

AD6
D66

MEMORANDUM

ON THE INCREASING EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN.

Figures showing the tendency of women to displace men in light industries, and its relation to the unequal rates of pay of men and women; with special reference to the Civil Service.

Unemployment.

The prolonged unemployment of men is intensified by the increasing entry of women into the labour market.

At present it is twice as easy for women to get work as for men.

The Unemployment figures for November, 1934 show men unemployed 1,724,000, which is 18.8% of insured male workers; women unemployed 355,000, which is 9.9% of insured women workers.

No doubt this greater employability of women is partly due to the depressed state of the heavy industries and coal-mining, which mainly employ men. But there are many trades which definitely prefer to employ women.

Numbers of Women in the Labour Market.

In 1921 36.1% of all the women in the country between the ages of 14 and 65 were employed.

In 1931 37.1% were employed.

This is a rise of 1%, or numerically 550,000 women.

(Note.—The age 14-65 is chosen as representing the working life. The employments covered include insurable and non-insurable occupations.)

Most of these 37.1% women (5,606,000 in number) are young.

If analysed by age groups in relation to the numbers in those groups it appears that one girl of 14 and 15 out of every two throughout the country is at work; two girls of 16 and 17 out of every three; and four girls of 18-20 out of every five.

Occupations of Women in the Labour Market.

Roughly one-third of the employed women are in some form of personal service. One-third are in commerce, clerical work and the professions. One-third are in industry.

Personal Service.

This includes domestic work, hotel and restaurant work.

In this field women are not displacing men.

It is almost the only sphere in which the proportion of men employed has been increasing.

In 1911 men were 15% of the workers in these occupations.

By 1931 men were 19% of the workers.

Clerical Work.

Taking clerical work as a whole, in 1911 women were 22% of all workers.

In 1921 they were 33%.

By 1931 they were 43%.

At that date the actual number of women doing clerical work was 580,000.

In this field women are definitely displacing men, or at least preventing an increase in their employment.

Commerce (Including wholesale and retail business, shop assistants, buyers, canvassers, commercial travellers, but not transport or clerical workers).

Between 1911 and 1921 there was a sharp rise in the proportion of women employed. The numbers of men went down by 100,000 and those of women went up by 300,000.

Since 1921 the position as regards sex distribution of workers has been relatively stationary. Both more men and more women are employed, the increases being proportionately much the same.

Industry.

In all the light industries the employment of women has been increasing relatively to men over a long period.

Taking all non-textile factories together:—In 1890 women were 15% of all workers; By 1931 women were over 30%.

These increases are more marked in some trades than others.

In the manufacture of food and drink, tobacco, clothing, china and earthenware, glass, lace, paper, chemical, leather, electrical appliances and above all light metal work the numbers of women employed are rising steadily in proportion to the total number of workers.

Between 1921 and 1931 there was an actual decrease in the numbers of men employed and an increase in the numbers of women employed in glass, leather, and light metal work. In the other trades there were greater proportionate increases of women, or less proportionate decreases (according as the total numbers employed were going up or down).

These changes do not represent an actual displacement of men by women from specific processes. Such displacement is guarded against by agreements and customs. What it means is that wherever a new process or a new machine is introduced an effort is made to get women onto it. Mechanisation brings in its train an increase in female labour.



Two explanations of this fact are current.

The first is that women are good at routine and repetition work, and that they like it.

It seems to be true that they are better at such jobs than men.

It is however quite untrue that they prefer such work.

The theory is a comfortable one for everyone concerned except the women who are put to do the work, and the men whom they in fact displace.

The second is that women's labour is cheap.

This also is true, and is so well known as to need little proof. Women rates, even on piece-work vary from a half to four-fifths of men's rates, except in the case of the textile trades where they are very nearly the same.

Textiles.

In all textile processes women's rates approximate quite closely to men's, and in weaving (both wool and cotton) equal piece-work rates are given to men and women.

In the textile trades as a whole the rate of increase of women workers as compared to men has been definitely slower than in the other light industries.

In 1890 women were 60.5% of all workers in these trades, which were largely women's work in all ages. By 1928 women were 63.8% of all workers and by 1931 only 64.8%.

The proportionate increase of women is thus 4.3% in 41 years, whereas in other light industries it has been 15%.

In weaving, where equal pay is in force, men and women do the same work, and there has been practically no alteration in the sex distribution of workers since 1921.

Between 1921 and 1931 men weavers (in wool) declined 10% and women weavers declined 7%, and during the same period in cotton, men weavers increased 1% and women weavers neither increased nor decreased.

In these processes women are NOT UNDERCUTTING men.

The comparison of the textile trades and other trades suggests that if a greater measure of equal pay were attained the danger of displacement of men by women would be reduced.

The Remedy: Equal Pay.

Some people maintain that the only solution for the problems of women's employment is to prevent women from working at all.

This measure would bring the business of the country to a standstill. Moreover it would be totally rejected by women, who would not endure it.

They claim that they have a right to use their brains and their hands and to earn money by them if they choose.

Although it would be an act of tyranny for the state to prevent women from working, it is clearly the business of the state to adjust the conditions under which men and women work so that they are not a danger to each other.

At present women are blacklegs in industry, and the position is dangerous to their male fellow-workers.

If the state could secure the payment of equal rates where the work is identical, and the payment of rates more approximately equal where the work is different this danger would be reduced.

It is difficult for the state to regulate the wages of industry.

It is not difficult for the state to regulate the wages which it pays itself as an employer.

If the state services gave equal pay other employers would be encouraged to do the same.

That is why the position of women Civil Servants is of such importance.

In this occupation work is identical and interchangeable. Recruits are obtained by open competitive examination at which men and women compete. They serve under the same conditions, and in the same offices and they do the same work. And yet they are paid at different rates.

The giving of equal pay is not impossible. It has always been paid in weaving, and is now in force in medicine, law, accountancy, the arts, and in the House of Commons.

The Fair Field.

The women's demand is that they should be treated fairly, and that their pay should be based upon the work done, and not upon their sex. They ask for a fair field and no favour.

If the result of equal pay is the employment of a smaller number of women, so be it. Women consider that this will be healthier for the whole community than the present plan.

The Women's organisations ask Members of the House of Commons to support the claim for EQUAL PAY FOR WOMEN IN THE CIVIL SERVICE in the interests of justice, and in the interests of all the men workers throughout the country.

The figures quoted in this memorandum are drawn from the Occupation volumes of the Census of 1911, 1921, 1931; from the Survey of Industrial Relations 1926, the London and Cambridge Economic Service Memorandum No. 17A 1926, the Home Office pamphlet Cmd. 3508 Women in Industry 1930, and the Report of the Chief Inspector of Factories 1933.

ISSUED BY

THE LONDON AND NATIONAL SOCIETY FOR WOMEN'S SERVICE,

29, MARSHAM STREET, WESTMINSTER, S.W. 1.

and printed by request of a Meeting of Members of Parliament held in the House of Commons on December 13th, 1934.