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Women Workers and the Trade Unions in Austria: an Interim Report

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THE EUROPEAN LABOUR MOVEMENT, and particularly the European trade union movement, owe their origin to the rapid expansion of industry in the second half of the nineteenth century. The struggle for women's rights really began at the same time. Initially promoted mainly by the middle classes, it could not at this level enjoy the broad popular support required to bring about fundamental changes in the position of working women. For women not only suffered from inferior status at work and from lack of political rights, but in their capacity as housewives and mothers were—and to some extent still are—the worst-paid and most overworked (though indispensable) members of society.

The small but steadily growing number of women who were prepared to fight for an improvement in their lot were gradually enrolled in the militant working-class movement, and protection of women against exploitation at work but above all in their maternal role figured ever more prominently among the workers' demands. To such effect that today, at least in the German-speaking world, the basic forms of protection of women and comprehensive maternity care are no longer objects of dispute but are generally recognised as essential features of a society that is increasingly preoccupied with the welfare of its children.

In the following pages I shall begin by considering the over-all trends in women's employment, the emergence of sexual stereotypes and consequent division of the labour market into men's and women's occupations, and the discrimination against women this entails as regards pay and employment opportunities. I shall then show that women are poorly represented at the higher levels of the Austrian trade union movement, and that although the unions have been extremely active in promoting the protection and equitable treatment of women workers, the progress made is largely due to the efforts of male trade unionists.

[1] Vienna Workers' Chamber.

Men's work and women's work—two worlds apart?

Society accepted the entry of women into the labour force as the inevitable but far from desirable consequence of the first major wave of industrialisation. Having had modesty and a sense of inferiority instilled into them from childhood, women perhaps found it normal that they were admitted to only a restricted range of jobs on the grounds that many others were too strenuous or demanding for them. In fact many of the so-called " women's jobs " were by no means so light and easy: laundresses and nurses undoubtedly performed heavy physical labour, while farm women had and to some extent still have to carry out tasks that would tax the strength of many men in the long run.

But the stigma of " light work " or " women's work " persisted and was reflected in the wages paid. Gradually, however, technological and economic progress, together with improved education and vocational training, enabled women to perform skilled work too, even managing to make some sort of white-collar career for themselves (though often at the cost of remaining single). Hesitatingly and unwillingly, the universities and technical colleges began to open their doors to them, although they were still excluded from careers in engineering. It was the two world wars that opened up the wide range of jobs in the metalworking industries to women. The emergency put an end to all discussion as to the suitability of women for such work; in fact they were pressed into it, and duly proved themselves. After both world wars there was an attempt to put the clock back, but this was only partly successful. If the memory of women's sterling service in all kinds of jobs during the crisis years gradually faded, a new factor began to weigh increasingly in the minds of certain influential, progressive people, namely the position achieved by Soviet women in a wide range of manual and professional occupations. Very slowly, the view began to gain ground that women's capacities were very much greater than had previously been thought.

The process of freeing themselves from the straitjacket of " suitable occupations " has of course only just begun, and women still have a long way to go before their choice of trade or profession is truly free, based on the individual's personal aptitudes rather than the preconceptions of society. In Austria, at least, educationists, parents and even to a large extent employers and trade unions have yet to rid themselves of a heavy load of centuries-old prejudice.

The participation of women in economic activity is still widely regarded as a twentieth-century phenomenon. Such a view ignores the fact that women have always been involved in the production process, even if mostly in the domestic sphere, and that the middle-class woman with nothing to do but mind the house and children is a product of the intellectual and economic climate of the nineteenth century. Today's economic forces are all working in the opposite direction, yet this is still

the " ideal " that is held up to us by parents, the educational system, the mass media and the advertising industry, with the result that it appears to many members of both sexes as the outcome of a " natural " division of roles between man and woman in the family and in society.

According to the results of an OECD inquiry [1] based on reports from ten different countries, the expansion in women's employment is one of the most striking social developments to have taken place in almost all the industrialised countries since the end of the Second World War. Obviously, this is a trend that increasingly calls into question—and has done much to change—the existing structure of society, the organisation of work and the allocation of responsibilities within the family. The reaction which was discernible in the late 1940s and early 1950s could no longer stop the movement. Whereas prior to the Second World War women worked mainly in clerical and factory jobs as well as in other people's homes, from this time on there was an ever-increasing amount of employment open to them in the steadily expanding service industries. More recently the trend has been reinforced by the many women who return to work once their families are old enough to look after themselves, and by younger women who seek jobs in spite of having small children. In countries where female participation in the labour force is traditionally high, for example Austria, Denmark, Finland and Sweden, the rate has remained fairly stable.

In general the OECD report noted that the female participation rate was positively correlated with the level of women's education, that more highly educated women suffered less from unemployment, that turnover and absenteeism were highest among married women with small children, that women were far more often engaged in part-time work than men, and that opportunities for female employment were both more attractive and more numerous in the towns than in the country.

There is nothing surprising about these findings, but they should clearly incite us to draw some conclusions.

What most noticeably distinguishes " men's work " from " women's work " is first the difference in prestige, and second the difference in pay. This also applies when men and women are doing substantially the same work. Jobs habitually performed by women are not only much worse paid than those usually chosen by men but are also worth less in terms of social recognition. This is curious because in some instances women need substantially more knowledge and skills to advance in their profession than is the case in the more highly valued " male " occupations with which they might be compared. The higher we go up the occupational ladder the more flagrant this becomes. It is symptomatic of the whole situation that there is no feminine equivalent in the German language of many high-ranking posts, as there is for the lowlier positions more

[1] OECD: *The role of women in the economy* (Paris, doc. MS/5/73.3, 16 Nov. 1973).

" likely " to be occupied by women. The unfortunate thing about this is not so much the fact itself as that it strikes nobody as regrettable or even as a linguistic absurdity.

The Austrian trade unions have indeed recognised, but have not taken any very active steps to remedy, the fact that all this adds up to discrimination. Worse still, occupations which are on the decline as regards pay and prestige mysteriously become suitable for women even when they were previously considered too heavy, morally dangerous, etc. A typical example is men's bespoke tailoring. On the other hand, jobs that are regarded as having a future very quickly come to be considered " men's work ". Thus in the early days of computer technology many women became programmers, but as soon as this work started to be relatively well paid it was described as ill-suited to the feminine mind and thus made unattractive to girls.

The result of all this is that the demand for labour comes to reflect the model of an employment market split down the middle. On the one hand are the skilled jobs offering working conditions, promotion prospects and pay befitting the prestige of these occupations and often the higher qualifications demanded. On the other are essentially the less-skilled jobs, usually unpleasanter working conditions, few or no prospects and worse pay. Even when the qualifications demanded are the same for men and women, the fact is often irrelevant and in no way alters the above-mentioned advantages and disadvantages. Men and women simply have different possibilities of access to two separate, sex-typed labour markets, and it is virtually beyond the power of the individual to overcome the barriers between them. It seems highly probable that the findings of American research into the job opportunities of racial minority groups are also applicable to women's employment; these indicate that better general education and vocational training do not have the beneficial effect that one would expect in such cases because access to the labour market is governed by discriminatory practices. That this type of discrimination is hardly ever exercised against the male sex is demonstrated in Austria, for example, by the fact that campaigns to recruit men as social workers and nurses are being conducted with success, whereas there is virtually no recruiting among women for so-called " men's jobs ". Indeed, the few girls who seek to obtain suitable professional or vocational training to equip them for such work can count on no support from public opinion against the prejudices of their families, employers and fellow workers.

This lack of interest on the part of society as a whole is reflected in the trade unions' not very effective efforts to broaden the scope of vocational training for girls by opening up occupations hitherto reserved for men and through appropriate wage policy measures. For regardless of the fact that the ILO's Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100) was ratified over 20 years ago, the provisions it contains are reflected neither

in the practical application of collective agreements nor in employers' grading policies.

In the course of the past decade the expressions " men's wages " and " women's wages " have almost entirely disappeared from Austrian collective bargaining and wage agreements. Many industries have opted for the institution of several wage categories within which payment is made according to either qualifications or the type of work performed. In addition, numerous agreements contain the express proviso that age and sex shall not be taken into account in fixing piece rates, which theoretically implies recognition of the principle of equal pay for men and women. As always, however, there is a big difference between theory and practice. The principle is only applicable in cases of equal work, and whether work is " of equal value " is determined by criteria that emphasise the qualities usually attributed to men. Physical strength is rated above dexterity and perseverance in carrying out complicated or monotonous tasks. In evaluating different jobs no account is taken of modern discoveries regarding psychological and physiological stress. In occupations where women are traditionally employed in large numbers, they are placed in the lowest wage categories and this contractual financial disadvantage is then compounded by company personnel policy, which almost always treats male staff more favourably. Women are only admitted to the so-called " men's jobs " when no men are available, in which case they do nearly always receive equal pay.

The consequences of such procedures can easily be seen in the wage differentials between men and women. While it has to be remembered that women workers are often less qualified than their male counterparts and work shorter hours, this does not explain the fact that in Austria women's earnings average only about 68 per cent, or roughly two-thirds, of men's. In this respect it should be borne in mind that women in Austria do significantly more piece-rate working than men (40 per cent of total working time in 1971 against 17 per cent for men).

That the unfavourable position of women with regard to remuneration does not apply only to manual workers is shown by the fact that in July 1973 one male white-collar worker in three earned more than the national insurance contribution ceiling of 9,375 schillings a month, whereas only one female white-collar worker in 18 was in the same position.[1]

We may therefore conclude that, even though there is full recognition of the principle of women's right to equal pay for work of equal value, the unions have not been able to secure its implementation in practice; it may be added that not all unions have tried equally hard to do so. Even the very considerable efforts of the union officials responsible for the interests of women members have been ineffectual in reducing the

[1] As of August 1975, 100 Austrian schillings = $5.63 or £2.60.

incongruously wide gap between men's and women's earnings or in materially improving the promotion prospects of duly qualified women, which remain far inferior to those of their male colleagues.

In support of this statement let us consider a few more examples from Austria. There is not a single woman among the 65 heads of department in the various ministries, not even in the field of education where women unquestionably play a major part. In 1973 only 40 of the country's 265 general secondary schools had women heads (i.e. some 15 per cent), even though 40 per cent of secondary school teachers were women. Moreover, practically all the 40 schools in question were for girls, not co-educational. In 1974 only 21 out of a total of 920 established university professors were women, and only 12 of the 157 unestablished professors.

In 1974, again, out of 1,514 judges and candidate judges there were only 64 women, of whom 50 were attached to the Vienna District Court; in the same year only five of the 179 public prosecutors were women, and all of these worked for the Viennese Attorney-General's office. Not a single university clinic in the whole of Austria has a woman director, and in the hospitals and welfare centres of Vienna in 1973 there were 112 men and only six women chief physicians even though nearly 40 per cent of the doctors in the city are women.

The picture is the same in politics. Although there are two women ministers and one secretary of State in the Federal Government, the provincial governments of Vienna and Lower Austria have only one woman member each. While some 10 per cent of the deputies in the Vienna provincial parliament are women, that of Tyrol cannot boast even one woman deputy. Finally, there are only 12 women among the 184 members of the national Parliament, i.e. no more than 6.5 per cent even though women account for over 50 per cent of the electorate.

I shall revert to the trade unions' attitude to these questions in a moment.

Women in the Austrian trade union movement

A few figures on the size and distribution of the Austrian labour force will help to place the following comments in perspective. In round figures there were 2,655,000 wage and salary earners in Austria in 1974, of whom 1,018,000 were women. It was the first time that the number of female workers (averaged over the year) had exceeded the million mark. Since 1954 the proportion of female workers has been growing rapidly and in 1974 it reached 38.3 per cent. In 1973 wage and salary earners were distributed as shown in table 1 (average figures).

On 31 December 1973 the Austrian Federation of Trade Unions had 1,559,513 members, of whom 434,515 or 27.9 per cent were women. Their distribution among the individual unions was as shown in table 2. Nearly

TABLE 1. DISTRIBUTION OF WAGE AND SALARY EARNERS IN AUSTRIA BY CATEGORY AND SEX, 1973

Category	Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%
All workers	**1 629 819**	**61.5**	**1 019 814**	**38.5**
Manual workers	947 450	65.9	489 788	34.1
White-collar workers	430 179	49.2	443 992	50.8
Civil servants	241 712	81.4	55 185	18.6
Registered unemployed	10 478	25.4	30 849	74.6

TABLE 2. WOMEN MEMBERS OF AUSTRIAN TRADE UNIONS, 1973

Union	No. of women members	% of union membership
White-Collar Workers in Private Industry and Commerce	117 263	41.9
Municipal Workers	59 479	41.6
Public Service Workers	51 141	34.5
Metalworkers and Mineworkers	47 690	16.7
Textile, Clothing and Leatherworkers	46 580	65.8
Arts and Liberal Professions	4 575	31.1
Construction and Woodworkers	7 182	3.6
Chemical Industry Workers	16 931	23.7
Railway Workers	6 193	5.4
Printing and Paper Workers	6 459	25.7
Commerce, Transport and Communications Workers	8 928	31.1
Hotel and Catering Workers	10 171	58.4
Agricultural and Forestry Workers	4 662	17.6
Food, Drink and Tobacco Workers	15 992	32.9
Postal and Telegraph Workers	13 148	20.7
Personal Service Workers	18 121	91.7

three-quarters (74 per cent) of women trade unionists are concentrated in the first five unions listed here.

Anyone who is familiar with the European trade union scene will concede that both the over-all and the female unionisation rates are remarkably high in Austria and indicate a large degree of union consciousness on the part of both sexes. This is matched by the relatively high number of trade union posts held by women, which is none the less

kept lower than it might be by the fact that most women have domestic and maternal obligations in addition to their jobs. The virtually unaltered distribution of household responsibilities has almost always encouraged husbands to engage in social and political activities while offering no incentive to their wives. Similarly women are welcome as trade union members and their assistance is particularly appreciated at the lower levels, yet they seldom attain positions of leadership. A few examples will serve to corroborate this assertion.

None of the presidents of the 16 unions affiliated to the Austrian Federation of Trade Unions is a woman, even though women make up over 90 per cent of the membership of the Personal Service Workers' Union, two-thirds of the Textile, Clothing and Leatherworkers' Union, and almost 60 per cent of the Hotel and Catering Workers' Union. In the first and the third of these, however, they have at least elected women vice-presidents. This year, for the first time, a woman has acceded to the post of General Secretary of a union—the White-Collar Workers' Union in Private Industry and Commerce. The new president of this union has shown that he is fully alive to the fact that there are now more female than male white-collar workers in Austria and that over 40 per cent of his membership is female. This figure carries all the more weight when one remembers how many women are employed in petty retailing, where trade union organisation is particularly difficult. The number of female trade union secretaries is extremely low: a mere 18 out of a total of 392 in 1974. In the Federation itself there was only one out of seven, and she was in charge of the Women's Department. In the Federation's regional secretariats only six out of 105 secretaries were women.

Of course, this picture would be misleading if, as they could perfectly well do, the Austrian trade unions appointed women to the leading posts in the various bodies in which they have the right to nominate representatives. Yet here too the situation is identical. The directorships of the social security institutions are held entirely by men, and there are very few women among the senior officials. In 1974 there were 176 men in the highest grade as against two women; in the second grade nine men and one woman; in the third 312 men and only 11 women. In the workers' chambers, which are the constitutional guardians of Austrian workers' interests, the 40 per cent of female employees are represented by a single woman vice-president in a western district and not so much as one president. The Vienna Chamber, in whose area 44 per cent of wage and salary earners are women, does not have a woman vice-president, the highest posts being occupied exclusively by men. Turning to the actual staffs of the chambers, there is no woman director or deputy director. Of the 16 secretaries in charge of major departments only one is a woman, while of the 39 who head smaller departments two are women, one of whom is in charge of the Women's Section of the Vienna Chamber, a post which could not very well be held by a man.

The protection of women as workers and mothers

This is a field in which the trade union movement has scored some of its greatest successes. The preceding section of this article was devoted to the negative side of the record, which any woman active in the trade unions must feel bound to point out. However, the very fact that she is in a position to do so herself, rather than through some male intermediary, and can be sure to obtain a hearing is due in large part to the educational and other activities of the unions. Let us consider a few examples of trade union achievements with regard to the protection of women workers, especially in their role as mothers.

The need for special protection of pregnant women was already recognised in Austria in the nineteenth century. Lack of antenatal care often led to women's health being severely undermined. Frequently they were obliged to stand by their machines right up to the onset of labour and had to start work again only a few days later. In 1885 the excessive number of premature births and miscarriages and the high infant mortality rate led to a reform of industrial legislation, whereby mothers were not allowed to work for four weeks after their confinement. Three years later the Sickness Insurance Act provided them with a daily benefit of 60-75 per cent of " normal local earnings ". These modest provisions remained unchanged until the First World War, in the course of which the period during which resumption of work was prohibited was extended, together with the payment of benefit. In addition, expectant mothers could now qualify for sickness benefit for up to four weeks prior to their confinement. After the war these provisions were further extended, but still without any guarantees as to security of employment, so that they often remained meaningless. Not until the Second World War was protection against notice of dismissal enacted, and then it remained largely irrelevant inasmuch as it was compulsory for women to go out to work anyway.

As soon as the Second World War was over the trade unions set to work to obtain a new Maternity Protection Act, and in 1957 they finally succeeded.[1] The numerous resolutions of women's conferences and the campaign carried on by the unions in Parliament—above all by women trade unionist MPs—bore fruit in the new Act, which covered the majority of female wage and salary earners in Austria, though with special provisions regarding women employed in certain branches of the public service, in private households and as homeworkers. In the first place, and as a complete novelty, the Act introduced the notion of maternity leave. Originally unpaid and limited to six months, three years later it became paid leave up to the child's first birthday.[2] The unions

[1] ILO: *Legislative Series*, 1957—Aus. 1A.

[2] Ibid., 1960—Aus. 2.

also succeeded in having it made unlawful to employ a woman for six weeks before and a minimum of six weeks after her confinement, the latter period being extended to eight weeks for a nursing mother and to 12 weeks for a nursing mother whose child was born prematurely. Furthermore, only in exceptional cases, and even then only with the prior permission of a conciliation board, could women be dismissed, with or without notice, during their pregnancy or until four months after their confinement. Finally, the entitlement to leave was backed up with protection against dismissal, with or without notice, until four weeks after resumption of work.

These provisions remained essentially unchanged until 1974, when they were further extended. On this occasion Maria Metzker, parliamentary representative for working women in Austria, addressed the Upper House. The extent to which the idea of comprehensive maternity care had taken root in Austria during the intervening 17 years was shown by the fact that not only were the new amendments adopted unanimously but none of Mrs. Metzker's arguments was even challenged. Seventeen years of educational work and propaganda on the part of the unions and the workers' chambers, of keeping women informed of their rights and of representing them in court, had created a social climate in which it had become impossible to oppose improvements in the protection afforded to working mothers.

Another and complementary example is the above-mentioned maternity leave and its practical implementation. Doctors and psychologists are overwhelmingly of the opinion that care of the child in its own home during its first year of life is of the greatest importance for its proper development. When the Maternity Protection Act of 1957 was being drawn up, therefore, leading women officials of the Austrian Federation of Trade Unions began to examine what could be done to enable working mothers to stop work during the first year of the child's life with a guarantee of subsequent re-employment. Thus the idea of maternity leave came into being. Since the beginning of 1961, as we have seen, the maximum period has been up to the child's first birthday, and in most cases the maternity leave benefit makes it possible for mothers to take advantage of it. The benefit at first normally amounted to half the level of unemployment pay (in fact, it took the form of an unemployment benefit), and might not fall below a certain sum. This sum was raised a number of times, but as there was a means test on the combined family income some working mothers were ineligible. Moreover, the amount was such that others, who were the sole support of their families, could hardly consider living on it.

The year 1974 brought substantial progress in this respect thanks to the efforts of the Minister for Social Affairs, himself a former trade unionist. The maternity leave benefit is now calculated on the same basis for all, married women receiving 2,000 schillings and women who are the

sole support of their families 3,000, both sums being subject to annual revision. All women who have been employed for a certain period are now entitled to the benefit, with the result that it has come to be regarded more as a social service available to all than as some kind of charity. Its popularity is shown by the fact that, according to soundings by the workers' chambers, almost 90 per cent of working mothers now take advantage of the facility.

In some quarters efforts are being made to get maternity leave extended to three years, but this suggestion is being vigorously opposed by most trade unionists, particularly by women ones, on the grounds that such a measure would in all probability mean the end of suitable employment for skilled or highly qualified women. On the other hand the unions have finally succeeded in getting the period of maternity leave to count for pension purposes, so that women lose no entitlement on this account.

By their opposition to the proposed extension of maternity leave—which is impractical on economic grounds—and by their efforts to have such leave validated for pension purposes, the unions have clearly demonstrated their maturity and great sense of responsibility. On the one hand every effort must be made to obtain the best possible protection for mothers, women and every other category of worker, but on the other such measures should not frustrate employment in general or the demand for skilled workers in particular.

The restriction of night work for women is a story in itself. In 1950 Austria ratified the Night Work (Women) Convention (Revised), 1948 (No. 89). By the terms of the Night Work (Women) Act, 1969 [1], the provisions of the Convention were made directly applicable under Austrian law for the first time and the same protection was extended to women white-collar workers. Amended in 1972, the Act applies to all women workers aged 18 and over, the principal exceptions being women employed in transport, radio and telecommunication services, news agencies, the hotel trade, federal, provincial and local administrations, pharmaceutical staff in chemists' shops, doctors, nursing and similar personnel, and women holding responsible technical or managerial positions. The trade unions, which have hitherto always fought for further restrictions on night work for women, now find themselves in an awkward situation owing to the increasing number of women in skilled occupations. The vast majority of women workers are still in subordinate, underpaid positions and get little or no help in the home from their husbands. For them the restrictions on night work will continue to be of vital importance for a long time to come. The position of the skilled or highly qualified woman, who may find her career hindered by the prohibition on night work, is entirely different. To find some way of

[1] ILO: *Legislative Series*, 1969—Aus. 3.

reconciling the conflicting needs of the two groups is going to call for all the skill the unions can muster. It is really up to the ILO to point out a practicable course.

However, the unions have not only tried to solve the major problems facing women workers such as night work, maternity care and protection in respect of heavy or dangerous jobs. They have also begun to speak up increasingly for women workers weighed down by their double and treble work burdens, educating the community—which profits from their work—to understand that it must provide these women with certain facilities and assistance if their position within the family is to be fundamentally improved.

The unions have supported various moves to promote equality between wives and husbands in the home and have pressed tirelessly for the provision of adequate crèches and nurseries. They have also called for the introduction of all-day schools as an alternative to the customary Austrian half-day schools. Recently they have been campaigning for a statutory right to leave with pay for parents with sick children. The workers' chambers, which are headed by trade unionists, were the first to propose that alimony payments to women supporting their families should be advanced by the State and recovered subsequently from the ex-husband. This idea has quickly gained support and will probably be implemented in the near future.

It will be clear from what has been said above that the Austrian trade union movement has devoted an appreciable amount of time and energy to furthering the interests of women, but when we speak of " the movement " we mean the males who run it. Certainly they took advice from women and threw their weight behind the demands made on their behalf, but nevertheless in accordance with the apparently still valid principle of " all for women, nothing (or as little as possible) by them ". A great deal has in fact been achieved but, as already pointed out, the existing structure of male dominance has remained intact even in the trade unions, and there is no doubt that it will persist for a long time yet unless something fundamental is done about it.

A glance at the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions suggests that this is in no way a peculiarly Austrian phenomenon. In the issue of *Free Labour World* marking the 25th anniversary of the Confederation there was an article on its activities on behalf of working women.[1] In the short paragraph concerning women in the policy-making bodies of the ICFTU it was proudly reported that at the Ninth World Congress in 1969 the ICFTU Women's Committee had succeeded in getting a woman elected to the Executive Board in a consultative capacity, and that at the following Congress in 1972 no fewer than three women had been elected to the Board as substitute members. How modest we women still are! Or

[1] Nov.-Dec. 1974, pp. 34-36.

have we perhaps become modest on realising how difficult it is to obtain equal opportunities even within our own organisations? Anyone who reads *Free Labour World* regularly will notice that women are hardly ever mentioned in the text and that to judge from the pictures the ICFTU might be exclusively a male preserve. Perhaps this is just a coincidence, but it could also be symptomatic.

No doubt the material progress and enhanced occupational status already achieved by women give grounds for hoping that the efforts to obtain full recognition of their contribution will eventually be crowned with success, but the difficulties still to be overcome in what remains essentially a man's world lead one to fear that the road will be a long and hard one.

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It has of course not been possible in this brief outline of the position of working women and of trade union action on their behalf, in this enumeration of achieved and unachieved goals, to attempt an answer to a question which is frequently heard nowadays: namely whether the full integration of women into economic life, so often demanded by women trade unionists in every country, is really the best of all possible roads to self-fulfilment. The fact is that while such goals as self-fulfilment are conceded to be important, the more practical concept of material " achievement " is now accepted in both East and West as the proper yardstick and driving force of continued development in this field; and any discussion of self-fulfilment is likely to be mere theorising about possible future roles for both sexes rather than an attempt to chart a practicable course for the generation now at work.

In our present social and economic situation the attempt to obtain wider and fuller acceptance of the working woman represents the only way for women to break out of the ghetto of " womanhood " and its associated roles of mother, housewife and faithful but subordinate companion of man. Not until women's right to a trade or a profession is generally recognised will it be possible to give them fuller access to occupations offering better pay and career prospects. To achieve this, however, fundamental changes are needed in the education of boys and girls, and as school is the place where society can most directly influence their upbringing this is where the attempt must begin. So long as women are brought up to think of giving up work as a way of evading its difficulties, and so long as they are only too ready to stop working if their husbands prefer them to stay at home, the efforts to secure full equality with men in all aspects of working life will continue to interest only a small if growing percentage of women. Moreover, so long as it is regarded as socially quite acceptable for women to stop work, not because of compelling family obligations but simply in order to withdraw into a supposedly less harassing, more comfortable way of life, the

woman who really cares about her job will continue to be the object of suspicion if not indeed discrimination at work.

Not until the less desirable jobs no longer go automatically to women or immigrant workers, not until there are no more " men's " or " women's " jobs but simply jobs, can we achieve that solidarity of all workers which is needed if the trade unions' efforts to humanise working conditions, that most vital of contributions to the attainment of a truly human world, are to be crowned with success. Only then will there be no more meaning in August Bebel's dictum: " oppression is the common lot of women and workers ".