

## How Much Should They Earn?

(The following is a condensation of an article by Betty Hanna Hoffman, reprinted by special permission from the *Ladies' Home Journal*. Copyright 1946, The Curtis Publishing Company.)

In this survey, *Journal* editors set out to discover what Mr. and Mrs. America feel about wages, not what pressure groups tell them they ought to feel.

So *Journal* interviewers went ringing doorbells from coast to coast, giving a lot of silent millions a chance to speak their minds thoroughly. An accurate cross section of all American adults over 21, men and women, union and nonunion members, told what *they* would do if magically given the chance to settle "the wage question" once and for all.

The most spectacular result, at first glance, is that 49 per cent of the adult population of America feel disgruntled and dissatisfied with their wages. They are the respectable blue-suited pillars of the community—school teachers, librarians, ministers, farmers. A greater portion of these individuals are on the rampage over wages than the laborers who mow lawns, dig ditches, help harvest crops or pick berries for a living. The majority of Americans consider *these* persons the most poorly paid in the country: *white-collar workers, school teachers and unskilled laborers.*

Primarily, the heart of America goes out to underpaid office workers and store clerks. Not only clerical workers themselves, but also their supervisors, complain that "white collar help" is generally paid too little. The average office worker today makes about \$30 a week, before deductions, and most store clerks get considerably less; whereas a job that takes no brains at all, such as sweeping up around the factory, will often pay \$39 weekly. It

may be office workers' close association with the boss as well as the prestige of being "in the know" or "in the front office" which prompts feelings of loyalty and sympathy toward management. Whatever the reason, they so far have been sufficiently pro-management, whatever their personal grievances about their jobs to prevent much headway by unions into their ranks.

The public supports President Truman's program to raise minimum wage rates from 40 to 65 cents an hour. A majority of Americans say their family incomes fall far short of what is needed for comfort.

Which brings us to one of the most widely held notions about America: that we are an installment-buying, gadget-minded nation, a people who think a new car or bathroom more important than things like education and culture. Plenty of G.I.'s in France and England have heard it said that we are too materialistic, too comfort-minded.

This theory is not borne out by this survey. In fact, America's sales resistance is pretty darn high, as reflected in the answers to this provocative question: "*What would you do with a gift of \$1000?*" Practically nobody would splurge on a new car or fur coat or take a flier to Tahiti. One woman dreamed happily of paying a whole year's rent in advance. The majority said: put it in the bank, invest in a house or insurance, pay bills.

With this solidly conservative approach toward unexpected manna from heaven, it is small wonder that the public doesn't fully realize what "big money" is.

"*Should Congress set a limit on the amount of money a man can earn in a year?*" "No!" is the vehement answer of 73 per cent of those interviewed. "If he has the brains and the push, let him make it," was the general response.