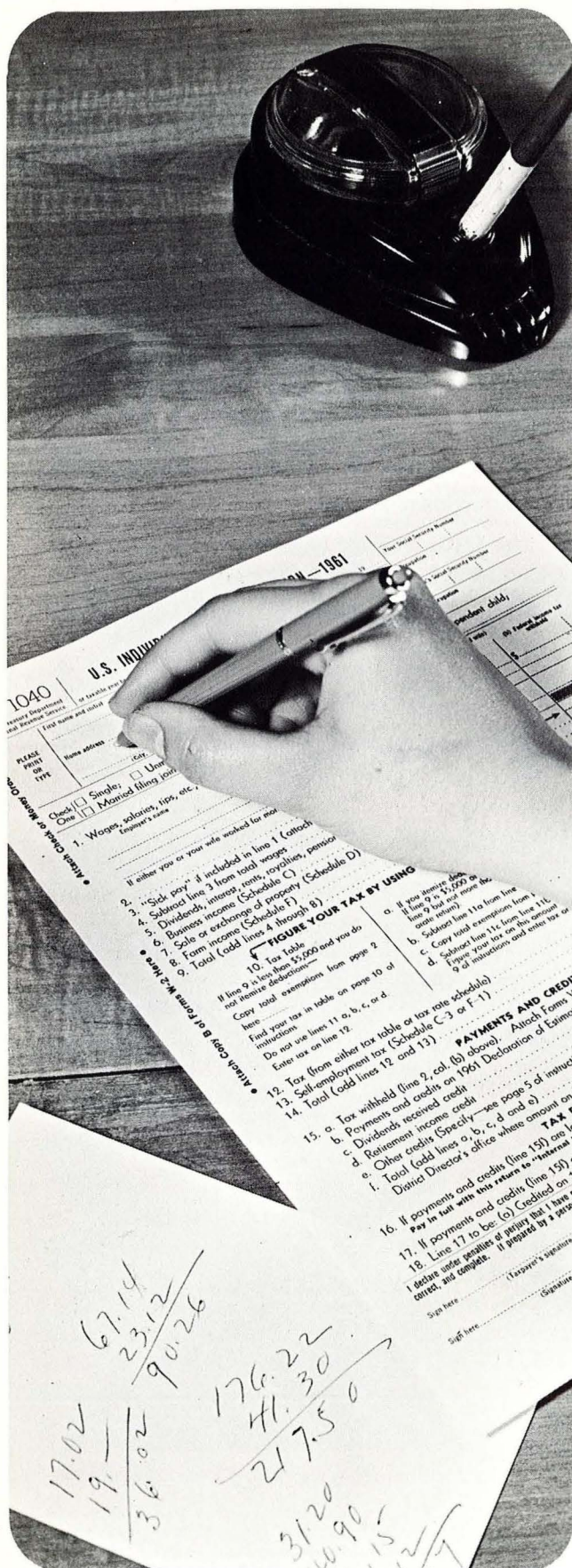




*A Weak Spot
in
Our Economy*

UNEQUAL PAY FOR WOMEN

WHILE A WOMAN IS FILLING OUT HER INCOME tax, she is equal to a man in the eyes of the Federal government. But when she goes out to earn her income, she is paid only 61 per cent of what a man receives in the same job.

In an enlightened country where women constitute a third of the labor force, this is a shocking reality. And possibly the most disturbing part of the problem is that unwittingly women aid and abet this practice. They have convinced themselves that they must accept this down-grading, and along with it accept less money for equal or superior skills.

And the group which should be most concerned — the college-educated women — has largely ignored the problem. How many know that in 1961 several equal pay bills were introduced to both Houses of Congress?

That as of this writing the Equal Pay Act of 1962 is riding out weeks of postponements and delays in the House waiting for consideration?

It is a curious fact that whenever the cause of women is advanced, men are the prime movers. The Secretary of Labor minces no words as to how he stands: "Reason cannot muster any arguments for these differences which so often force women workers to sell their industrial skills at discount rates. The all-too-human impulse for a bargain would be restrained by these proposed bills when the bargain is that of buying the work effort of female hands. A woman working for bargain rates necessarily must feel that her effort itself is cheapened when the objective measure of its worth to the employer — namely her wage rate — is less than a male worker's for the same job."

Today, women are not working for the thrill of it. They are working toward the aims that men have — to support themselves and their families. Last year, women were listed by the government as heads of one-tenth of all the families in the United States. Single, widowed, and separated women are frequently the sole wage earners in their families. Their earnings are vital in the battle against the high cost of living.

The image of the carefree bachelor girl in her twenties who blows her weekly pay check on clothes and trips is simply a fantasy of the past. If she is still a bachelor girl, she usually is supporting her parents or putting a younger brother or sister through college. She needs equal pay just to survive. If she's married, she may be paying back her college loan and supporting her husband until he gets out of medical school.

Currently, about 40 per cent of the female labor force is made up of women over 45 years old. They are the solid, unchanging group who have ambitions just as legitimate as any man's. The Department of Labor estimates that within the next eight years, the labor force in this country will grow nearly 20 per cent. At least half of this number will be women.

Esther Peterson, Chief of the Women's Bureau in Washington, who has aided the SIMMONS REVIEW in gathering data on this problem, says: "Many employers continue to regard women workers as casual earners, or as working for pin money, or merely marking time until they can leave their jobs for marriage. Labor force data show, however, that married women (with husbands absent or present) accounted for *three-fifths* of the total number of women workers in 1961.

"In 1960, women's median wage and salary income of \$3,293 was \$2,124 less than men's."

But this is the immediate past. It is unfortunate, but it has gone by. What should concern every educated woman are the danger signals ahead. The devaluation of women's work is on the increase. Its symptoms are showing up in the down-graded pay offered women in

such newly developing industries as plastics and synthetic textiles. The habit is spreading.

In a nation which makes such a self-conscious effort to serve as an example to the world, only 22 of the 50 states have any equal pay legislation on the state level. These are so riddled with loopholes and are of such uneven value, that they lack the teeth for effective application. Massachusetts, for example, has in effect equal pay laws. But it is a mystery why this law does not cover, among others, employees of charitable, fraternal, educational, religious, scientific, or literary associations. Massachusetts' next door neighbors, Connecticut and Maine, make no such exclusions. They cover all employees. The unevenness and lack of justice in these laws have prompted the Federal government to draw up strong Equal Pay Bills as sound preventive medicine for the future.

Last December, the President of the United States took an extraordinary action on behalf of women. He established the President's Commission on the Status of Women. First among the objectives he outlined is a study of the employment policies and practices, including those on wages, under federal contract. He pointedly mentioned taking affirmative steps to assure non-discrimination on the basis of sex and to enhance constructive employment for women. He charged the Commission to inquire into new and expanded services that may be required for women as wives, mothers, and workers, including education, counseling, training, home services, and arrangements for care of children during the working day.

Backing up the Federal government all the way are the labor unions. Although they are inserting equal pay clauses in many of their collective bargaining requests, they realize that millions of women come under no union and are without even state protection.

The bills proposed in the House have teeth in them, but they bite gently. They are not out "to get" the employer. They are out to educate him. They plan to

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use the principles of conference, conciliation, and persuasion — not coercion. They seek to encourage employers to eliminate discriminatory wage practices, to make restitution for back wages due, and to encourage the practice of careful job evaluations.

Only as a last resort will the teeth bite, and they bite where it hurts the employer *most* — in the pocketbook. It requires that employers with government contracts exceeding \$10,000 must maintain equal pay rates. If an employer is found guilty of any violation of equal pay, no contract by any United States government agency may be awarded to him.

Educated women in America are dragging their feet about taking positive action on more equitable treatment of women workers. In the last decade, many foreign countries set in motion equal pay programs. Five years ago the European Economic Community made equal pay a provision of its treaty. This bound Belgium, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, Luxemburg, and the Netherlands to this principle. The International Labor Organization (the United States is a member) provides in its constitution that "men and women should receive equal remuneration for work of equal value."

Pushing hard for equal pay in this country is the American Association of University Women. In providing data for this article, Mrs. Lorraine B. Torrec, Chairman of the National Committee for Equal Pay, urged Simmons alumnae to become interested in this legislation, "to study state laws to supplement Federal legislation which can only pertain to interstate commerce. . . . Equal pay protects men's jobs. The employer who pays a woman a lower wage for the same work will also hire the 'cheap labor!' "

Eleanor Roosevelt suggests that readers of the *SIMMONS REVIEW* "can help settle the problem of equal pay by writing to senators and representatives." Many a cause has been won by a postage stamp.

Behind the movement are the majority of the great women's organizations and the labor unions. But their work is withering on the vine for lack of mass support of those most involved — the women themselves.

Women must discern, too, that equal pay legislation is not a total magic solution. They can be defeated by lack of equal opportunity — something that can never be legislated into existence. When an employer says, "She is getting top salary in our company — for a woman," this means that equal opportunity hasn't a ghost of a chance.

The problem is one of pure and simple justice. When women get angry enough about the situation, they will act. Now appears to be the right moment for a case of national anger.