home and take care of their homes and their children,—something that is not by any means a part-time job. It would mean a lower infant mortality, less juvenile delinquency and crime, a strengthening of family religious life, a rise in sexual morality and ideals, a nation of children stronger in soul, mind and body, longer schooling for girls, earlier marriages and more of them.

The frequency of divorce has one of its roots in the economic system. It is characteristic of the system that the individual is to do what he wishes and get as much money as he can. The individual's selfishness is glorified into a virtue, the rule of life and the source of financial success. The thing permeates our whole society; it is responsible, among other things, for the compulsion women are under to take up gainful work. Carried over into family life, it becomes the

home's greatest enemy. For the family is not kept together except by mutual sacrifices undergone in a spirit that is the very antithesis of selfishness. This selfishness, greed and materialism has its influence on sexual morality in general, upon delayed marriages, upon licentiousness, upon birth control and upon the change that has come over our times.

This question, "Do too many women work?" must be answered in terms of the success of home life in the United States. That so many women work is due largely to defects in home life under our economic system and to the economic system itself. It is likewise a cause of further defects in home life. Granting this and granting that industry does not require so many working women and would require very few if it were properly organized, then the answer is evident. And our duty, phrased by Pope Pius XI in his "Reconstructing the Social Order" likewise is evident: ". . . Intolerable, and to be opposed with all our strength is the abuse whereby mothers of families, because of the insufficiency of the father's salary, are forced to engage in gainful occupations outside the domestic walls. . . ." Women are fitted for finer things than industry and trade have to offer and positive harm is done their own higher good and the higher good of society when so many of them are transitory workers, engaged at monotonous, ill-paid work in an unfree society.

VII. DEEDS OF MERCY

To extricate ourselves from the tangle we wander in requires all the charity, mercy, love of God and of mankind we can arouse. This mercy is not a vague sentiment; it is the practice of certain definite deeds. The Church teaches us that. Witness the definiteness of the spiritual and corporal works of mercy: To admonish sinners, to instruct the ignorant, to counsel the doubtful, to comfort the sorrowful, to bear wrongs patiently, to forgive injuries, and to pray for the living and the dead; to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to harbor the harborless, to

comfort the imprisoned, to visit the sick and to bury the dead.

Nor are these works of mercy mere superfluities that we can take or leave alone. They are the bread of our spiritual and social life. Our lives belong to others as well as to ourselves. The love of God and our brethren is a social virtue in whatever sphere we live in. The more money we have, the more talents we have, the greater is the sum exacted of us. These corporal and spiritual works of mercy are not only spiritual exercises that aid in the salvation of our own souls; they were commanded us that we might make this world a better place to live and die in. Nor are they to be performed solely by an individual in behalf of another individual.

Organizations can perform works of mercy and we as individuals can aid organizations, as outsiders or as members, in the performance of these works. We can help others to organize so they may care for themselves. We can perform works of mercy through our vote and our taxes. We can perform them indirectly. We can feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked and harbor the harborless by establishing employment bureaus, by regularizing employment and by initiating public works during unemployment. It is to be noted also that the spiritual works of mercy refer to the whole range of activities of the mind and will.

It is greater charity, deeper mercy, to help our fellows overcome normal difficulties and conquer the abnormalities of our industrial-commercialism than it is to salvage the wrecks it produces.

What can those do who are not of the working people? What especially can they do to help working women? First, anything justly done to help solve the general labor problem is a work of mercy. Once it is solved, more women will be free to marry and care for a home and those who work will enjoy conditions that correspond to their personal dignity and their potentiality as mothers.

To right the special difficulties of women at their work is a spiritual and corporal work of mercy. To help train

them to fill better positions, to secure work for them, to encourage them as individuals or in labor unions to better their own corporal and spiritual welfare, to buy only union made products and to have a regard for the welfare and dignity of the millions of women who serve in our own houses, to vote or work for laws that liberate women's efforts to protect themselves and that make their right to a living wage, reasonable hours and safe and healthful work the law of the land are all spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Directly or indirectly, as individuals or through organization, through our own organizations or by cooperating with other organizations, through voluntary bodies or through our civic right and duty to vote, we help them to obtain their physical, mental and moral needs.

Other spiritual and corporal works of mercy outside the immediate sphere of work and pay can be performed in their behalf, such as providing proper living quarters, recreation, including dramatics, sports, etc., opportunities for companionship and sociability and a chance for young men and women to meet one another, physical culture, training in domestic science, family life, hygiene and sex education.

But besides the drive of the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, there stands also the virtue of social justice. This is the virtue which requires all of us to serve the common good, the general welfare, and help establish those conditions of work and wages, property, prices and property incomes that will mean steady and good work for all, a full output, a good living, the distribution of our income for the common good, and such a distribution as will let non-owners rise to ownership. It "demands of each all that is necessary for the good of all." Here is a virtue that calls on us to create a social-economic and governmental order, animated by social charity, that will fight and overcome not only the evils that oppress women at work but the whole economic tragedy of our time.

It is for all of us a problem of spiritual reformation, of education and of organization—of organizing Catholic lay-

men and women so that they will be able to work out plans of action, obtain the expert services they need, and tackle the job with the help of other general organizations that are handling one or other definite difficulty. The National Council of Catholic Men and the National Council of Catholic Women are at this work now.

Of these two groups, Catholic women's organizations are the ones better fitted to deal with the specific problems of working women though they should take part also in the solution of the general labor problem. How they will do their part cannot be set down in any hard and fast way because conditions vary from city to city and from parish to parish. If there is a central Catholic community house or women's clubrooms and active parish halls, then the work is greatly facilitated and a whole cycle of work can revolve around them. When a permanent secretary can be had, so much the better.

Advice and information about economic conditions and remedies, and opportunities to study out the whole problem should be part of the program of the organization. Where possible the local organizations should send some working woman or women to the yearly Institute on Women in Industry held in Washington by the National Council of Catholic Women with the N. C. W. C. Social Action Department. Working women should be advised to join the labor union of their occupation. Study clubs should be formed among them to take up their labor problems. Interest should be aroused among the other members of the organizations in the women's trade union movement and labor legislation. Study clubs, lectures, attendance at the meetings of and cooperation with the Catholic Conference on Industrial Problems are all to the point. The question is not what a Catholic woman's organization can do, but what to start doing. Yet whatever is started nothing should make us lose sight of the economic problem of working women and the general labor problem of which they are a part.

VII. THE GENERAL LABOR PROBLEM

The problem of women in industry will never be completely solved until the general labor problem is solved.

The great economic obstacles to sane family life are enormous concentration of wealth and power, unemployment, extremely low wages, and low or even moderate incomes in families that see clearly the full and costly needs of family life. Yet among those who work, poverty is not necessary; we are rich enough now for all to have a living wage. Moreover, we have the natural wealth, equipment and knowledge to assure employment and a high standard of general comfort to all.

We have come to our present pass through the distortion of one Christian quality and the denial of another. We have distorted personal freedom till it has become the right of every man to grow as rich as he may off the persons who work for him and the persons with whom he buys and sells. This itself is a denial of brotherhood. In the process we have abused and twisted the institution of private ownership in productive property till some cry out now for its abolition.

Catholic social teaching aspires towards reviving again a happy blend of personal independence and brotherhood in occupations and property ownership. The individual is to be strong in his own right as consumer and worker so that he may develop his talents and protect his individual, family and group rights against encroachment. Yet personal strength has to be tempered with brotherhood.

We can attain again the right blend of personal freedom and brotherhood only by ourselves striving for it. The Government can and should help greatly. But the change is largely to be accomplished through voluntary upward struggle, walking one step at a time. The final aim is the joint cooperative, collective action of brothers in their occupations working for the good of each and all and for a wide diffusion of property ownership that carries with it a measure of control.

The first and necessary step is organization in our occupations, in labor unions, in employers' organizations, in farming and in the professions—and the cooperation of each group within the industry for the proper control and working of each industry. But our economic system is closely knit and to handle it properly it would not be enough for each group to go along on their own, each looking to its own interests and ignorant of all the rest and not joining in the general brotherhood of all.

There must be a union of the representatives of all industries to guide the delicate machine, decide how much of each product is needed, at what price it should be sold and the distribution of its income. Government should both supervise and help. The aim is to bring the determining majority of the people within the circle of ownership and control. The aim is to diffuse property and control widely but not equally, for personal strength and brotherhood do not demand absolute equality.⁷

This is a far-reaching program and in the meantime, there are many injustices involved in wages, prices, interest, credit control, etc., which may and should be remedied by legislation, organization, and consumer action. Yet nothing, it seems, but a far-reaching program will restore the personal strength of the American pioneer who founded this country a democracy, or the personal strength and brotherhood of the guildsmen who worked out an economic system in the cities of the Middle Ages that harmonized with the self-respect and the brotherhood they learned from the Redeemer. Nothing but far-reaching changes will give the family the economic backing it demands.

⁷ See "New Guilds," Social Action Series, No. 1.

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N. C. W. C. STUDY CLUB OUTLINE

I. WHY WOMEN WORK

1. Give figures to support statement women work because they must, as to:
 - (a) Number of working women who are heads of families.
 - (b) Number who are homemakers.
 - (c) Number who contribute to support of dependents.
 - (d) Number of families with women sole earners.
2. Discuss the following as reasons for women working:
 - (a) No longer enough work to do at home.
 - (b) Women will work for less because they have no dependents and do not intend to work permanently. Women working for less and competing with men make it impossible for men to earn enough to get married.
 - (c) Feminist groups want women to work.
 - (d) Opportunity to do useful satisfying work outside marriage.

II. WHAT THEY DO AND WHO THEY ARE

1. Give proportion of women in agriculture; manufacturing; trade, transportation and communication; the professions, personal and domestic service; clerical occupations. How are they divided within these categories?
2. How are working women distributed as to age? as to race and color? as to locality?
3. Discuss the increase in the proportion of married women who work.

III. THEIR FREEDOM

1. The modern system has given women freedom to exercise their right to marry or not. But what two great abridgments on the freedom of working women exist? How test the freedom of women in their jobs?
2. Discuss the following standards for working women and compare them with facts in the United States.
 - (a) Strict right to an individual wage.
 - (b) Equal pay for equal work.
 - (c) Same standards as to health and hours as those enjoyed by men.
3. Why is industrial home work a factor in depressing wages?
4. How far do women share in the general unemployment?

IV. ORGANIZATION AND LEGISLATION

1. Review the principles back of labor unionism. Why do they apply to women
2. Why are so few women workers organized today? Contrast some union scales of wages with others.
3. What organization is particularly active in the promotion of unions for women?
4. Discuss the proposition that more protective legislation is needed for women despite the opposition of (a) Reactionaries, (b) National Women's Party.
5. Describe existing legislation on (a) Hours (see also Ch. III), (b) Minimum Wages, (c) other.

VI. DO TOO MANY WOMEN WORK?

1. In view of social conditions today, discuss the statement that
 - (a) Women with families should not work.
 - (b) A healthy society requires that the majority of its citizens marry and raise families.
2. How do the present organization of the economic system and the wages which are being paid to men interfere?

VII. DEEDS OF MERCY AND THE GENERAL LABOR PROBLEM

1. What are the obligations imposed by the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, and by social justice? Their applicability to working women in the spheres of work and pay and social and recreational life?
2. What organizations are working in this field, and what are some of the things which can be done by women's groups?
3. How is the problem of women in industry bound up with the larger problem of our economic system?
4. What far-reaching program is suggested as a means of reviving personal freedom and brotherhood in industry and in all occupations?

Catholic Action for Social Justice *

HOW shall we know well the right moral principles and spread them?

We shall all be unified in our religious program and our work under the Bishops (48).

We shall join a Catholic lay organization working with and under the Church (31).

We shall get it to start, or we shall join, a program of training (31).

We shall take part in study clubs and industrial conferences and the like (8).

We shall spread books, newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets (8).

We shall get the help of a priest trained in this matter (46).

We shall start work among youth (47).

We shall attend lay retreats (47).

We shall be apostles to our own associates—workers to workers, employers to employers, and so on (46).

We shall ground all our ideas in the Encyclicals of the Popes (48).

We shall take on the social charity of brotherhood in God and in Christ (44).

We shall lead good Catholic lives (44).

We shall know the crisis facing us which has, with the grace of God, put the destiny of mankind in our hands (47).

We shall have hope, because the Christian spirit of the people is strong, ignorance and environment can be overcome, and even the most abandoned have in them the sparks of "a natural Christian soul" (45); and because already much has been done to make known and apply the social teaching of the Church (7-13; 45-6).

* Numbers refer to page numbers of Pope Pius XI's Encyclical "Reconstructing the Social Order" (N. C. W. C. edition).

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