The Women's Labor League movement stood solidly behind the organization of working women as the best path to securing better working conditions under capitalism. Efforts at unionizing women workers, however, had not met with much success by the 1920s, and the WLLs recognized that other avenues were needed as well if conditions were to be changed. While never trusting legislative solutions on their own, the Women's Labor Leagues nonetheless pushed for the introduction of a range of protective labour laws and social welfare measures. Minimum Wages, Mothers' Allowances, Old Age Pensions, Workmen's Compensation—the Federation of WLLs and its Locals were ardent advocates of these and other provisions. But they were also staunch critics, keeping an eye on the limitations of legislative initiatives and, wherever they could, exposing violations. Nowhere was the Federation of Women's Labor Leagues more diligent in the watchdog role than in the case of minimum wages for women.

Protective labour legislation was introduced in Canada with the passage of the Ontario Factories Act in 1884. A few of the Act's provisions applied to men and women alike, but the statute was aimed most pointedly at female and child labour, imposing limitations and restrictions on their hours and conditions in the manufacturing sector. As industrial conditions received increasing public exposure, there was widespread alarm about the impact of employment on the health and morals of the newest and most vulnerable labour force participants, women and children. As the nation's future mothers, women were judged especially worthy of special protection. Racist and class-based fears about the declining white population and increasing presence of southern and eastern European immigrants led many Anglo middle-class Canadians to look to the state for the
Protective Legislation

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The protection of "white" women's motherhood in particular. Self-interest was part of the motivation for some male unionists too who saw unorganized female and child workers—who were cheaper and were used by employers to undercut wages—as unwelcome competition in the workplace. Regulation of the terms of employment of this pool of labour was one way in which some male dominated trade unions hoped to preserve masculine privilege in the labour force and the home. At the same time, trade unionists believed in shielding women, the "weaker sex," from the exploitation of capitalism. Adhering to the ideal of the family wage, they also assumed that most women aspired to leave the work force for domestic life, not embrace life-long wage labour.

As more factory acts were introduced women and children continued to be the favoured target for state protection. By the 1920s the desirability of labour laws specifically aimed at women and girls was well accepted by most Canadians. This was not so in several other Western countries, however. The Federation of WLLs followed the debates in the United States and Great Britain. In both countries labour, with some exceptions, tended to stand behind gender-specific protective legislation. The issue was more divisive in the women's movement, especially in the United States where the "equality versus protection" debate caused some bitter splits. Two articles in the Woman Worker—one spilling over from January to February 1928 and the other appearing in January 1929—traced the dominant contours of this debate. The paper applauded labour's pro-protection position and harshly criticized British middle-class feminists, the majority of whom had lined up against special protection for women because they were afraid of the "backfire" potential of the legislation (employers could fire, or simply not hire, women to avoid the regulations), and because they were uneasy with the whole notion of women needing "special" protection. To Communist women, this dismissal of labour protection in favour of abstract arguments for "equal rights" smacked of bourgeois privilege.

Women's minimum wage laws, passed in most Canadian provinces between 1917 and 1920, were unique in their interference with wage scales. Governments, reformers, and certainly employers had long considered wages beyond the scope of the state's regulatory arm. The escalation of labour strikes and protests late in the war, however, softened much of this resistance and employers for the most part were resigned to the legislation as a necessary concession to keep the peace. The Women's Labor League in Winnipeg had been especially influential, along with labour, in the campaign for minimum wages for women in Manitoba. The actual legislation,
however, fell far short of the League’s expectations, and despite the fact that a WLL member was appointed to the Manitoba Minimum Wage Board, the President of the Winnipeg League, Helen Armstrong, was a fierce critic of the practices of the Board.

After the Ontario Board was established in 1920, the Communist Party newspaper, *The Worker*, printed scathing critiques of the rates themselves and the budgets upon which they were based. Some of these were penned by Rebecca Buhay, one of the most prominent women in the Communist Party, who argued the Board’s cost of living budget was so inadequate that a reduction, not improvement, of living standards was the likely outcome. Buhay shared the concern sometimes heard in labour circles that the minimum wage could easily become the maximum wage, for what employer would want to pay more than what was absolutely required? She concluded in disgust that women’s wage boards “under the guise of social reform” were actually accomplices in the capitalist assault on workers. The ruthlessness of employers who found ways around the legislation or ignored it altogether was exposed in the Communist press and the Board itself was portrayed as spineless by its reluctance to use its designated powers to prosecute, fine, and even imprison offending employers.

The *Woman Worker* kept up the pressure on the wage boards. In July 1926, in the first official issue of the paper, a writer (probably Custance) compared the prevailing wage rates of certain unionized women in Toronto with the minimum set by the Ontario Minimum Wage Board. (See “Girls Benefit by Belonging to the Boot and Shoe Workers’ Union,” in the issue reprinted at the beginning of this book.) The results showed how much more protection workers got from unions than they ever would from legislated minimums. Unfortunately, scores of women workers were not organized and had to depend on the wage rates set by the Board. Not quite as negative in her assessment of the wage legislation’s potential as Buhay had been several years earlier, Custance insisted that the little protection the laws gave was better than none for the unorganized woman. But that was as generous as she got with the boards.

Hoping to influence the way the laws were designed and implemented, the *Woman Worker* made a mission out of exposing the inadequacy of the rates, as well as the limitations, loopholes, and violations of the existing legal minimums. By 1927 much of the energy of the Toronto Women’s Labor League was going towards monitoring employers and the Ontario Minimum Wage Board itself, and their findings were well publicized by the *Woman Worker*. The Toronto WLL received many complaints from underpaid women,
which were then passed on to the Board. Although some of these complaints resulted in back payments to the women, the Board was criticized harshly for its continued practice of quiet diplomacy in relation to employers. Fed up, the Canadian Federation of WLLs announced in the summer of 1927 that it was declaring “War” on violators of the minimum wage.

Custance reminded readers in an early editorial that the WLLs had always demanded a $15 flat rate minimum (much higher than the Ontario minimum rate of $12.50 per week for experienced women in large cities). They also called for the establishment of a national minimum for all workers regardless of sex. A woman’s minimum wage, then, was just a step in the door to securing more decent wage floors for all workers on a national scale, without the wide provincial variations marking the current legislation. The labour movement, along with the Canadian Labour Party, was increasingly interested in legislating minimums for men too. Not all workers agreed, however, and one contributor to the Woman Worker expressed her own ambivalence. Florence Perry supported the demand for a male minimum wage on the chance that it might raise the general standard of living in workplaces and at the same time prevent employers from replacing women with unregulated male labour. But she could not help worrying that legal wage floors for men might actually deter workers from organizing and striking for wage improvements. The WLL Federation, while more confident in its demand for a national minimum for all, was absolutely in agreement with this comrade that the state was no replacement for the union.

The Woman Worker’s battle with Minimum Wage Boards and employers was nowhere near done when publication stopped in 1929. Noticeably absent from their grumbling, however, was a critical appraisal of the basing of women’s minimum wage budgets on a single woman with no dependents. Wage Boards were continuing this practice in spite of their increasing awareness that many women were supporting family members on their wage just as men were. The WLL’s silence on this issue is a reflection of their lingering attachment to the male breadwinner, stay-at-home wife ideal known as the “family wage.” Little wonder then that when the question of establishing male minimums came up Communist women, along with labour, politicians, and reformers, all assumed that the calculation would be based on a family, not an individual, wage.

The enormous amount of attention given by the Woman Worker to the minimum wage issue overshadowed commentary on other protective labour and social welfare measures affecting working-
The Woman Worker, 1926-1929

class women. Some attention was given, however, to the few income supplement policies in place in this early period of welfare state formation, most notably Workers' Compensation, called "Workman's" Compensation initially and enacted in many provinces by the 1920s; Mothers' Allowances, available throughout the West and in Ontario and aimed primarily at "deserving" widows; and Old Age Pensions, enabled by federal legislation in 1927 but available in just a few provinces by the end of the decade. The WLL movement also pushed for the establishment of unemployment and health insurance. In response to readers' confusion about how the existing laws worked from one province to another, the paper devoted a limited amount of space to answering common questions and concerns, as well as to highlighting the ever present gaps and evasions. Mother's Allowance laws were particularly confusing because of key differences between the provinces in eligibility rules, and the editor herself found them hard to sort out for she incorrectly told a Sointula, B.C., reader that mothers with only one child should be included but they were not. In fact, British Columbia's law, the most inclusive in the country, was the only one specifically allowing support for one-child families. The WLL paper championed some basic improvements in the laws and supported the creation of uniform Mothers' Allowance legislation that was federally designed but provincially administered. Yet while the trade union movement had protested the moralistic exclusion in almost all provinces of unwed and divorced mothers, the Woman Worker did not develop a sustained critique of the policies and their administration.

The slowly emerging Canadian welfare state offered generally better and more "entitlement-based" benefits to men through employment-related provisions such as Worker's Compensation than it did to women claiming support as single or widowed mothers through Mothers' Allowance. Still, the compensation given to male victims of workplace accidents were hardly generous, and the Women's Labor Leagues joined labour and "labourite" politicians like J. S. Woodsworth in highlighting the suffering of those whose benefits were not sufficient to allow the basic dignities of life for themselves and their families. The letter from a Cape Breton woman, Annie Whitfield, told the plight of two Glace Bay miners, both with wives and children, squeezed between the callousness of the mining company and the stinginess of government. As most WLL members were working-class housewives heavily dependent on a male breadwinner to feed their families, these accounts resonated strongly. While both men's and women's wages and benefits were scrutinized through the pages of the Woman Worker, there was no well devel-
oped effort to critique the gender biases underlying the different treatment of men and women by the state. There was one crucial exception. In early 1929 the paper published an extremely progressive editorial highlighting the hazards of domestic labour, the exclusion of domestic work from all protective labour laws, and endorsing the position that houseworkers, including both paid domestics and unpaid housewives, should be covered by Workmen's Compensation.

The WLL paper drove home its point again and again that the very best protection for working-class people under capitalism was the union, not the government. Communists dreamed of a Canada where workers' demands of good wages and secure futures were guaranteed by a socialist economy created and controlled by the working class. In the meantime, the WLLs for most of the 1920s fought to make legislative reforms more adequately protect workers in general, and working-class women in particular. Through its locals and its newspaper, the WLL Federation fought for and watched over measures promising women minimum wages, the elderly basic income support, and injured workers compensation. They also looked to a day when their demands for unemployment and health insurance might be met. Given the dire immediate circumstances of much of the working class, the state's protective arm, no matter how weak and ineffectual, could not be refused.

Further Reading:


THE Saskatchewan Minimum Wage Board has issued new orders. These raise the minimum rates of wages for women and girls employed in Saskatchewan shops and stores, laundries and factories, and mail order houses. These orders come into effect Sept. 21st.

The minimum wage for women employed in shops and stores is raised from $14 to $15 a week. Learners are to receive $10, $12 and $13.50 a week during the first, second and third periods of six months respectively. At present the rates are $7.50, $10 and $12 respectively.

A feature of the regulations is that seats must be supplied by employers in the proportion of at least one to every four employees engaged in shops and stores.

The minimum wage in laundries and factories is raised from $13 to $14, while the rates for learners are unchanged.

For all time worked beyond 48 hours, both experienced and inexperienced workers must be paid not less than the minimum rate.

The minimum wage for female employees in mail order houses is also raised from $13 to $14, while the rates for learners are set at $9 instead of $8 for the first six months, and $11 instead of $10 for the second six months.

It is gratifying to find that at least one province has moved in the right direction for bettering the standard of life for working women and girls. From what we can gather, it is evident that the progressive farm women and labor women have played some part in getting the minimum wage rates raised.

The Women's Labor Leagues have all along stood out for the $15 minimum. Now that Saskatchewan has moved, the fight must again be renewed with vigor by working women in the other provinces for similar wage rates.

Not so long ago the rates were lowered in Alberta. In Ontario the rates have remained unchanged. But so far as Quebec is concerned, the Minimum Wage Board of that province has not as yet issued a single wage order, although conditions of labor and rates of wages are perhaps worse in Quebec than in any other province.

The letter the Woman Worker received from a Montreal factory girl, and which is published in this issue, is just a sample of the treatment meted out to girls who have absolutely no medium for redress and shows the nature of the general conditions prevailing in that city.

Just now politicians are stumping the country telling us of Canada's prosperity. Government trade returns show that Canada ranks high in the list of
the volume of trade done on the world's market. But who is profiting? Cer­
tainly not working girls who helped to produce the commodities, nor, for
that matter, the workers in general. The results of that prosperity are seen in
new factories, immense business buildings, and a greater display of wealth
on the part of the owning and employing class. Some will say, "Why the
working class are buying their cars!" This may be, but the cars the workers
buy are Tin Lizzies and the discarded cars of the well-to-do.

It is time the workers realized they should receive some benefit from
what is called Canada's prosperity. It will not come to them, they will have
to go after it. There is really no excuse for the other provinces to remain be­
hind Saskatchewan in giving a little more of the wealth produced by the
workers to working women and girls. There is no reason why a minimum
wage should not be granted to all workers throughout the country. A strong
demand should be put forth for A NATIONAL MINIMUM WAGE for all
workers.

MOTHERS' ALLOWANCES CLAIMED TO BE
INADEQUATE

November 1926, p. 11.

Speaking before a public meeting of ratepayers in Toronto, Deputy Min­
ister of Labor, J.H.H. Ballantyne, outlined the provisions of the Ontario Act
dealing with Mothers' Allowances. He claimed the Act was very clear as to
who was entitled to the allowance. He said there seemed to be a popular con­
ception that the money was only to support a mother, whereas it was
intended to support dependent children. The Act states that "Any widow
with two or more children under sixteen is entitled to be considered for an
allowance."

When asked what amount in cash would stop a widow from getting an al­
lowance, Mr. Ballantyne replied, $500 in cash and $2,500 equity in a home.

That there is a growing dissatisfaction with the way some of the laws are
being administered in the province of Ontario was shown when one of the
ratepayers declared "That the Mothers' Allowance Board should not think
they are the guardians of the public funds."

But it seems that the Government is more concerned with booze than
bread at this time.
MISTRESS HOUSEWIFE, WHAT DOES YOUR HUSBAND GIVE YOU TO KEEP HOUSE?

By Trade Union Supporter

December 1926, pp. 7-9.

Mistress Housewife, on what do you run your house these days? Well, if your family is a family of five, and your husband’s wage is $1,369.92 for the year, or $26.86 per week, please learn that you are running at what is called “A Minimum Subsistence Level,” or, in other words, you and your family are just managing to keep bodies and souls together.

If, however, your husband is fortunate enough to earn $1,719.23 for the year, or $33.06 per week, and he gives you all this to run the house, you are supposed to be running your house at “A Minimum Health and Decency Level.”

Now, we are mentioning these two kinds of budgets because they were discussed by a special committee of the Dominion Government. This special committee is trying to find out what it costs a working class family to live, so that it can fix what is called a National Minimum Wage for the workers of Canada.

It is pleasing to know that one union, the Canadian Brotherhood of Railroad Employees, has stated that the lowest figure on which a working class family can live in Health and Decency is $2,202.37 a year, or $42.35 per week.

So that the members of this special committee shall know our views on the subject, we class-conscious housewives address the following letter to them:

Gentlemen:

We wish to say a few words about the family budgets you have been discussing.

Now, we housewives know that figures are one thing and facts are another. We, who are wives of laborers, machinists, carpenters, etc., know very well that, owing to a number of conditions, we do not get even an average wage of $26.86 per week. Therefore it is pretty clear that the greatest number of working class families are living all the time from hand to mouth—they are on the border line of poverty and starvation.

We are not going to kick about a minimum wage; indeed no. But, for goodness’ sake, let’s have it every week. We want it understood that we can’t live on AIR, and can’t run a house on HOPES AND PROMISES, when our good men are thrown out of work through weather conditions or industrial depression. This is the thing that gets us. Because we do not get a
regular wage, we either have to get into debt at the CREDIT STORES or go out to work ourselves.

If we are to do justice to our homes and our families and have minds free from the worry of debt, be able to send our children to High School, and start them on a career which will assure them bread and butter for life, we contend that this cannot be done on a budget less than the one proposed by the union which stated before your committee that $2,202.37 a year or $42.35 per week alone could provide a working class family with a standard of HEALTH AND DECENCY.

We know, of course, that we could subsist on dry bread and water, live in a hovel, and dress in rags. And we know, too, that if good profits for the masters could be made from the workers' energy by living this way, well, that is all we would get.

We may not know much, but we do know this, that modern industry requires a certain standard of energy, so the workers must be given a wage to keep that standard of energy in their bodies. We believe this is called the IRON LAW OF WAGES.

Really, it is most unfortunate for us who want a Decent Budget, that the greatest number of Canadian workers look upon their masters as good, kind bosses, who give them work because they love them. But this is because these workers have still the SLAVE MIND. We know that wages are only given as a means of renewing the energy of the workers, and only represent a very small part of the actual wealth they have created for their masters. And we know that the bosses only give what they are compelled to give. That is why, for Decency's Sake, and for Health's Sake, it becomes necessary for the Government to fix a MINIMUM WAGE.

Now, we agree that you are trying to do your best to help us poor, unfortunate beings of an unfortunate, "ignorant" class. But if you do not mind us saying it, we should like to point out that it has been the power of those workers organized in their unions which has raised wages from starvation level to the standard of Health and Decency, as well as struggled against those masters who would lower the Health and Decency level. And this is why the masters hate the Unions, why they try to smash them, why they try to belittle them. Of course, this is why we should support the Unions, and help to build them. Your Government may not like us to say such things, but, really, we do want to see the workers' unions as strong if not stronger, than the masters' organized institutions. This may be ambition, but it is Truth. For it means that we shall not then have to worry about a Minimum Family Budget.

Yours truly,

THE CLASS CONSCIOUS HOUSEWIVES OF CANADA,
Per Trade Union Supporter.
MOTHERS’ ALLOWANCES AND WORKMEN’S COMPENSATION

January 1927, p. 4.

Labor’s demand for more adequate allowances for mothers and a wider application of the working of the Workmen’s Compensation Act, to bring better protection to those who are in unfortunate positions either by the death or accident to the breadwinner, should receive the fullest support of working class women.

The recent accidents in the mining districts of Canada, which have deprived women of their husbands and children of their fathers, make it imperative that the dependents shall not suffer.

The number of fatal cases during the month of November, for Ontario alone, (some 54 persons killed in industry), brings home to one the misery of desolate homes through the loss of the bread-winner. Surely every woman can see she must get right behind Labor’s demands.

WHY ARE NOT DISHONEST MASTERS SENT TO PRISON?

[Editorial]

April 1927, pp. 1-2.

THE article in this issue of The Woman Worker dealing with Minimum Wage violations is of great importance to women wage earners.

The letters received by the Toronto Women’s League from the Chairman of the Ontario Board, prove clearly that it is one thing for the Board to fix a Minimum Wage and quite another thing to know whether or not working girls receive it.

The Minimum Wage, as its name implies, is the lowest amount of money a girl can live on without starving. Or, as the Chairman often remarked at public meetings of the Board, the Minimum Wage just keeps body and soul together.

In spite of the fact that the Minimum Wage is only a step from starvation, there are employers who set themselves to rob working girls of that minimum. Often this is done in such a way that the Board cannot easily detect the deception.

No one disputes the fact that Minimum Wage Boards have brought some relief to those workers who were extremely underpaid, such as laundry workers. But the Board could have done a little more. They could have had those employers punished who deliberately robbed the girls who slaved for
them. A few examples of this form of injustice would have benefited many women workers who have all along been the victims of fraud.

The Ontario Minimum Wage Act, for instance, makes provision for violations. This provision states “that these are punishable by fines from $50 to $500, and also imprisonment.” Never once has the Board brought a robber employer to justice, although it has admitted that it has settled hundreds of cases of underpayment.

Shielding employers so that their business will not suffer, is no doubt an act of kindness on the part of the Board toward those employers. This may be called by some, Christian Charity. But what of the girls who have been robbed? What happens to them if they are forced on to the streets, or forced to steal? Christian Charity is lacking in their case. The stern hand of the law is brought in and the jail or prison is their lot.

The lesson, and the only lesson, working girls can learn from this is, they must stand up for their rights. They must learn that they must help themselves.

As individuals they can do little. As individuals they fear to offend their masters because they fear to lose their jobs, and this because their jobs mean bread.

But banded together working girls can protect themselves, not only to obtain their wage rights, but also to obtain higher wages and better working conditions. THE UNION IS THEIR BEST PROTECTOR.

Two things face working women and girls, UNIONISM, or CONTINUED ROBBERY by unscrupulous employers. We urge UNIONISM.

PENSIONS FOR CANADA’S AGED

April 1927, pp. 4-5.

Pensions now seem assured for Canadian aged workers. But by no means do the pensions measure up to the standard of wealth production of Canada, a standard for which the energy of the workers is responsible.

Twenty Dollars a month, that is, two hundred and forty dollars a year, is just a provision against starvation. It merely pays for food. This means that shelter and clothes must be items of charity.

But this is not all. There is a very obnoxious clause inserted in the Bill that victimizes those workers who were careful, frugal, and economic during the days of their wage-earning capacity. If an aged man or woman has become possessed of a little property, such as a house, this must be made over to the government, and the government will deduct from the sale of this property at the time of the pensioner’s death, the amount of money received by the pensioner.
It certainly seems our master class government is not going to give something for nothing, as the saying goes. It is clear the government victimizes the aged worker for his thrift.

We can well ask here, “Are judges, senators, government officials penalized in the same way?” These would not be so insulted. But anything is good enough for workers, because workers are the lower order in society.

Some will argue that the action of the government is a step in advance, that it has committed the government to a recognition of the “pension right.”

Be this as it may, we are going to insist that the aged shall have “maintenance pensions” and not a “pauper’s dole.”

A WORD ABOUT COMPENSATIONS

April 1927, pp. 15-16.

Dear Comrades:

In the January issue of The Woman Worker there was an item dealing with Workmen’s Compensations. In my opinion this is something the workers should take more interest in. I wonder how many workers ever think of the small amount of compensation received by a permanently disabled worker.

Here, in Cape Breton, no matter how large a family a miner has, his family must exist on $12.69 per week compensation, and in some cases less than this; of course it depends upon the man’s earnings during the last three months’ work previous to his accident. But whatever he got in wages, he cannot get more than $12.69 per week for compensation allowance.

I will now tell you of two cases here in Glace Bay, as it may be of interest to the readers of The Woman Worker. Although I give only these two cases, it must be understood that these are not the only two cases of BROKEN SPINES in Glace Bay, there are more, and in most cases they are men with families.

About four years ago a miner here received severe injuries to his spine. About a year ago this man had to leave his home and go to a hospital in Halifax to undergo an operation, as his life was in danger. This meant great anxiety to his wife and family. But he pulled through. Now this man had a piece of bone taken from his shin bone and grafted to his spine. The bone was long enough to cover five joints in the spine. It has grown all right at the lower part, but not at the top; here it sticks out, and it is hard to say if it will ever knit with the rest of his spine. This man is middle-aged. A short time ago this man was informed by the Compensation Board that they again desired to operate. But he was not wanting to risk his life again and would not
consent to be cut and sawed to pieces. So in a polite way he was made to un­
derstand that he must either consent or get work.

So now this man has got a job in one of Besco’s mines. His job is trapping. This is opening and closing an air door. This is no light task to my thinking for a man with an injured spine. His wages are less than $3 per day, and the mines are on short time. He will not be able to bank very much to provide for old age.

The accident to this man was caused through a fall of stone, and he was buried under it. He has two boys going to school. His compensation amounted to about $12.69 per week.

Now, the other case happened three years ago, also in one of Besco’s mines. This, too, was due to a fall of stone, and the man was buried under­neath it. About a year and a half after the accident this man was able to sit in a wheel chair, and then of course he wanted to leave the hospital and go home. But he could not because his compensation did not allow for paying about $80.00 for a wheel chair. So the miners came to his rescue. They took up a collection at the mine and bought him a chair and he went home. He was not discharged from the hospital, so when the winter came he was obliged to go in the hospital again just to be kept warm. And this was a man who had spent all his life digging coal. When his wife asked for coal from Besco she was told that she must pay $3.60 per ton for the coal and $1.00 for hauling, and also she must pay cash on delivery. Because this could not be done the man was forced back into the hospital.

This man is paralyzed from the waist down. He has no other source of in­come but compensation allowance. He has three boys going to school. And this home must be kept going on $12.69 per week.

Once in a while the miners take up collections for such cases. But Besco, who is the cause of all this misery, never does a thing for these men. This is what the workers suffer for Besco’s profits.

Annie Whitfield,
New Aberdeen, Cape Breton.

SHOULD MEN AND BOYS HAVE A MINIMUM WAGE?

May 1927, pp. 7-9.

The subject of a minimum wage for men and boys is one that has been brought to the attention of the Provincial Governments practically through­out the Dominion, and also to the Federal Government itself. The following resolution was introduced to Parliament by J.S. Woodsworth on March 15th of last year: “That in the opinion of this House a wage sufficient to provide for a reasonable standard of living should constitute a legal minimum
wage.” This resolution was referred to the standing committee on Industrial and International Relations for a report.

In its report the committee deals with the labor principles embodied in the Treaty of Versailles, and especially the one which reads “The payment of employees of a wage adequate to maintain a reasonable standard of living as this is understood in their time and country.” The committee further recommended that a conference of Provincial and Dominion representatives intimately in touch with labor conditions throughout Canada be held in the near future to consult as to the best means to be employed of giving effect to the labor provisions of the Treaties of Peace.

We find in Alberta that an amendment has been made to the Minimum Wage Act, which provides that no male workers except indentured apprentices shall be employed in any class of work for a less wage than that fixed for female workers under the minimum wage regulations for the same class of work.

Ontario, Manitoba and British Columbia are also asking for amendments to their Acts, asking that the word minors be substituted for girls, to include boys under 18 years of age.

In British Columbia the Act has been extended to all male workers, this being the first legislation of its kind to be enacted in the Dominion, the first order issued under it being a minimum wage of 40 cents per hour to apply to the lumber industry. Perhaps some of you may know that the employers in the lumber industry in British Columbia got together and protested against this minimum wage. The case was tried in court, and again in a higher court, as to whether the Government had the right to fix the minimum wage, but a decision was given in favour of the Government in both cases.

There is still a great deal of controversy going on in British Columbia regarding the minimum wage. An article appeared in the Canadian Lumbermen’s Journal (an employer’s journal), Jan. 15th of this year, which read something like this: That as there is a duty of 25 to 30 per cent. on machinery being shipped in from the States to start a factory, it would cost more to construct than in a country where the duty is not so high, and that as a large proportion of the articles manufactured here must be exported they are unable to compete in the markets of other countries, where perhaps labor is cheaper than a minimum wage in Canada.

These are the kind of arguments we heard when the Minimum Wage Act for female workers was first organized, the merchants were all going to be put out of business, but they seem to be holding on very well. In my opinion the argument is a worthless one, for in many industries to-day the machinery is shipped from the States, and if the employees are well organized the rate of wages demanded is much higher than that set by a Minimum Wage Board. And still the employer is able to stay in business and make his profits, and if in the lumber industry or any other industry the employers are unable to pay a living wage then they have no right to be in business. I be-
lieve a minimum wage for male workers would strengthen the hands of the
members of Minimum Wage Boards for female workers, as such arguments
as this are continually being put up to the members: “If you set the wages too
high and control the hours of the female workers, we shall employ men that
we may work them longer and pay them whatever we may see fit to do.”

The subject of a minimum wage for men and boys was discussed at great
length by the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada according to its 1926
report, Regina and Edmonton both sending in resolutions asking for such
legislation. The Resolutions Committee recommended that the Congress
favour an adequate wage for male and female workers, which was adopted.
All of us will agree, I am sure, that organization is the best method the work­
ers have in demanding a living wage and decent working conditions. I am
not sure in my own mind whether it might not deter organization if the
workers were sure of a minimum wage. I have in mind the case of the labor­
ers in Regina. Last winter we found that men were working for 25 and 30
cents per hour, but what do we find to-day? These men have organized, and
they now have an organization 405 strong and asking for 60 cents per hour.
While the agreement has not yet been signed, I doubt if such an organization
would have been formed if these men had been getting a minimum wage of
even 40 cents per hour.

Of course they may think the time opportune to organize, as the prospects
for building this year are very good. But it is a hopeful sign that those men
feel the need for an organization, and until the workers generally feel the
need for organization it seems to me that the matter of a minimum wage
should receive the sympathy and support of all organized groups in the La­
or movement, as no doubt it will have a tendency to raise the standard of
living for those employees which may be brought under it, and in this way
assist organized Labor to maintain the standard of living which has been
fought for for many years.

Florence Perry.

A BOSS PUNISHED FOR ROBBING A WORKING GIRL
OF HER WAGES

[Editorial]
July/August 1927, pp. 3-4.

A FEW days ago a Toronto employer was fined $250.00 and costs for un­
derpaying one of the girls who worked in his clothing factory. The case was
taken up by the Ontario Minimum Wage Board, and was the first time the
Board had taken a case to court.
The worker in question was a girl of sixteen. This girl was entitled as a beginner to $8.00 a week under the orders of the Board. She received less than this sum.

This employer is not by any means the only one who is guilty of robbing working girls. Time and time again has the Toronto Women's Labor League received complaints from working girls or their parents of under-payment. These complaints were always passed on to the Board for action. Until this last case the Board has acted the part of "arbiter" and has been satisfied if the employer paid the arrears or wages.

Only recently the Labor League reported a case to the Board. This girl recovered $7.76 arrears of wages covering a period of two and a half weeks. This girl could not have been the only girl who was underpaid by the boss of this particular factory. This girl complained, so the case received attention. Many fear to complain because they fear to lose their jobs.

Because the Board has been easy with the employers the robbery of working girls went on unchallenged.

The minimum wage is, as its name shows, a wage only sufficient to provide a girl with the barest needs of life. Yet even for this, working girls have to put out the fullest amount of energy, they are speeded up to the point of exhaustion.

The remedy for this treatment lies in the hands of working girls. They must organize themselves in the shops and factories. Through unions they must protect themselves against the greed and heartlessness of their employers. Unions are not only protectors, but they are a means by which can be obtained a wage higher than the minimum wage set by a government board.

Organized labor, too, must pay more attention to the laws that have been enacted for the protection of the workers. These are few and paltry enough. But even these must be preserved when we see how the employing class uses every means to deprive those who work for them of such small measures of protection.

THE FEDERATION OF WOMEN'S LABOR LEAGUES DECLARES WAR ON VIOLATORS OF THE MINIMUM WAGE

July/August 1927, pp. 10-11.

During the past month the Federation Executive Committee has received complaints concerning conditions of work and wages that obtain in factories operating in some of the larger cities. For instance, from Vancouver the complaint is as follows:
"In the cloak and dress factories in Vancouver the girls are working 90 hours a week; the machines do not stop running, even for lunch hour, and many girls are not receiving the Minimum Wage."

From Winnipeg as follows:
"There are laundries that are paying only $8.00 instead of $9.00 per week, which is the Minimum Rate for laundry workers here. Women and girls working in a certain brick factory get only 12 ½ c an hour. Girls working for the Central Press are receiving only $6.00 per week."

From Toronto as follows:
"That a girl working in a certain laundry got only $9.90 for a week’s work, and this included overtime every night. The girl was working until 9 and 10 each night in the week. Girls are working in the white wear factories for the miserable wage of $4, $5 and $6 a week. Many of these girls are experienced workers who should be getting $12.50 a week. There are girls and women working in restaurants seven days a week in spite of the fact that the Factory Act calls for ‘One Day’s Rest in Seven.’"

It is evident that the exploitation and underpayment of women and girls working in industry is far more general than is supposed. The consequences, that is, the mental anguish and bodily harm which working girls suffer are such that the Federation Executive Committee declares relentless war on those who rob working women and girls of the meagre protection of the Minimum Wage.

The Federation Executive Committee calls upon its affiliated units to deal with every case that comes to their attention. Report these, not only to the Central Labor Bodies, but also to the respective Provincial Minimum Wage Boards.

The following letter was received by the Toronto Women’s Labor League from the Ontario Minimum Wage Board. This letter shows that results can be obtained if we go after them:

Dear Mrs. Custance:

I am now able to inform you that we have secured for Miss E. Cooper the sum of $48.41 due her as arrears by the Exclusive Ladies’ Wear Co. ...

We thank you for bringing this matter to our attention.

Yours faithfully,
J.W. Macmillan, Chairman.

Esther Cooper (the Esther who seeks the Right to Live in June’s Shop and Factory Life), was robbed of the sum of $48.41. This amount only made up the Minimum Wage of $8.00 a week and in no way represents the actual values she created for her boss during the ten weeks she worked for him.
This girl found courage to complain. It can be left to the imagination what those girls suffer who fear to complain.

**WE MUST WAGE A WAR AGAINST UNSCRUPULOUS BOSSES WHO MAKE BIG PROFITS AT THE EXPENSE OF THE ENERGY OF WORKING GIRLS.**

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**CORRECTION**

September 1927, p. 5.

In our last issue a report was printed concerning conditions in some industries in Winnipeg. The report on page 10 bottom of first column, reads: "There are laundries that are paying only $8.00 instead of $9.00 per week, which is the minimum wage for laundry workers here. Women and girls working in a certain brick factory get only 12 1/2 an hour."

The facts are as follows: The girls are getting only $8.00 per week in the laundries. The learners are entitled to $9.00, and the minimum wage is $12.00 per week.

The Alsips Co. no longer employ girls in their factory, but boys. This frees the company from the obligation of paying the minimum wage.

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**OLD AGE PENSIONS GRANTED IN BRITISH COLUMBIA**

November 1927, p. 15.

British Columbia is the first of the provinces of Canada to meet the proposals contained in the Federal Old Age Pension Act and to put into operation the machinery through which Pensions will be granted the aged in British Columbia.

The rest of the provinces are tardy in their action. The workers of the provinces will have to urge their provincial governments into action.

The Old Age Pension scheme as it stands is a very meagre one. We cannot rest content with the present provisions. Agitation must be kept up in order that the age of the recipients shall be fixed at sixty, and that the aged shall be removed from a state of penury.
PROTECTIVE LEGISLATION AND WOMEN WORKERS
Restrictions on Employers Make for the Welfare of the Workers.
Statement by the Standing Joint Committee of Industrial Women's Organizations.

January 1928, pp. 13-16.

The Standing Joint Committee of Industrial Women's Organizations defines in the following statement their attitude on Protective Legislation for Women. This Committee speaks for organized working women in the United Kingdom. It represents over one million women organized in the political Labor, Trade Union, and Co-operative Movements. The views which it voices are those of women in these organizations. It is true that they are the same as the views of men who in some cases form the majority of the organizations represented, but as women the Committee has the special duty of securing what is in the best interests of women, and they have come to the conclusions set forth. These views are not new, they have been the views of the Labor Movement and the women within it ever since there has been organization to express their opinions, but it has become necessary to restate the position because of the attempts of certain groups of feminist organizations to oppose Protective Legislation for women on the ground that it is restrictive and injurious.

The Committee does not speak only for women who are themselves in industrial employment. It speaks also for the mothers of such workers.

The Standing Joint Committee is in favour of all legislation which improves conditions of employment for the worker, and is especially concerned in securing these for the worst paid and least organized sections; unfortunately women belong to this section. Moreover, the Committee is especially concerned in securing adequate care and protection for women exercising the function of maternity.

Special Difficulties of Women Workers

It is unnecessary to consider in detail the reason for the low wages and difficulty of organizing industrial women workers. In general, the employer regards women's work with favor because it can be obtained more cheaply than that of men, and in the whole history of their employment since the industrial revolution women have had to bear the worst burden of bad wages. It is true that in some occupations they actually do better work than men. But they have not had corresponding economic advantages. This in itself has made them more difficult to organize and, in addition, the fact that women normally leave employment on marriage has bad results in two
ways: on the one hand, the age of the woman worker is lower, and she herself is less experienced than in the case of men, and on the other hand, she is apt to regard her employment as lasting only for a few years.

Speaking generally, women are less capable of violent muscular effort than men, and cannot undertake work entailing so heavy a physical strain. A few individual women may be able to do so, but broadly speaking this is not the case and it must be remembered that an employer considers the question on broad lines and does not select his workers after an athletic test.

Further, in addition to physical strain, under present social conditions, merging as we are from the dark ages in our attitude towards women, certain working conditions, such as night work and very late or very early hours (the two-shift system), are more disadvantageous for women than for men; whether that will always be so we cannot say, but we are regarding legislation from the point of view of facts as they are.

Three Forms of Protective Legislation

Yet in the present state of public opinion it is often easier to secure protection for women than for men, while conditions which men's stronger organization can gain for them can only be won for women by legislative enactment.

Protective legislation for women can be divided into three classes:

1. Provisions that would be good for men as well as women, but which can be obtained for women and not for men at the present time.

Legislation regarding hours of work comes under this heading. We can in factory legislation secure regulation of women's hours, and even the present Government (a year ago at least) was willing to enact a 48-hour week for women. Not all the efforts of Labor, and of agreements at International Labor Conferences, have been sufficient to secure 48-hour legislation for all workers. We prefer to take what regulation we can get rather than to delay it.

2. Regulations that are more needed for women than for men, because women are less fitted than men for certain dangerous and specially heavy muscular work.

Under this heading comes the exemption of women from all forms of active service, their prohibition in dangerous industrial processes such as work in underground mines, outside window-cleaning, the cleaning of dangerous machinery, also regulations as to the lifting of heavy weights, exposure to excessive heat, and the handling of poisonous substances which may be specially injurious to women. The prohibition of nightwork, in so far as night-work is necessary, may be placed in the same category. The experience in munition factories during the war brought once more into evidence the half-forgotten facts of unregulated nightwork—"deterioration in health caused by the difficulty of securing sufficient rest by day; disturbance of home life with its injurious effects upon the children; and
diminished value of work done.” (Report on Women’s Employment by the Health of Munition Workers’ Committee.) If women could be relieved of domestic duties, it may be that their resistance to industrial fatigue would approximate more nearly to that of men, but legislation has to deal with things as they are.

3. Some forms of protection are necessary for women because of their functions as mothers.

Under this heading come the provisions proposed by the Maternity Convention adopted by the International Labor Conference in 1919. This Convention, which has not yet been ratified by our country, declares that women workers should be prohibited from working for six weeks after childbirth, have the option of not doing so for six weeks before, and should have adequate maintenance during the whole period.

Our position, therefore, is that we take whatever we can get under all three heads, and if we cannot get it for men, or it is not necessary for them, we endeavor to secure it for women alone.

**Effects of Part Legislation**

Does such provision worsen the position of industrial women workers? In our opinion the facts all point in the other direction. The position of women in the industrial world during the last 100 years has been strengthened by every regulation for their protection which has been adopted.

We cannot believe it possible that anybody would desire to go back to the time when women were employed in coal mines, or when the hours of their work in factories were wholly unregulated. Without regulation those who are weakest get the worst jobs at the worst pay, and that means that women get them. It is, however, quite a mistake to think that when the hours in factories and workshops employing women are regulated, women are at a disadvantage in comparison with men.

An employer does not substitute men in such a case but all workers share in the improvement. As to the prohibition of night work, it has certainly not been injurious to women, and it has been an influence towards its abolition.

A comparison of the numbers of men and women employed in the engineering and metal trades is especially interesting. Allowing for slight differences in methods of compilation, the following numbers indicate the trend of women’s employment in these trades:

**Numbers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>38,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>110,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>252,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Census figures, Great Britain.)

(Ministry of Labor estimates, Great Britain and Northern Ireland—where the number is very small.)
Expressed in the form of an index number, there were 252 women employed in 1911 for every 100 employed in 1881, and 340 women employed in 1926 for every 100 in 1881.

On the other hand, the numbers of men have not increased so greatly. For every 100 employed in 1881 there were 189 in 1911, and there was no increase on these figures in 1926.

The worker who cannot be exploited at the employers' will because the law does not permit it, gains a stronger and not a weaker position in the industrial world. Legislation has had to step in to give women a chance of achieving a more equal footing with men. Without such protection it is not equality that the woman achieves, but far greater inequality.

Need to Examine All Legislation Proposed

At the same time the Committee does not believe that we should accept blindly all protective legislation; each proposal must be examined carefully, and we must feel that there is good reason for the provision to be made. The past history of the woman worker has shown that she has often been employed to break the wage-rate for all employees. That time has not yet passed, and there is a feeling that the introduction of women into employments where they are not accustomed to work endangers wages. The consequences of using women to break a wage-rate are so dangerous to both men and women of the working-class that some trade unions have taken a strong line against the extension of women's employment in occupations where they have not been previously employed. They have, however, never proposed that such restrictions should be made a matter of legislation.

Women and Lead-Poisoning

The restrictions, for example, of women employed in certain painting processes where lead is used are due, not to fear of the women, but to the definite medical belief that women are more subject to lead-poisoning than men.

The greater susceptibility of women to lead-poisoning has been the subject of very careful examination in the Potteries. The evidence of Dr. T.M. Legge, Medical Inspector of Factories, given before the Departmental Committee in 1908 was conclusively borne out by the figures of the greater incidence of lead-poisoning amongst women. His opinion is the opinion of the organized workers in the trade represented by the National Society of Pottery Workers, of whom the majority are women. At the present time the number of cases in that trade (which is the most important of those using lead in which women are employed) is about equal, but the rate per thousand is much higher for women than for men as there are at least one-third more men employed in the lead processes than women. During the war period a large number of women were introduced into the lead processes, but by agitation against their continued employment the numbers were reduced, but still are slightly higher than the pre-war level. We accept their
view, based as it is upon definite first-hand experience, and welcome the
fact that the protection of women in processes using lead has been in­
creased, though we are whole heartedly in favor of a further protection
which would include men as well.

The whole Labor Movement would prefer the abolition of lead in certain
productions, but the present government has refused to adopt the proposals
on these lines accepted by the International Labor Conference at Geneva.
(Continued next issue).

PROTECTIVE LEGISLATION AND WOMEN WORKERS
(Continued).
February 1928, p. 12.

Restrictions on Employers Not Workers

The greatest evil in the industrial employment of women is low
wages—whether of men or women. The low wages of men often compel
married women who are already fully occupied at home, and who are bear­
ing children, to compete for employment in industry. The low wages of
women are an important factor in dragging down the wages of men. In our
efforts through Trade Boards to abolish sweating, regulation affects both
sexes—but the worst sweated trades are those which mainly employ
women. The fixing of minima, both of wages and hours, which has, there­
fore, been of special benefit to women: would the feminist organizations
regard it as “restrictive”? Would they prefer that the employer maintain his
right to sweat his workers in the name of equality?

These considerations apply to industrial workers in factories and work­
shops. They do not apply to the professional and clerical workers. We are
also entirely against prohibition of the employment of married women on
the ground of marriage. It is because we believe in the emancipation of
women, economic, social, and political, that we stand for the protection of
industrial women workers against the ruthless exploitation which has
marred their history in industry.

For industrial and professional women alike, we seek equal remuneration
for the same job, and we desire that all professions should be equally open to
persons of either sex.

Signed on behalf of the Committee,
Eleanor Hood, Chairman,
A. Susan Lawrence, L.C.C., M.P.,
M.J. Pidgeon, Julia Varley, Vice-Chairmen
Marion Phillips, Secretary.

—from the Labor Woman
MOTHERS—ARE YOUR GIRLS GETTING THE MINIMUM WAGE?

[Editorial]
May 1928, pp. 1-3.

HOW many mothers, whose daughters have become wage-earners, know that their girls have wage rights and protection by law? We fear very few.

And this is the reason why so many employers are able to get away with all sorts of things, or, in other words, are able to rob the girls of their wage rights.

For mothers who have not become acquainted with these wage protection laws, we will inform them that every Province of Canada, with one exception, New Brunswick, has a Minimum Wage Board. This Board fixes the rates of wages which employers must pay their female workers. These rates are fixed for girls according to age and experience. Let it not be forgotten that these rates are called the minimum or lowest rates the employers are allowed to pay. And, also, that the Minimum Wage Act of the various Provinces makes it a crime on the part of the employers if they violate the regulations of the Wage Boards. This crime is punishable by fine or imprisonment.

But, because employers are also the owners and controllers of the workshops, factories, etc., they are able to devise ways and means of getting around these minimum wage regulations.

One common practice is to move a girl from one department to another, and to keep her moving around the factory departments so that she remains always an inexperienced worker and never entitled to the full minimum rate.

Another practice is to fire girls who have worked in a factory long enough to be entitled to the full rate and to take on new hands—inexperienced younger girls at the lowest rate—only to fire these when their turn comes for the full rate.

Another, and an extremely vicious practice, is that connected with piece work. Employers, in order to get their pound of flesh for the wages they pay, fix piece-work rates so low that girls have to work at top speed to make the minimum wage rates. If they cannot then they are put on the list of slow workers.

The Ontario Minimum Wage Board allows the employers of Ontario a 20% exemption if they run their factories on a piece work basis. This means that so long as an employer pays 80 out of every hundred girls he employs the minimum wage rates, the other 20 girls don’t count. The evil of this should be clear to all.
But do parents know of these things? Do they trouble to ask their girls questions about their work? Or are they only interested to the point that work provides the means whereby their girls keep themselves?

It is necessary that parents should become acquainted with the facts concerning factory work and wage conditions that prevail today. They should be made aware of the dangers of the speeding up system. And they should know that the speeding up process is getting worse as time goes on.

That the speeding up process has put fear into working girls can be seen when girls are compelled to say they hope people will not try to make the minimum rates higher because they will never be able to reach them. They feel they are being worked to the limit of endurance and can stand no more.

Thus we can see to what extent the speeding up process in industry is sapping up the life and energy of working girls.

We must tell those parents who allow their girls to work under such conditions that they are the friends of the employers and the enemies of their girls.

We must say to those parents who are indifferent to these conditions and think only of the few dollars their girls bring into the homes, that they have lost sight of their duty as parents, the protectors of their children.

Mothers in particular must heed the conditions under which their girls work to-day. They must not get rid of their responsibilities by saying, "I had worse than that in my day." We know many mothers are themselves wrecks because of the conditions they worked under during their wage-earning days.

It is the duty of all working-class parents to become acquainted with the Minimum Wage Act of their Province, also the wage rates that apply to the labor of their girls.

It is the duty of parents to help their girls obtain their wage rights, and to remember that these are only minimum rights and not all they should receive. Organization would bring them more. Unionism is the best form of protection.

For the moment, at least, they should show interest in their girls' welfare by seeing to it that they get the minimum wage rates.

And last, but not least, parents should see to it that their girls are acquainted with the minimum wage rates before they apply for work.

Only this interest and insistence on the part of parents will make employers of working girls think twice before they treat them in the ways already referred to.
The question of special protective legislation for the benefit of women workers has been the subject of discussion in various countries during the past two years. References to this controversy have been made in recent issues of the Labour Gazette (December, 1927, page 1277; September, 1927, page 926; June, 1926, page 531, etc.)

The United States Women’s Bureau of the Federal Department of Labour was called on in 1926 to mediate between the contending parties, and an advisory committee was appointed to investigate the effects of the special regulations on behalf of female employees. The report of this committee, recently published, is to the effect that the employment of women has not been restricted in consequence of such regulations.

The same question was debated last year in the British House of Commons, some of the women’s representatives, including Miss Margaret Bondfield, opposing special regulations for women, and advocating instead policy of “equal pay for equal work.” The same view is taken also by the Viscountess Rhondda, in a letter written from England to the New Republic (New York), November, 28, 1928, supporting the views of the National Women’s party in the United States in opposition to distinctive laws for women. “Our own experience,” she says, “has shown us that the only adequate protection of women lies in giving them equal conditions of work and equal pay. Under a system by which women wage-earners are ‘protected’ by a series of restrictions based not upon the nature of work, but on sex, women are still at the bottom of the wage market, the worse paid and, as you sir, acknowledge, the least organized section in the industrial community.

“In this country the more important professional women’s organizations work for equal conditions of employment, such as the National Union of Women Teachers, the Federation of Women Civil Servants, the Women Engineers and the Women’s Electrical Association, the Open Door Council, the Women’s Freedom League, and St. John’s Social and Political Alliance (the Roman Catholic women’s organization) and this Society, have all taken a firm stand on this matter.

“This October, at York, the National Council of Women of Great Britain at its annual conference, at which 800 delegates represented women’s societies of every kind and occupation, passed by an overwhelming majority a resolution demanding that in industrial legislation all regulations and restrictions in regard to conditions of work should apply equally to men and women.

“Englishwomen are realizing that without equal conditions of work equal pay is almost impossible. Low pay handicaps adequate organization, and
ill-organized, low-paid labour will always be liable to exploitation. The only real protection for women lies in equal pay and improved organization, and we congratulate the National Women’s Party on their championship of this principle.”

HOUSEWORKER’S AND WORKMEN’S COMPENSATION

[Editorial]

February 1929, pp. 6-7.

It is not generally known that considerably over fifty per cent. of women wage earners in Canada are houseworkers. And it is not often given thought that these houseworkers are the most neglected persons in the scheme of things. They are outside the pale of all forms of legislative protection. So quite truly they can be called the most unprivileged of the unprivileged class.

It is interesting to find that at last some thought is beginning to turn itself to the pitiful plight of houseworkers—the domestic servants and working class housewife.

Says the Victoria Colonist, in discussing the position of houseworkers in relation to accident insurance:

“Workmen’s Compensation, if it is to be adequate in the expression of its needs, should cover housework. This is a phase of industry that, in the matter of insurance, has been far too neglected up to the present. The women who perform homely chores are as much entitled to compensation as any other class of the community, and no doubt would be prepared to contribute to the premiums of Workmen’s Compensation. Under the present dispensation the housewife finds it difficult to get an accident policy. The belief exists, no doubt founded on statistics, that housework is the most dangerous of all occupations for women. As a consequence, insurance companies fight shy of the risk, or only accept it at much higher rates.”

Also the Rochester Times Union has something to say on the same question. It gives the opinion that

“The high casualty list among women in the home is due to the housewife’s own persistence in doing the day’s work, even when weary from long hours, to her lack of proper tools or unfamiliarity with the tools she has.” There ought to be no such unfamiliarity in these days of domestic science in the schools, that is if the domestic science taught is practical and capable of application to the homes. Under Workmen’s Compensation, in which an immense reserve fund has been accumulated—beyond present and immediately prospective needs—the housewives could be cared for without
having to pay any higher rates of insurance than obtain in any average industry. This is a matter that should be of moment to women’s organizations. The housewife is just as much entitled to protection as any workman.”

What lesson can working class housewives and domestic servants learn from these statements? Surely this: That they, too, can obtain Workmen’s Compensation if they will agitate for it.

Here is something the Women’s Labor Leagues can take up, both on their own behalf, since they are for the most part working class housewives and in the interests of the domestic servants they are trying to organize.