

A Fifth Freedom

By ELIZABETH DOTSON

With tongue in cheek, a friend remarked, "Yes, there is a fifth freedom . . . the freedom to do a man's work—for a woman's pay!" Let us put it a little differently, however. The freedom to do any work of which one is capable, without receiving an equitable and fair salary. This takes the gender out of the situation, for the women's problem of equal pay for comparable work is only part of a larger problem of fair wages and employment, which involves both men and women.

During the war, women filled $\frac{1}{3}$ of the home front industrial jobs. But in 1945 a woman in industry received an average of only 60% as much in her paycheck as did a man performing comparable work. Secretary of Labor Schwollenbach says, "Women have fully proved their ability as workers during the war. They have discharged their new and unusual tasks in a manner which entitles them to the highest commendation." Most industrial employers have been equally complementary with words, if not with wages.

Some improvement has been made, in industry especially, over women's pre-war wages, which averaged 50 to 60% less than men's. Let us consider two facts revealed by the 1940 census. First, the general level of wages was low in fields where women employees predominated — nursing, teaching, welfare work, secretarial and others. This tendency depressed wages for men in the same and related fields. Second, when men were employed in these fields their average receipts, though low, were appreciably higher than the women's. For example, among stenographers and secretaries there were 15 times as many women as men. The men averaged \$110.66 a month; the women \$81.66. Surveys show that in 1940 in many industries, women's salaries, regardless

of the work performed, "averaged less than the lowest average for men."

In our own state offices it is known that unfair inequalities exist. At one state institution a group of men and women are doing the same work. The men receive \$5 more than the women in all grades of their classification. Women employed to replace office men in one department were given lower classifications and lower salaries.

In another instance, a woman employee was given two advances in position, each time replacing a male employee, doing exactly the same work he had done and assuming the same responsibilities. Her first advance gave her a \$5 increase. The second advance netted her \$10 more. Her salary was still \$50 less than that of her predecessor in the second position. This wide differential could not be justified on the basis of the male employee's term of service. At that time some new employees were being paid a higher wage than employees in comparable classifications who were already in the service of the department.

Many women feel that equal pay for the *same* work is not the only problem. They feel that equal pay for *equal importance and responsibility of position* should be recognized. Consider a professional librarian with five years of college education and specialized training. She is contributing to the education and economic advancement of our Oregon citizens. Still in spite of steady increases in the last four years, she receives from 84c to 98c an hour (\$150-\$175 monthly). An unskilled laborer working for the state receives from 73c to 87c an hour. A skilled or semi-skilled laborer receives from 87c to \$1.09 an hour. This statement in no way criticizes the receipts of the laborer nor his right to them. It merely extends his

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