

*Equal Pay*  
*Miss Edwards*

THE CASE FOR 'EQUAL PAY' IN AUSTRALIA

Before I begin to speak directly about 'equal pay for equal work', I would like to make two points in connection with it. The first is that it is probable that some of you here this morning may have already heard me speak on this issue. And it may appear to you that I have changed my position. I do not think that I have. Even if I had, it would not worry me particularly, since I hold it to be self-evident that if we want progress we must be prepared for changes ourselves, our attitudes and our ways of thinking. I do not mean to imply this that all changes are necessarily progressive - they may be retrogressive; only that where there is progress, change is a necessary part of it. However, in this case, whatever change there may appear to be is in the form, and for the sake of increased clarity, rather than real shift of ground. In every address I have given on this subject, my expressed conviction, always, has been that, insofar as equal pay brings with it a threat to the economic sufficiency of family maintenance, it is unjustifiable. I still think so. If I were asked now to vote for equal pay for men and women, with the legislation as it now stands - i.e. if equal pay involves the raising of all women's rates to the level of the male rate including the male basic wage - I would vote against it. That is the first point.

The second is this, that I speak today as the representative of the sub-committee of the W.A. Branch of the U.N. Status of Women Standing Committee - a sub-committee which was specially formed to examine the content and the consequences of equal pay for equal work - or, if you prefer the lengthier and more elaborate title, equal remuneration for work of equal value. The views expressed, however, are also, without qualification, my own. They are these.

In asking for equal pay for equal work, we are not asking for anything nearly so revolutionary as the proposals in Dr. Summerskill's Bill. What we are asking for is so simple in comparison - and so innocuous - that were it not also, I believe, so very important, I would feel the need to apologise for wasting your time in pointing to the obvious. What we are asking for is not even new. It has been done before, in part, in wartime, and is now being done, in part, in peace time. We are merely asking that it be done wholeheartedly, and done continuously, and the better.

It is now time to tell you about what we are asking, whence it is to come, and why we are asking for it.

Firstly, as to what we are asking for: The foremost, the fundamental, the most important point which needs to be clearly established in connection with equal pay for equal work is that we are NOT asking for the limitation of income in conformity with the rate for the job, nor for the raising of all wages on the basis of the male basic wage. Equal pay carries with it as a necessary consequence the protection of the family. It comprises a standard rate for the job irrespective of the sex of the occupant PLUS adequate family allowances. "Only through a system of adequate family allowances" said Mrs. Wheaton, President of the Australian Federation of Women Voters, "can social justice be ensured for the dependants of workers and for mothers engaged in the socially significant work of rearing families."

We maintain, in this regard, that the provision of family allowances has been admitted in principle, and partly in fact, in Australia in the provisions for child endowment and for a basic wage. The basic wage is not merely the rate for the job. It is a rate for the citizen, but we think that it is too limited in its application, too rigid, and incorrectly addressed. The basic wage is, we think, a social wage. It is the irreducible minimum amount of money deemed sufficient to enable (I quote the Industrial Arbitration Act) "the average worker to live in reasonable comfort with regard to any domestic obligations which would ordinarily arise."

That the family allowance - that part of the basic wage having 'regard to domestic obligations' - be paid to the person who fulfils the domestic duties, the housewife; and, therefore,

That this sum having been expunged from the pay envelope of the male worker, and re-distributed as a direct payment to the housewife, the residue, plus any other amount for skill or discomfort, will represent the rate for the job, or, rather, that rate for the job which it is within the capacity of industry to pay; and, therefore

That since 'domestic obligations' are no longer part of the wage in the pay envelope of the male worker, there is no reasonable ground for wage differentiation on the basis of the mere sex of the job-occupant.

Equal pay for equal work does NOT mean that women should receive the rate as men are now receiving, where the male rate is calculated on the basic. We believe that those who interpret it thus do their own cause, and the community in general, a disservice, unintentional though that disservice may be. Let us on now to the consequences of wage payment as the rate for the job. This leads to the second stage.

The 'Whence', the source from which the family allowance is to come:

mean that the difference between the rate for the job and the family basic wage continue as at present to be paid entirely out of the pockets of the employers? In other words, should it be a tax on industry, and industry alone? We think, if we to be consistent, that the answer is 'No'. For this would mean that only the of industrial workers are entitled to a family allowance, whereas what we re is that ALL housewives should receive an adequate family allowance. The ons for this will be clearer later. We are advocating here that the family allow- should be drawn from the same source as the child endowment allowance - i.e. tion. In short, that the child endowment and the 'domestic obligations' basic payments be incorporated in a composite family allowance, adequate to the size he individual family, be it small or large.

Will this necessarily make the rich richer, or the poor poorer? We k not. Industrialists may, perhaps, be relieved of a portion of their burden, gh when you take into account the extension of the application of the family wance from the wives of industrial workers only to the wives of all citizens, ncreased cost makes even this doubtful. In any case, there are other rich le in the community - farmers, for instance - whose present contribution (based he number of their employees) is negligible when compared with that of, say, a factory owner. We deny that it will make the poor poorer, since the really poor not subject to taxation, and some of them are not even in receipt of the basic wage.

We admit that the group which will be hardest hit will be that comprised he unmarried male workers, to whom at present is granted a family allowance as atuity, even though they remain unmarried all the years of their lives. The basic wage thus creates an anomaly in the form of a reward for bachelorhood, a punishment for spinsterhood. I will leave it to you to work out the implications uch a peculiar social system. But we do not anticipate that the unmarried woman er will be appreciably better off economically than she is now. We do think, ver, that all women workers, and the community generally, will be better off in r ways. It is these 'other' ways which we believe to be of such importance that opose to spend a little more time on this third - and final - stage of my talk morning.

We come now to the third, and logically the most important, aspect of claim for equal pay.

The 'Why', the reasons which we believe justify us in making our demand: arily, they are five:-

Sex discrimination is not in accordance with the full intention of universal

Women employed in the home are entitled to receive payment for their contribution to the wealth of the nation as are others employed in alternative avenues of employment.

The choice of whether one works in industry or in the home is a matter for the individual conscience, and not a fit subject (to quote Mrs. Wheaton again) for "the imposition of external restraints."

With regard to the first reason, insofar as universal suffrage implies equal rights for all citizens, we think that its intention has not been fulfilled. Granting of the vote is certainly an indication of the belief in equality, but, things stand, it is the mere symbol of a hope, rather than a fact - a hope which now crystallised itself into a demand by, at least, thirtyfour nations before United Nations Assembly, and incorporated in the Declaration of Human Rights. A vote is no more than a mere mark on a piece of paper unless it is the sign of a reasoned judgment, and one cannot arrive at a reasoned judgment unless one is in possession of all the relevant facts. Can one, for instance, learn to appreciate wine if one's beverage is compulsorily limited to ginger beer? We think that long as women are either confined exclusively to the home, or relegated almost solely to jobs of minor importance in the world at large, their appreciation of facts is limited by the restrictions imposed upon experience.

The whole world over, behind the plea, the hope, the demand for equal is the desire of all thinking women for a proper recognition of their capacities. Insofar as some jobs - e.g. higher civil service clerical jobs - are reserved for men, a suggestion of inferiority, the implication that she is not capable, attaches itself to the woman. In the world of practical affairs, there is little doubt, we think, that the status of the position occupied attaches itself to the occupier as a personal attribute, a sign of that person's ability and inclination. This external assessment, we contend, affects one's inward development. Where it is forced on one a deliberate system of external limitations, the result is a deeply ingrained feeling of inferiority, or frustration. So long as the lower paid positions only open to women, the implication is that these inferior roles only are within their capacity. And in those cases where women and men do the same work under a differential system of payment, the implication is that, really, the male worker does better. We think that the first is unfair, and the second downright dishonest. It covers the second reason.

As for the third, the prevention of women's full development, we hold that the time is now opportune for a re-orientation of the traditional views of the divided roles of women in a world of workers. The machine age is a godsend to women. Providing freedom from the drudgery, of housework, it opened the door to women's emancipation. In the old days - particularly in Australia which suffered from domestic servant problem because there were no domestic servants (or practically none) - when house-cleaning was entirely dependent on the old-fashioned broom and scrubbing brush, when carpets had to be taken up and beaten, when floors had to be polished (even at the risk of housemaid's knee), when washing day brought with it never-ending back-breaking job of bending, stirring, scrubbing, wringing, stretching over an open copper in an atmosphere of heat and steam, when in a week women wore multitudinous petticoats and men innumerable stiff white collars and children all little Lord Fauntleroy's (in apparel at any rate), when cooking was without the modern contrivances which make it quick and light, when transport was slow and infrequent and shopping burdensome, when, in fact, the exigencies of housework offered little opportunity for relaxation or adventure into other fields outside the home, women's emancipation was not possible. In those days one chose to struggle with all the rigors of household duties and nothing else, or one chose to do nothing else. But with the advent of labor-saving machines housework was lightened, time consumption lessened to such an extent that it brought to women a freedom which they had not known before. Let us face it. Housework as a sole occupation is indubitably, eminently respectable - and dreadfully dull. (I do not refer to household management, but to houseWORK). It restricts women's personality if the job is too large. The monotonous daily repetition, whether one is aware of it or not, does not allow of that effort and variety which keeps the mind alert and the body observant. Total absorption in the work around the house is not only no longer