

## CONFERENCE ON MEN'S AND WOMEN'S WORK

The traditional divisions between men's work and women's work in present-day society and the social and economic effects of these divisions were discussed recently in Ottawa at a round-table conference sponsored by the Women's Bureau of the Department of Labour. About 50 persons from federal and provincial departments and agencies, universities, secondary schools and national organizations participated.

In welcoming the conference participants, Dr. G.V. Haythorne, Deputy Minister of Labour, said that the division of work between men and women had tended to become a matter of tradition. The Department of Labour was concerned with improving manpower development and manpower use, and traditional ways of using manpower were being examined in the light of technological and other changes in industry and business and the changing roles of men and women in modern society.

### RIGID WORK DIVISIONS

Dr. Oswald Hall, Professor of Sociology, University of Toronto, said that societies were almost infinitely variable, in the sense that almost any kind of work could be considered as either masculine or feminine. However, within a specific society, the division of work between the sexes was likely to be very rigid. A person's choice of occupation was influenced by factors that ran very deep into the fabric of society, and there were mechanisms at work that drastically limit his freedom of choice.

In today's North American society, the bureaucratic corporation was the main model for organizing work, Dr. Hall said. This system, in which each member either gave or received orders, worked well when there were no serious differences in status between those in the two groups. It was highly acceptable for men to have authority over women; it was acceptable for men to have authority over men and somewhat less acceptable for women to have authority over women. However, for women to have authority over men was likely to be regarded as "disagreeable". Therefore, he said, "women hesitate to strive for jobs that place them in anomalous positions while men hesitate to place women in such positions".

### EFFECT OF FAMILY STRUCTURE

A second limitation on occupational choice for women arose as a result of the family structure. What the husband did determined the ranking of the family. If part of the income came from the wife, these earnings were, in many cases, viewed as an indication of inability on the part of the husband to support his family adequately.

Dr. Hall went on to say that, in a situation in which multiple family incomes were acceptable, another type of limitation of occupational choice occurred. This was in the case where the wife moved ahead in the work world until her occupational status and income exceeded that of her husband. In this instance, the husband and wife enter a competitive situation.

### ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS

Dr. W.R. Dymond, Assistant Deputy Minister of Labour, spoke on the economic aspects of the problem. He said that the occupations in which so-called women's work was concentrated were predominantly those in the service-producing industries, which included transportation, public utilities, trade and finance, as well as services proper. Men's occupations tended to be concentrated in the goods-producing industries.

He also pointed out that women were heavily concentrated in the white-collar occupations, which often cut across these industry boundaries. In 1961, 57 per cent of the female labour force was in these white-collar groups.

Dr. Dymond said that the participation rate of women in the labour force was increasing, while the rate for men was actually dropping. This was partly the result of differing employment trends in the industries in which men's and women's jobs predominated. It was also the result, he said, of the social and economic factors that influenced the extent to which men and women entered the labour force. Generally speaking, adult men were pushed into the labour force because of their need to support themselves and their dependents, regardless of the level and character of labour demand. On the other hand, whether or not women entered the labour force depended largely on the character and level of the demand on their services.

While some of the jobs in the expanding service industries were traditionally more suited to women, there was a vast number of jobs which could be done equally well by either sex. However, in these industries employers preferred to hire women, mainly because women were willing to work at lower wage rates than men of equivalent skill and experience, and because women appeared to be less concerned with the fringe benefits which men found important because of the male role in society — such things as seniority, pensions, insurance, health benefits and so on.

Also, Dr. Dymond said, in North American society it was probably considered morally wrong to pay a man less than he required to support his family at a reasonably decent standard of living. The same scruples did not apply to women, since employers assumed that young girls and married women usually lived at home where their pay merely supplemented the family income.

Another factor was that women had traditionally been more difficult to organize into trade unions and in consequence were more "tractable" from the employer's point of view.

### SERVICE INDUSTRIES

Many jobs in the services-producing industries required higher levels of education and training than the jobs in the goods-producing industries. In spite of the lower salaries available to them, women often had more to offer in the way of education because, on the average, women in many areas of the country spent longer in school, and more often attended

(Over)