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Title:

ALP talk regarding women's rights and equal pay for equal work.

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A.L.P. TALK 28th March, 1960.

Good Evening,

I want to tell you a story about a very rebellious wife. She would not go exactly where her husband wanted, or do as he said, and because he had given her cause to dislike him, sought to go and stay with some friends. Her husband endeavoured to get her back and lock her up until she should come to her senses.

There was a court case about it and the husband found to his surprise and horror that the Courts for the first time in British history considered that he no longer had the right to do what he wanted with his wife.

He had been fortified by the clear pronouncement of the Courts previously that a man might discipline his wife and conform her if she did not obey him as the head of the household. He might even, the Courts had said, chastise her if he thought fit, with a stick not thicker than his thumb. All these cherished rights of husbands the Court denied the unfortunate man, and said we now lived in a more enlightened era, where a woman had rights to her opinions and her liberty from matrimonial tyrants. And that was only 70 years ago.

The view that woman was an inferior creature of less brainpower, strength and force of character than a man dies hard. Gradually steps have been taken for the emancipation of women which have let to their status today being very much better than it was in 1890 - but there is much to be done yet.

When women started going to work in other than menial occupations - for a long time the only work they could get was as domestic servants, or to live a life of impoverished gentility as a governess or lady companion - when, then, at the beginning of this century they went in for work

basis of fixation was a single woman's needs.

Now these principles were adopted in the early years of this century. Considerable social changes have taken place since. Today, not only young men but young women equally save towards marriage - it is usual for both to contribute to the matrimonial home and to own it jointly. So a young single woman just as much as a young single man needs to have a wage from which to save for marriage.

As the avenues for employment of women have widened, so have the cases of women working to keep dependants ^{are} increased. They ~~have~~ no longer mere exceptions. They form a substantial section of the female working force. Moreover, the basic wage is no longer fixed on a needs basis only - it is also fixed on the capacity of industry to pay and that lessens any case for differentiation between the sexes on the ground that the male more often has to provide for dependants. In a full employment economy it is essential for expansion that so far as we are able without disrupting family life, we should draw on married women for our work force. They will contribute to the upkeep of children just as much as their husbands.

So the reasons advanced for the difference in wages fixation as between male and female on the grounds of sex alone have disappeared. The only just basis for differentiation is in value of the work done - where people are doing the same job or jobs of equal worth they should in all fairness be paid the same rate.

The Court, however, is always reluctant to alter established principles of fixation, and will often give as its reason the mere fact that the principle has been long established. Although awards do exist in which equal rates for men and women doing the same job are fixed, in order to get the principle of equal pay for equal work

established it is undoubted that legislation is necessary.

When the I.L.O. had adopted a recommendation to its member countries to adopt equal pay for equal work Mr. Holt, the present Federal Treasurer on behalf of the Menzies Government declined to ratify the recommendation and said it must be left to the State Governments. The Court did nought. S. A. was the first State to refuse. The Playford Government always takes the most reactionary of any existing alternatives in industrial matters. The Labor Government of N.S.W, however took the lead and provided for annual increases in the ^{female} ~~basic~~ basic wage so that by 1963 it will be the same as the male rate. This means bringing in equal pay gradually - but effectively. The legislation has now been in operation for nearly 2 years and industry shows no signs of being unable to meet the cost.

Unfortunately, we can't do the same here without a Labor Government, but remember, we only need two more seats in the House of Assembly to get a Government which will give justice to our women workers.