

# TRADES HALL COUNCIL

## MELBOURNE

Statement prepared by Committee appointed to propagate the principle of Equal Pay for the Sexes, and Endorsed by the above Council.

### A UNIFORM BASIC WAGE FOR THE SEXES.

The demand is that the same Basic Wage be given to women as is given to men—that there be no longer differential rates as between the sexes—that, in short, there shall be the one uniform BASIC LIVING WAGE for all adult persons.

#### THE REASON FOR THE CLAIM.

The primary reason for the claim is that the development of machinery enables women in increasing numbers to enter industry, doing work of a character that, under the older methods of production, fell to males only, and if we permit the dual standard of wages to continue, we are placed in the position of allowing one-half the supply of labor to be available to the employing class for the same jobs at a lower rate of pay than the other half. The result, of course, being that the more expensive labor having to compete with the less expensive would be compelled to reduce its price to the level of the less expensive. This being so, we affirm the time-honored principle of Unionism that the level of the lower-paid shall be risen to the level of the higher.

#### BUT ARE NOT WAGES FIXED ON THE COST OF LIVING?

That is so, and here we come to an important point in the discussion. Is the present basic wage what the Arbitration Court claims for it—that is, a family basic wage? The Movement disputes that it is. We of the Labor Movement have persistently claimed that it is not so. The 7/- a day rate fixed by Justice Higgins in 1907 was fixed after what was at best a most inadequate inquiry. And it was not an inquiry into what a family should have weekly to spend on necessities and comforts, but it was an inquiry into what an average family was then expending. It was more an inquiry into what standard they were living on than what standard they should live on. Now the standard they were getting was that which they had been able to win by collective bargaining and action in a bad period from which they were just emerging. In consequence, if only viewed from that angle, a wage based on that standard was necessarily a low one; but their present wage can be demonstrated to fall miserably short of a family wage. What the workers were able to win by collective bargaining and action was not more than that for which the average Unionist was prepared to put up a fight.

Now the average man's necessities form the basis round which the workers' will to fight manifests itself. If, then, we reckon up the 1907 average man's requirements in the way of family, we find the average working man maintained not more than one child, and at this date there is only a fraction of a child per man. In consequence, how could a wage based on the average man's needs be classed as an adequate living wage for a family containing three children?

As a verification of the fact that the present basic wage is not a living wage for a family of five, as has been generally alleged hitherto, we can point to the 1920 Basic Wage Inquiry, of which Mr. Piddington was the chairman, which definitely proclaimed that the Harvester Wage fell far short of providing the necessities of a family of five, consisting of a man, wife, and three children.

#### THE PRESENT WAGE—A SINGLE MAN'S WAGE.

But the Commission inquired into the cost of living of a family and of separate units as members of a family. Had it inquired into the cost of maintenance of a man as a single man, it would have found that the present Basic Wage was not more than a single man's wage. Whilst it is not true that two can live cheaper than one, it is true that two (a man and wife) can live cheaper than two single persons can live. Therefore, the average single man, for food, shelter and clothing, has to outlay more weekly than would cover a married man's share of his family expenditure. The social habits of a single man also demand more than those of a married man. Apart from this, we have to recognise that many single men have responsibilities in the way of helping to support aged parents. It is expected that the single sons of a family shall do this, and not allow such responsibility to fall upon the shoulders of a married son. Then, again, if there is excessive sickness in a family, or any other exceptional expenditures, the single man is called upon to take it upon his shoulders. So we declare that a Commission inquiring into the cost of living of a single man would be compelled to declare that the present Basic Wage does not more than provide for the "needs of a single man considered as a human being living in a civilised community."

How, then, does a man and wife fare on the Basic Wage? We have already pointed out that the man and wife live cheaper than two single persons could live, and, further, the man and woman dependent upon merely a Basic Wage are compelled, in order to live as man and wife, to debar themselves from many things to which they both were formerly accustomed. The standard of living of both man and woman is viciously lowered the moment a Basic Wage worker becomes married, and the two rely upon the wage of one. So much is this now recognised that more and more do married women go to work, and less and less become the numbers of those who get married. All this demonstrates that the present wage is only a single man's wage.

#### THE SINGLE WOMAN.

And what of the single woman? With the increase of women in industry, and owing to the decrease in the number of marriages, and the increase in the age of those who do get married, woman has come to recognise that, for large num-

bers of women, working for wages is a permanent condition, and in consequence, in ever-increasing numbers, do women seek to maintain themselves. And we declare that it cannot be contended that a woman's maintenance under these conditions costs less than a man's. Food, clothing, shelter, as a whole, costs as much for a woman as a man. In ever-increasing numbers also do women, under these conditions, adopt social habits costing as much as men, and we claim that men's present Basic Wage would not be more than is required for the maintenance of the "average woman regarded as a human being living in a civilised community." She has every right to be able to maintain herself in decency and comfort, and that she is unable to do on the present low rates given to women.

#### OUR REMEDY.

Hence our demand for a uniform basic wage for the sexes is justified from the point of view of the vicious effect unequal pay for the sexes would have upon the customary standard of life of the whole working class, and it is an absolutely necessary reform for woman if she is to maintain herself. And in demanding equal pay, we are only asking for the general acceptance of a principle which has been accepted by Australian Courts and Boards as perfectly legitimate in those special industries where women were in competition with men in what Courts were pleased to regard as men's work, because men were largely engaged therein. We demand then that that principle should be applied generally, because, if it is not, women who will continue to enter industry in ever-increasing numbers will be employed at lower wages, and will cause widespread havoc on our present standards. If the principle in its application is to be confined to merely a few of what the Courts term men's industries, then so much the more will women seek to enter those industries, until they become "women's industries," and subject to the lower rate of pay as such. The general application of the principle is the only way out to save our standard of living from sweated competition, and to give to woman that measure of reform to which she is fully entitled—that is, the right to draw from the social product an amount equal to that of her brothers, and to at least maintain herself, as the Court puts it, as a human being living in a civilised community. The attainment of a higher basic family wage would not in any way minimise the evil of the different wages for the sexes. On the other hand we may expect it to even accentuate the trouble. The dual standard, if allowed to remain, is bound to become an evil of the first magnitude, and the Committee believes that the only measures that deal effectively with the situation are the uniform Basic Wage for Sexes, and Child and Motherhood Endowment by the State.