Household Employment in the United States

by

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The drift from domestic employment in the countries where other occupations have become widely available to women has resulted in greater realisation of the social importance of the domestic worker. Particularly in modern urban conditions where great numbers of mothers go out to work, domestic help may be essential to the welfare of the whole family and not merely a convenience to the housewife. The significance of this more or less unorganised occupation is recognised by the I.L.O., which held a meeting of experts last year to consider how the status and employment conditions of domestic workers could be improved by international action.[1] *The author of the following article acted as chairman of this meeting of experts, and her description of conditions in the United States acquires added interest for an international public by taking account of the universal aspects of the domestic employment problem.*

IN the United States conditions in domestic employment have for the most part been left to be determined by the individual decisions of the housewives and women seeking work. This field of employment is, roughly speaking, at the stage of development where industries such as the needle trades were half a century ago. When times are bad and unemployment is widespread, the workers compete for employment and accept substandard wages. When a labour shortage occurs, large numbers of workers leave household

[1] The recommendations of the meeting of experts were summarised in the I.L.O.'s fortnightly publication, *Industry and Labour*, Vol. VI, No. 7, 1 October 1951, pp. 275-8.

For an account of the domestic employment situation in the United Kingdom, see *International Labour Review*, Vol. LXIII, No. 2, February 1951: "The Status of Domestic Work in the United Kingdom", by Dorothy M. ELLIOTT.

employment for the factory, the store or the restaurant, and household employers compete for the services of those who remain by raising wages and lowering the standards they require of job seekers.

Social Change and Current Needs

No other field of employment so intimately affects the conduct of family life, and in no other have the rewards of labour and the maintenance of an adequate working force been so completely unregulated.

Patterns of family life in the United States have been undergoing significant changes since the turn of the century. The family pattern where the father provides the means of support and the mother provides care at home is no longer the only normal arrangement. In more and more families both the husband and wife are employed outside the home. More than half of the present total of 18.5 million women workers are married. In about a fourth of the families where the husband is employed the wife is also in the labour force. Five million women workers have children under 18, and two million of these have children under six years of age. Four million women are heads of families.

Under these circumstances, unless satisfactory arrangements can be made for the care of children by obtaining competent household help through child-care centres or in some other way, family life suffers and absenteeism among working mothers rises as they struggle with home responsibilities and emergencies.

The high birth rates during and after the second world war and the lengthening of life expectancy are contributing factors to this situation. For the five-year period 1946-50 the annual number of live births in the United States averaged 3,526,241, as compared with 2,757,507 for the period 1941-45. Preliminary reports indicate that the number of live births in 1951—estimated at 3,833,000—may be the largest ever recorded. Birth rates have been higher since the war than for many years past, reaching 25.8 per 1,000 of the population in 1947 and 24.5 in 1951. The 1940 rate was 17.9.

Not only are more babies being born, but the average span of life is longer than in any previous generation. In 1900 there was one person of 65 or over for every 25 persons in the population ; in 1950 there was one for every 12 persons. The maintenance of their own home by elderly persons often depends on the availability of household help, at least on a part-time basis, to do the heavier work.

The provision of a sufficient number of well-trained, well-qualified household workers is therefore a matter of grave and

widespread concern in the United States. Equally important are measures to assure to this large group of workers social status, economic security, pay, and working conditions comparable to those of other workers. These two aims are, of course, bound up together, for the assurance of social and financial status equivalent to those enjoyed by workers in other occupations for which they are qualified is probably the most effective way of attracting competent persons to household employment in sufficient numbers.

As a first step in clarifying the problem it seems appropriate to consider long-term trends in household employment in the United States and the present situation, particularly as regards women domestic workers (who constitute the vast majority of all household workers). The efforts that have been made to establish standards for this occupation will then be reviewed and present standards examined, including the recent extension of old-age and survivors' insurance to household workers. The final section of this article will be devoted to some newer developments in the thinking of persons concerned with household employment problems in the United States.

Long-Term Trends

A drift away from household employment to better-paid and better-regulated occupations, which began during the first world war, was temporarily reversed during the 1920s and 1930s and reappeared with renewed vigour during the second world war.

Figures on this subject that are precisely comparable over a long period are almost impossible to obtain. From decennial census to decennial census concepts as well as counts have been refined, and the occupations included under the broad classification " domestic and personal service " have been more precisely defined. Until 1930 they did not indicate, for the most part, whether the employment was in a private household or in a commercial establishment. By any count, however, nine-tenths or more of the domestic workers in the United States have always been women.

Nevertheless, as other fields have opened up for women, the importance of domestic service as an occupation for women has declined. The percentage of females (10 years of age and over) employed in non-agricultural occupations who were working as servants or in related occupations in the decennial census years from 1870 to 1920 and the percentage (14 years of age and over) working in private households from 1930 to 1950 are as follows: [1]

[1] Compiled and adjusted from various reports of the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census.

Servants in private households and commercial establishments :

	per cent.
1870	60.7
1880	47.3
1890	40.3
1900	33.0
1910	25.5
1920	18.2

Domestic workers in private households only :

	per cent.
1930	14.6
1940	18.7
1950	10.9

During the period before the first world war, domestic service offered women their greatest opportunity for employment. By the midpoint of the century, domestic employment had declined from first place to fifth as an occupation for women. Much of the change is explained by the tendency for operations formerly performed in private households to become commercialised. Laundresses, cooks, seamstresses, moved from the home to the commercial laundry, the restaurant or hotel, the garment factory. This naturally led to a shortage of competent household workers which, especially in the great cities, has become both serious and chronic.

Number of Household Workers

The manpower demands of the first world war resulted in new opportunities for women workers in war production plants, clerical work and many other fields. Young women entering the labour market found these new types of work more attractive than domestic service, and many women already working in households were able to find more rewarding employment in factories, stores and restaurants. The flow of immigration was checked, and with it the supply of foreign-born servants. As a result, the number of persons of 10 years of age and over who were employed as servants (in private households or elsewhere) declined by 20 per cent. from $1\frac{1}{2}$ million in 1910 to about $1\frac{1}{4}$ million in 1920. Wages rose as household workers became hard to find, and servants became a luxury which only well-to-do families could afford. At the same time the widespread adoption of electric appliances and other labour-saving devices for home use reduced the amount of household drudgery in many homes.

A major shift in the age range of servants took place during this period ; because of changing attitudes toward the employment of children, which were reflected in child labour and school attendance laws, the number of children of 10 to 15 years of age employed as servants decreased by nearly 60 per cent. from 1910 to 1920.

During the 1920s a very large increase occurred in the number of persons classified as " servants ". There were nearly two million so classified in 1930, an increase of 27 per cent. compared with 1910. The losses during the first world war had been more than made up. Much of the increase in women household servants was due to the migration of Negroes from the South to the North and Midwest. The Negro women readily found employment as household workers in cities where the supply had been insufficient since the first world war.

During the depression of the 1930s the number of domestic service workers continued to increase, but more slowly. Many women who had to support themselves, and perhaps dependants as well, could find no work except in domestic service. Their competition lowered wages, as might be expected, and a great deal of exploitation resulted. A New York State study (made in 1948) revealed cases where women household workers received as little as $1 for a full day's work during the 1930s.

The second world war brought about a sharp reduction in the number of workers in private households, as women shifted from domestic work to other service occupations, such as that of waitress, or to occupations in which there were labour shortages, such as that of production worker in a war plant. During this period the percentage of domestic workers who were women rose to 97 as men were drawn into the armed forces and essential industries. The total number of domestic workers declined from 2,240,000 in 1940 to 1,923,000 in 1950—a drop of 14 per cent.

During the past two years the number of household workers has continued to decline. In April 1952 the total was 1,786,000, of whom only 2 per cent. were men. The proportion of non-white persons among household workers, variously estimated at from 45 to 55 per cent., is much higher than in the population as a whole, where the proportion of non-white persons is about 10 per cent.

Ratio of Household Workers to Households

These fluctuations in the number of private household workers must be examined against the background of a steadily expanding population and a steadily increasing number of households. In 1950 the number of women domestic workers had increased less than 45 per cent. as compared with 1900, but the number of households (including " one-person households ") had increased by 170 per cent. Instead of one woman domestic worker for every 13 potential employers, as in 1900, there is now one worker for about 25 households. Meanwhile the number of women workers in all occupations had more than tripled and amounted to some 18.5

million in 1950. A large proportion of these might be expected to have real need of household help, as nearly half of the women workers in 1950, and 55 per cent. in 1951, were married.

The Present Situation

The Workers

Data from the decennial census of 1950 on the individual occupations of women in the broad occupation group " private household worker " are not available at the present time, but in 1951 the Bureau of the Census carried out for the Bureau of Old-Age and Survivors' Insurance a special survey of persons employed in the " service industry " in private households. Preliminary reports from this survey indicate that roughly three-fifths of the total are general houseworkers. " Baby-sitters ", who take care of young children in their parents' absence from home, make up nearly another fifth. Only about 10 per cent. of the women employed in the industry are housekeepers (whether at the head of a staff of servants or having sole responsibility for the management of a small home) ; the remainder are employed as cooks, practical (non-registered) nurses, laundresses, cleaning women, child nurses, companions or specialised workers.

Not all of the occupations which are considered a part of the private household industry-group are included in the major occupation-group of " private household worker ". The industry classification includes one additional group of women (practical nurses) and several additional groups of men. Men form only about 2 per cent. of the occupation group " private household worker ". According to the 1951 survey almost four-fifths of the men in the industry were working at outdoor jobs, as lawn cutters, yardmen, handymen, odd-job men, chauffeurs, gardeners, or landscape gardeners. Owing to the nature of these jobs there is some seasonal fluctuation in the proportion of men in this industry.

Hours of Work

In the United States, as elsewhere, the worker in a private household has been under pressure to work extremely long hours. Human needs cannot be divided into even units of work and made to stop at the stroke of a clock, as can factory production. If the same person who prepared the family breakfast is expected to prepare a late dinner and clean up afterward, her workday can scarcely be less than 12 hours and may be much longer.

Resident workers especially have been subject to exploitation in this respect. A study made in New York State in 1948 by the State Department of Labor included interviews with 51 resident women workers. All said that they worked at least 13 hours a day; some worked 16 and a few as much as 19 hours. On the other hand, part-time workers may be exploited by housewives who expect them to do a full week's work in half the normal time, perhaps " keeping an eye on the baby " meanwhile. Many house-workers are employed on a day-to-day basis, their hours and pay depending on the number of days' work they obtain in the week.

The number of hours worked by private household employees, therefore, shows a wider range than do working hours in most occupations. The 1951 survey indicates that, of those who were working full time (35 hours or more in a week) and who were engaged primarily in domestic employment, the largest number reported a 40-hour week, but about one-fifth worked 48-54 hours, and another fifth worked 55 hours or longer. In the case of resident workers, however, the long hours reported may include hours " on duty " or " on call " when the worker is not doing any active work.

The possibility of having to work excessive hours is one of the factors discouraging competent workers from taking a job where they will " live in ", although the cash wages now offered are generally as high for the worker who receives free meals and living quarters on the job as for the worker who must buy her own food and lodging out of her earnings.

The strongest restraining influence on working hours in private households is probably the progressive limitation of hours of work in industry through legislation and through collective bargaining. A worker who can walk out and get a factory job with better pay and shorter hours is in a strong bargaining position.

Earnings

Reports to the Bureau of Old-Age and Survivors' Insurance during 1951 indicate an average wage of about $80 a month for the household workers covered. In addition to full-time workers, this includes part-time workers regularly employed by one employer on at least two days a week. The June 1951 survey gives a figure close to this average, but indicates that the range in wages and also in hours worked is very wide.

The most usual wage for full-time non-resident household workers in New York State exclusive of New York City was $90-100 a month in 1946, according to a State Labor Department study. In New York City it was much higher: $150 a month, $35 a week, $6 for an eight-hour day and 75 cents an hour. Such high

rates, however, would only be found in cities where the shortage of domestic workers is most acute.

Many household workers are employed irregularly, with long waits between jobs, either by choice or from necessity. Their annual earnings, therefore, may be relatively low compared with their average monthly earnings while employed. That this is true appears from a comparison of the median 1950 earnings of experienced women workers in selected occupations. Private household workers, with a median of $448, are at the foot of the list. Women in other service industries earned twice as much ; women in sales-work 2.5 times, operatives more than 3 times, those in clerical occupations more than 4 times, and professional and technical workers 5 times as much (see table I). Moreover, the annual earnings of household workers had increased only 51 per cent. in 1950 as compared with 1939, although the cost of living nearly doubled during the same period.

TABLE I. MEDIAN ANNUAL EARNINGS OF EXPERIENCED WOMEN WORKERS IN SELECTED OCCUPATIONS, 1939 AND 1950

Occupation	Median annual earnings	
	1939	1950
	$	$
Private household workers	296	448
Service workers (other)	493	895
Sales workers	636	1,148
Operatives and kindred workers	582	1,616
Clerical and kindred workers	966	2,064
Managers, officials, proprietors (except farm)	1,107	2,089
Professional, technical and kindred workers	1,023	2,264

Most household workers receive one or two meals a day and their streetcar fare, and some receive all meals and living quarters. On the other hand, most of them work for longer than 40 hours a week when employed (especially those who " live in "). Individual workers have less security as regards job tenure, seniority rights, unemployment insurance or compensation for injury on the job than do workers in most other occupations except agriculture.

On the whole it seems clear that the job conditions of the household worker place her under considerable economic, as well as social, disadvantage.

Women as Household Workers

Age. In age distribution, household workers differ markedly from the 90 per cent. of women workers who are in other occupa-

tions. In April 1951, 18 per cent. of the girls under 20 who were employed were working in private households; many of these doubtless worked part-time as "baby sitters" or "mothers' helpers" while attending school. At ages 20-24, the percentage of employed women who were in household employment was at its lowest point (4 per cent.) whereas the percentage in clerical work was at its peak (47 per cent.). In each successive age group, beginning with 25-34 years, the percentage of women employed in private households increased, mounting to 25 in age group 65 and over as women reach the age of retirement. Table II shows the age distribution of women workers in all occupations and in household employment. The entire curve of the household workers is displaced toward the older age groups, and a secondary peak occurs in the very youngest age group. Only two-fifths of the household workers, as compared with three-fifths of all employed women, are between the ages of 20 and 45.

TABLE II. AGE DISTRIBUTION OF WOMEN IN ALL OCCUPATIONS AND IN HOUSEHOLD EMPLOYMENT

Age group	All employed women	Women household workers
	per cent.	per cent.
14–19 years	9.0	15.7
20–24 „	13.9	5.7
25–34 „	22.4	14.2
35–44 „	22.7	19.1
45–54 „	18.4	21.2
55–64 „	10.5	16.7
65 years and over	3.1	7.4

Marital status. The percentage of married women workers with a husband present who are employed in private households is small (7.7), as might be expected. The percentage of single women is about the same in this occupation as for all employed women. Women who are widowed, divorced or separated, or whose husbands are absent for some other reason, are more likely to work in private households. Nearly one-fifth of all employed women in this marital group are household workers.

School enrolment. Nearly a million (928,000) girls of between 14 and 17 years of age were employed in October 1950, and 63 per cent. of these were also enrolled in school.

Thirty per cent. of the employed girl students were classified as private household workers, whereas only 8 per cent. of the employed girls not attending school worked in private households. The importance of this type of work—especially baby sitting—

as a source of income for students is apparent. It should also be noted that mothers are relying to an increasing extent on school-children for the care of their young children. It is, of course, no new thing for older children to be given charge over younger brothers and sisters ; but the hired baby sitter may have neither home experience nor special training in school to qualify her for this responsibility.

In the age group 18-24, which includes most students in universities and professional schools, only 8 per cent. of those employed were private household workers. Evidently the girls who expect to continue as household workers have left school by the time they are 18 ; girls who go on with their education after high school are better able, on the other hand, to find clerical, sales, and professional or technical jobs.

Job experience. In January 1951 only one in 10 of all women household workers had been with her current employer for ten years, that is, since the beginning of the second world war ; about three in 10 had held their current jobs less than six months. This indicates that there is a good deal of shifting about from job to job, as openings become available in stores and factories or as the bargaining power of individual women changes with experience, age, maturity or changing employment conditions.

Of women with experience in the field of household employment during the second world war or later who were not in the labour force in March 1951, about one-fifth were married women with children under six years of age, and nearly one-fifth were 65 years of age or over.

Full-time and part-time workers. Less than half (44.4) of all women and girls of 14 years of age and over who worked in private households in 1950 held full-time jobs ; and less than three-fifths of these were employed for 40 weeks or more during the year. Of the part-time workers, an even smaller proportion (about two-fifths) had worked for 40 weeks or more.

Problems Facing the Employer

In the United States wealthy households constitute only a minor fraction of the employment market for domestic workers ; most household workers are in moderate-income families where no other workers are employed, and frequently, especially in city apartments, the services of one worker will be shared by several families on a part-time basis.

In many families the problem of household assistance is a two-edged one. First, it is necessary to find a properly qualified

person who will accept the job ; and, secondly, it is necessary to budget household funds to pay her. With living costs rising, the employment of household help may represent a considerable financial burden on the family. This is especially true for young families not well established financially—the type of family where babies and small children are most likely to be found—and for families whose earning power is reduced by age or long illness. Most difficult, perhaps, is the problem of the one-parent family, in which a widow or widower may have to pay a full-time household worker to care for the children whom she, or he, must fully support.

There is interest in the United States in amending the Federal income-tax law to allow deductions from taxable income for necessary expenses of child care in the case of working parents. Several Bills have been introduced in Congress during recent years to provide such relief for specified groups. Most of the Bills are restricted either to widows and widowers in low-income groups or to " women gainfully employed through necessity to support their children ". No action has been taken by Congress, but the movement is gaining strong support from labour unions, women's organisations, teachers and other groups.

Development of Standards

Early Efforts

There is no government-sponsored household employment programme in the United States to promote the same kinds of labour standards as are found in industry. A number of significant experiments, however, have been undertaken at one time or another by national women's organisations and local community groups.

The Young Women's Christian Association has taken a strong interest in the problems of women household workers for many years. As early as 1915 the National Board of Y.W.C.A.s formed a commission on household employment, which during the four years of its existence published four studies dealing with conditions in household employment, training, and the obligations of housewives toward domestic workers. The industrial department of the Y.W.C.A. in many communities also took an active interest in household workers, and held a number of conferences at which their problems were considered.

In 1928 the forerunner of the National Council on Household Employment was established at a conference called by the National Board of the Y.W.C.A.s and interested government agencies. This council, composed of employers, specialists in domestic science and

other individuals interested in household employment problems, acted for a number of years as a centre for the exchange of information on household employment problems, maintained a library, co-operated with other organisations working in this field, formulated standards, and carried on research activities.

In the early 1930s, during the depression period, 64 local Y.W.C.A. groups organised committees on household employment, with local civic and social agencies frequently joining in. Training projects were undertaken in a large number of communities ; one of the strongest was the Philadelphia Institute, set up by the Y.W.C.A. and the Philadelphia Board of Education.

The National Women's Trade Union League, the National Consumers' League and other national organisations of women also considered specific problems of household workers on occasion.

The second world war turned the attention of these groups to other matters. The local committees disappeared, and in 1942 the National Council disbanded. Household help was at a premium, and the workers could pick and choose the job that suited them.

Community Programmes

After the war, owing to the continuing shortage of household employees, many local committees—representing social and civic groups, placement bureaux, and vocational and trade schools, as well as employers and employees—were revived, and others were newly formed. By the spring of 1946 the Women's Bureau had received information of 20 such community committees, about half of them in communities which had had similar committees before the war.

A Conference on Household Employment was called by the Bureau at this time and was followed by a study of 19 selected cities reported to have active programmes on standards, training and placement. In practically all 19 cities visited the same basic difficulties were found. Employers were dissatisfied because of the continuing shortage of household workers and the inadequacy of many of the workers who were available, while employees protested against the disadvantages of household work as compared with industrial occupations.

The work of the committees included consideration of standards, training, placement and status, but attention was concentrated mainly on the formulation of standards for working conditions. These standards, however, in turn often affect placement and training techniques and aid in the improvement of status. The effectiveness of the committee approach depended on the organising

ability and devotion of volunteer leaders, and the results were generally meagre in comparison with the time and energy expended.

The general community committees took other forms in some places, where organisations of household employers were founded (as in Chicago) or where the workers formed a union. A domestic workers'union has been active for nine years in Washington, D.C. This union has a form of agreement which is to be signed by both employer and worker. It has registered hundreds of workers, but most of them relinquish membership as soon as they find satisfactory employment.

Other methods of improving standards of working conditions without resort to legislation (such as the use of formal employment contracts) have made little headway in the United States.

Training Programmes

The chief method of providing training in household employment in the United States is through vocational courses within the public school system, which are given with the aid of Federal grants under the Smith-Hughes and George-Barden Acts. These courses are open to residents (adults as well as school-children) and are free. The subjects offered depend on the demand. In the year ended June 1951 only eight states and the District of Columbia reported any courses in household management, although such courses have been given in the past in other states, and would be given again if enough people requested them.

The total enrolment in household management courses in the year 1950-51 was 1,063 (946 female, 117 male) out of some 3.25 million students in all vocational courses. Of the 946 females, 423 were enrolled in all-day classes and were mostly girls of secondary-school age ; 523 were employed women enrolled in extension classes, which are held in the evening.

One school in California has developed courses in household specialities—lady's maid, cook, butler—for adults of 18 or over. These courses have attracted a fairly large number of men as well as women, with white persons predominating. All other household management courses reported in 1951 were given in connection with schools for Negroes. Except in two states, where a small number of men or boys were enrolled, the students in these courses were women and girls.

Courses in home economics, including cooking, menu planning and food buying, sewing, and child care, are given in public secondary schools throughout the United States, but these are designed to train girls not for employment in private households but for the management of their own homes.

From time to time the household employment committees in individual communities have attempted to provide training courses for household workers. The aim is usually to raise the level of competence and to increase the employment opportunities of unskilled women. Of the 19 communities with active household employment committees, surveyed by the Women's Bureau in 1946, only five reported that they offered training courses for household workers. These courses were usually free, and graduation certificates were granted to women who completed the course. In spite of the committees' efforts at recruiting, however, few women had requested the training. The largest number reported as enrolled was 22.

Many institutions for the care of dependent children and the training of delinquent girls provide instruction in bedmaking, ironing, food preparation, the bathing and feeding of babies, and other household duties. However, most girls prefer to train as typists or waitresses, and of recent years it has been relatively easy for them to find jobs in offices or restaurants on leaving the institution.

Placement

The public employment offices set up in every state and most cities of the United States, in co-operation with the United States Employment Service of the Department of Labor, were created to provide placement services for workers in all occupations, including private household employment. This service is free for both workers and employers. In most offices household employment is handled as part of the general placement service; in New York City, however, a separate office is maintained for private household workers, and in several other cities there is a household and service trades office.

Many private employment agencies also place workers in private households, taking their fee from the employer or from the worker as a percentage of her pay for one or more weeks, or from both. In addition, employers often insert paid advertisements in the newspapers, which may be answered by anyone seeking a job; workers also sometimes insert notices of "situations wanted". The cost of such advertisements is small, but the results are uncertain and involve some risk. Nevertheless, the "help wanted" advertisements cannot be disregarded as a placement method, for they are accessible to everyone, even the most isolated, and they are widely used.

Voluntary Standards

The public employment offices have exerted a powerful influence toward improving wages and working conditions for household

workers. Although without authority to impose standards on either workers or employers, the employment service can and does counsel persons registering with it as to fair wage rates for workers with their training and experience. It can also advise housewives in search of domestic help as to recommended standards of pay, time off, living quarters, and so forth. For the past several years there have been, at least in the larger cities, more families seeking help than there are qualified applicants. Since workers are referred first to the best jobs for which they are qualified, it usually happens that no one applies for jobs where the wages are too low or the hours too long. As in other occupations, the weakness of this type of voluntary standard is that, when a labour surplus occurs, the pressure is great for women in need of work to accept sub-standard jobs.

The education of the public in regard to the responsibilities of employers of houseworkers is carried on from time to time by the women's organisations such as the Young Women's Christian Association, and through magazines for women.

Visiting Homemaker Services

Home aid services, successfully used in some countries, have never been widely adopted in the United States ; and more attention might well be given to experimenting with this type of service as a means of improving the competence and stability of household workers.

The nearest approach to home aid services in this country is the visiting homemaker service operated by social agencies in a number of cities in order to provide emergency assistance in low-income families. Initiated by welfare agencies in two cities during the 1920s, this movement was developed during the depression period of the 1930s by the Work Projects Administration with public funds and proved so useful that many family welfare and children's agencies adopted the plan. When the W.P.A. was discontinued in 1942 some of these agencies continued the service, and others initiated similar systems later.

According to the Children's Bureau of the Federal Security Agency, over 70 social agencies in the United States were providing homemaker services in 1949. Reports from 58 of these agencies indicated that they employed about 280 homemakers as salaried staff members. All agencies provide the service free when necessary; most of them accept fees from families who can afford to pay.

A survey of 16 agencies with homemaker services was made by the Women's Bureau in the autumn of 1951. These agencies were located in 11 cities along the Atlantic Coast and as far west

as Chicago ; they employed a total of 252 women as visiting housekeepers. Many of the women had been with the agency for at least 10 years, and most of them were 45 years of age or older. Slightly more than half were Negro women—in some agencies, especially in southern cities, all were Negro, in others all were white, and in some both white and Negro women were employed.

These women are placed by the agency employing them in families where there is a temporary need for someone to replace the mother. They are paid and supervised by the agency, and take over the management of the household, with authority second only to that of the father. They take care of the children, organise the housework, plan and prepare meals, with a view to putting the family on its feet. They have authority to hire a woman for cleaning or to send laundry out if necessary. Their hours are strictly regulated by the agency, and overnight work or overtime is allowed only when it is authorised and paid for.

The length of time spent on a case averaged about a month. One city limited services in maternity cases to two weeks.

The women employed are generally fond of children, enjoy keeping house, and are extremely loyal to their agency. They appear to be a very stable and reliable group, seldom sick and never absent without explanation. Some of the best workers were nearing 70 years of age. Although the pay was no better than that of saleswomen in retail stores, and in some cases no better than that of general houseworkers, their continuing status as staff members of the agency and their status in the household gave these women a sense of personal dignity and of satisfaction in their work.

In spite of the general shortage of houseworkers, these agencies had not for years had to search for homemakers. If they needed someone, one of their staff usually knew a good person to recommend.

The homemaker services surveyed were supported in most cases by community chest funds, though in a few instances they were supported from public funds. Most of the agencies said they would favour an expansion of the service if sufficient funds were available, but none of those visited had any definite plans for expansion.

Services of this type have usually been limited to families served by family or child welfare agencies. Attempts to set up similar services through " professional " associations of the workers in order to supply skilled workers for employed mothers and others who are ready and willing to pay well for competent assistance in the home have been abortive. However, if some way could be

found to adapt the experience gained through the visiting-homemaker services to community needs, the influence might be far-reaching.

Legislative Protection

In general, it can be said that employees in private households have less protection through legislation than those in any other non-agricultural occupation in the United States. The regulation of wages, hours and working conditions, except in inter-state industries, falls within the jurisdiction of state governments under our Federal system. With a few exceptions, noted below, state labour laws either do not apply to workers in private households or expressly exclude them from coverage.

The provisions of the state labour laws which apply to " domestic workers " may be summarised as follows :

Maximum hours.

Washington : A 60-hour week for men and women, except in emergencies.

Alaska : A 60-hour week for women.

Minimum wage.

Wisconsin : A schedule of wages and board-and-lodging allowances for women and minors, according to size of city.

Alaska : Minimum wage of $18 a week (6 days, 48 hours) ; 45 cents an hour for part-time work.

Unemployment compensation.

New York : Payable where four or more private household workers work for one employer.

Wage payment.

Twelve states and Alaska : Covered implicitly or (California) explicitly.

Workmen's compensation.

California : Coverage is compulsory if the worker is employed more than 52 hours a week by one employer ; otherwise it is voluntary.

New York : Coverage is mandatory if the worker is employed by one employer for 48 hours a week or longer. This provision applies only in the 17 cities with a population of 40,000 or over. Nevertheless, in 1948 (the first year in which domestic workers were covered) compensation was awarded in 781 cases of injury. Of these injuries, 5 were fatal, 5 resulted in total permanent disability and 210 in partial permanent disability ; the remainder were cases of temporary disability.

Connecticut, New Jersey, Vermont : Coverage is elective ; employers not electing to come under the Act have no defence under common law if sued by an injured employee.

Thirty-four states : Coverage is voluntary ; employers not deciding to come under the Act retain defence under common law.

Nine states and the District of Columbia : Domestic workers are excluded from coverage.

Federal Legislation

As the national Government has power to regulate employment only when inter-state commerce or government contracts are involved, Federal wage and hour laws do not apply to domestic workers. Social security legislation, on the other hand, can be extended to any group, workers or non-workers, in all states that meet the standards laid down for Federal grants.

Thus, old-age assistance, aid for dependent children and general public assistance have been available for household workers on the same terms as for other residents in most states since the later 1930s. The allowances are small—not enough to live on—but for persons of 65 and over and for widows with children under 16 the money so received may make it possible for them to maintain their own homes or to live with relatives.

Old-age and survivors' benefits, on the other hand, are paid only to workers in specified categories and their families or survivors, in cases where both workers and employers have made the specified contributions to the fund for the required length of time. The extension of this system to household workers, long urged by the Women's Bureau, the Young Women's Christian Association and other interested organisations, is now in progress. In 1950 the Social Security Act was amended to bring in several additional occupation groups including domestic workers, to liberalise the benefits, and to make it easier for older workers to qualify. This is probably the most important single step to improve the status of household workers through legislation that has ever been made in the United States.

The Government estimates that the number of household workers meeting the requirements for coverage is over a million. During 1951, the first year in which household workers were eligible, social security taxes were paid for nearly 700,000 of them. To obtain coverage for a calendar quarter, a household worker must be employed on at least 24 days or part days in the calendar quarter by one employer, and receive cash wages of $50 or more from that employer. To qualify for benefits a household worker must have a minimum of six quarters of coverage, with coverage

for at least half of the quarters elapsing between 1 January 1951 and her sixty-fifth birthday.

The old-age benefits range from $20 to $80 a month, depending on the individual's average monthly earnings ; family benefits for a worker who supports a husband or a wife over 65 or children under 18 may run up to a maximum of $150 a month. If the worker dies, survivors' benefits are paid to the dependent husband (or wife) and dependent children under 18 ; and a death benefit equal to three monthly payments is paid to help with burial expenses.

A worker of 75 years of age or over may earn any amount and still receive the benefits. Persons between 65 and 75 may earn a limited amount (an Act of 1952 increases the limit from $50 to $75 a month with effect from 1 September 1952) without deduction from the benefits.

Problems Calling for Solution

At present there are families in the United States that are handicapped by lack of competent household help, and the problem is becoming increasingly serious. Among the most serious situations are those of families where one parent is obliged to cope both with family support and with the care of young children, and those of families with invalids or old persons needing more care than the housewife can give. There is evidence that there is a need to increase the supply of household workers and to give employers some reliable means of assessing the competence and training of the houseworkers they employ. The central problem is how to make the occupation of household worker attractive to more people. As I see it, this is a problem of status even more than a problem of wages. As a group, household workers take little pride in their occupation, enforce among themselves no standards as to qualifications or performance, hold no annual conventions, and publish no trade journals. The household workers need leaders from their own ranks to awaken them to group consciousness, build morale and develop standards within the occupation. They need someone to do for them what Florence Nightingale did for the profession of nursing. In the United States, occupation after occupation has performed the feat of transforming a mass of competing individuals, often working with a sense of grievance and exploitation, into an organised body with recognised leaders, a roster of recognised members, and channels of communication both internal and external. Some have done it through labour organisations, some through professional associations. I hope to see the day when household workers will come together in an organisation,

and elect delegates and take a conscious pride in their skilled specialities, just as the members of many other occupations do today.

Meanwhile, the United States today offers a considerable variety of immediate possibilities for improving the status of domestic workers: through education of employers; through the use of employment contracts; through orderly training, both in basic household duties and in specialities; through the development of tests for proficiency in household skills; through the certification of well-trained workers; and if necessary through legislation.

More positive efforts can and certainly should be made to offer practical and attractive training courses, and to utilise trained workers to the best advantage.

In the United States, employment contracts are chiefly the instrument of collective bargaining between labour unions and employer associations. They come into wide use only where strong unions have grown up.

Legislation, as we have seen, is already used to a certain extent in a few states for the protection of household workers and the establishment of standards of pay and working conditions. Especially in the field of social insurance legislation, much more could be done to improve the status of this large group of disadvantaged workers. It is hoped that the recent extension of old-age insurance to household workers may prove to be the opening wedge.

It is clear that the non-existence of any nationally recognised standards in the employer-employee relationship is a key factor in the situation. It underlies the reluctance of many girls to enter training for this type of work. It undermines the confidence of housewives in the competence of the workers they might hire. It has prevented the public from becoming aware of the wide gap between the number of well-trained houseworkers available and the number of persons seeking their services. It encourages the indifference of the public to the social maladjustments that result.

The household employment problem is universal, or nearly so, in this day of highly organised and industrialised living. Some countries have advanced much further than the United States in finding satisfactory solutions and putting them into effect, but before solutions appropriate to national conditions can be determined, there must be a rethinking and a re-evaluation of what competent household service means to family life and national well-being. On this process, international thought and international communication have an important bearing, especially in the formulation of essential standards.