

Legislating Equal Pay

By ELIZABETH DOTSON

In the last issue of this magazine we discussed what we termed a fifth freedom—equal pay for equal work. Perhaps we were hasty in speaking of a *fifth* freedom, for an adequate salary is necessary to assure freedom from fear of insecurity and freedom from want. The home and family is a basic unit of American life which must above all be preserved. In our modern economy, family units are dependent upon incomes for financial security and purchasing power. This security and purchasing power must be assured to family groups for whom women are the breadwinners and must be protected for the families supported by men. Equal pay for equal work is a necessary first step toward establishing and maintaining adequate standards of living.

With these facts clearly before the nation in the decisions rendered by the War Labor Board, Senators Wayne Morse of Oregon and Claude Pepper of Florida introduced Senate bill 1178, the Women's Equal Pay Act of 1945, to eliminate the injustices of unequal pay and to protect all wage levels. The following excerpts are quoted from a letter of Senator Morse to the author. "And my further consideration of it convinced me that the principle of equal pay for equal work as a matter of law should be a required policy in the field of American industrial relations. . . . The conscience of any fair minded person dictates that this principle is fair and right. . . . In essence this type of unfair discrimination in the field of employer-employee relations is a device of labor exploitation. . . . Therefore I believe that my bill S. 1178, which calls for equal pay for equal work is one of the most important pieces of legislation pending before the Congress in the in-

terest of fair and peaceful employer-employee labor relations."

Before the Senate Subcommittee on Education and Labor, to which the bill was referred, Miss Frieda Miller, Director of the Women's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor, stated that the bill has a "simple, direct purpose—to assure the payment of at least an established men's rate in a particular place to any persons doing a comparable quantity and quality of work . . . and that the same automatic rate progressions for the job will be applied to both (men and women). The bill also forbids the replacement of men by women in the same job at a lower rate of pay . . . all automatic provisions relating to seniority and productivity would apply equally." The bill provides for the creation of an Equal Pay Division in the Women's Bureau, Department of Labor. This division would be under the administration of the Director of the Bureau, who would appoint an Administrator to take direct charge of the Division. Provision is made for hearing evidence of alleged discrimination and prosecution for such violation.

On the basis of census figures, the Women's Bureau estimates that this bill would cover about 6 million women in establishments engaged in or affecting interstate commerce and employing 8 or more workers. It would, however, still leave many women's salaries unprotected by legislation. It is at this point that the need for state legislation arises.

Six states, including our northern neighbor, Washington, had passed equal pay bills as of October 15, 1945. Illinois and Michigan laws cover women in manufacturing only. The Massachusetts, Washington and New York bills cover persons in private employ-