

A Living Wage For Women Workers

By Rev. John J. O'Gorman, P.P., of Blessed Sacrament Church, Ottawa.

A great deal of extremely useful labor legislation is enacted every year in the Provincial Legislatures of Canada, as may be seen from a perusal of the volume entitled, "Labor Legislation in Canada," published each year by the Dominion Department of Labor. One of the most useful of these legislative remedies is the Minimum Wage Act for Women Workers.

The laws relating to a minimum wage for working women in Canada are provincial, not federal. They are of very recent date. The first step was taken by Alberta in 1917, which inserted a clause in the Factories Act of that year establishing a flat minimum wage of \$1.50 per shift for all employees covered by the Act, except apprentices, who were to receive \$1.00 per shift. In 1918, the first minimum wage laws for women were passed by Manitoba and British Columbia. In the following year by Quebec and Saskatchewan, and in 1920 by Nova Scotia and Ontario.

The principle underlying such laws is thus stated by the "Commission on Uniformity of Provincial Labor Laws": "We approve the principle of a minimum wage for women and girls, and recommend that a competent authority be created in each province in Canada to establish a minimum wage adequate to maintain self-support for women and girls, and such authority shall be empowered to fix the hours of employment for such women and girls not already provided for by legislation, and further recommend that such hours of employment should not exceed 48 per week, except of employees in domestic or agricultural employment." (Labor Gazette, May, 1920, p. 146.)

The Ontario Act applies to all female laborers apart from farm laborers and domestic servants. A Minimum Wage Board is established by the Act with authority to investigate conditions and determine a minimum wage. The minimum wage may, perhaps, vary according to locality, as living costs are cheaper in a large city than in a small town. Lower than the minimum wage may be given in all provinces, save Alberta, to apprentices or physically defective employees, and in Ontario, also, to part time employees.

The minimum weekly wage fixed by the Manitoba Board in 1918 for experienced adult women in retail stores was \$12. The Minimum Wage Board of British Columbia fixed in 1919 a minimum wage for experienced adult women working in the fishing industry to \$10.30 for theatre ushers. In Saskatchewan in the same year, the minimum weekly wage fixed by the board for experienced adult women varied from \$15 in millinery shops to \$14 in other groups of occupations covered by the regulations. The Ontario Minimum Wage Board has only recently been formed and has yet issued no decision as regards wages. New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island lack legislation on this subject.

It will be noted that the underlying principle of the minimum wage laws is not to determine how much the employer can afford to pay, or how much the employee deserves (the latter is the "fair wage" and is frequently much in excess of the minimum wage). The thing to be determined is how much does the worker require for a living wage?

In the case of an adult man, this means a family living wage, that is, sufficient to support a normal sized family and in the case of a woman, a personal living wage. The principle of a living wage though introduced into Canadian legislation only in 1917 has long been a familiar one in Catholic schools. It was thus stated by Pope Leo XIII. in his encyclical "Rerum novarum" (15 May, 1891): "There is a dictate of nature more ancient and more imperious than any bargain between man and man, that the remuneration must be sufficient to support the wage-earner in reasonable and frugal comfort. If through necessity or fear of a worse condition the workman accepts harder conditions because an employer or contractor will give him no better, he is a victim of fraud and injustice."

Humiliating as it is for us to have to admit it, there are women workers in Ottawa who are not receiving a remuneration sufficient to support themselves in reasonable and frugal comfort, and who consequently since they are giving an honest day's work (as the majority of them are) without receiving therefor an adequate day's pay, are the victims of fraud and injustice. A vicious economic system, permits and practically forces girls and women, even when they are no longer apprentices, to seek and accept a wage less than a living wage. While in many cases, employers in Ottawa are paying just wages, and giving due attention to the health and comfort of their female workers, there are, unfortunately, women in Ottawa who are working for \$8, \$7, \$6 and \$5 a week, not to speak of girls who are working for \$5 a week or less. These facts are so easily ascertained that without exaggeration they may be described as notorious. The Ontario Government Department of Labor published in 1918 a survey of the conditions of the women workers in the industries of Ontario. Here are some facts concerning the wages paid female workers in a few of the occupations surveyed, as may be found in Appendix A to Bulletin No. 1. The percentage of the workers who receive less than \$5 weekly is in one occupation 3.3; in another 4.1; in another 6.1; in another 6.7 and finally in one occupation no less than 35.5. The cumulative per cent. of those who receive less than \$5 weekly ranges in several occupations from 4 to 15, while in others it ranges from 10 to 15. In 12 out of 22, those receiving less than \$7 weekly number in two occupations over 25 per cent; in a third over 25 per cent; and in a fourth 35 per cent. In five occupations grouped together, more than 58 per cent of the female workers receive less than \$8 weekly; only six per cent of the female workers receive \$12 weekly; only eight per cent that amount to even \$5 per cent, while in four occupations the percentage of female workers receiving \$12 weekly were as low as 15.4; 12.2; 7.1 and 4.5. In the last named occupation, a form of manual labor, which requires only a short apprenticeship, 95.5 per cent of the female workers receive less than \$12 weekly. Yet less than \$12 weekly is not a living wage for a woman worker. Those



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of us who are comfortably clothed, housed and fed, and can find enough money for car-fares, reading, matter, recreation and medicine, as well as for charity and religion, (and to all these we are entitled if we do an honest day's work), can have but little idea of the humiliations, privations and sufferings to which are exposed working persons who are unjustly deprived of a living wage.

Thank God, this deplorable state of affairs will not last much longer in Ontario. For under the Minimum Wage Act, 1920, there was constituted on November 17, 1920, a Minimum Wage Board, consisting of Professor J. W. Macmillan, of Victoria College, Toronto, (Chairman), Mr. E. A. Stapella, Managing Director of the Elroy Manufacturing Company, Toronto; Miss Margaret Stephens, of the Garment Workers' Union, Toronto; Mrs. H. W. Parsons, Secretary of the Women's National Council, Toronto; and Mr. H. G. Foster, Secretary of the Hamilton Trades and Labor Council. The Board has authority under this Act to conduct such investigations, as it may deem necessary, and after due enquiry, to establish a minimum wage for female employees in any trade, occupation or calling in Ontario, apart from farm laborers or domestic servants. Meanwhile, since action by the Minimum Wage Board, though imminent, can scarcely be immediately, I would most earnestly implore our local employers who are paying experienced women less than \$12 weekly to take time by the forelock and, without waiting for the decrees of this Board, fulfil the primary requirements of justice by giving at once to the girls and women who are doing a fair day's work for them, a living wage.

To be allied unto wisdom is immortality. The way to wisdom is through much thought, much learning and much action.

"It is possible for the rich man as well as the Bolshevik to betray civilization."—Robert Lynd.

ONTARIO LEGISLATURE TO OPEN ON TUESDAY

Little is Heard About New Labor Legislation.

Ontario's Legislature will open on January 23, with all the usual ceremonies. The same procedure will be adopted as last year and the year previous. There will be the guards of honor, the escorts, and the great society demonstration that have for a generation accompanied all openings. The Farmer Government will not cut out any of the frills, although there have been demands for the cut from some quarters in the Farmer organization.

The Legislative programme will not be as long as last year. However, the Opposition will be more keen. The Conservatives, with a permanent leader and a thoroughly organized group, will put up a fight on every occasion. The work is all mapped out for the members, and there will be "no back benches" in the group. Every member is delegated to handle some subject.

To Mend Temperance Act. Some changes will be made to strengthen the Ontario Temperance Act. These will probably come on the recommendation of a Parliamentary Committee, for which a sub-committee is now preparing a report. They will include the right of appeal to a County Judge, and a recommendation that malt drinks be sold in standard hotels only.

The Government will introduce a bill to establish a system of rural "Pessimist—a person who of two evils chooses both."—"Pan."

"What is the best way to make a pair of trousers last?" "Make the waistcoat and coat first."—"Merry Moments."

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credit, based on the recommendations of the commission which reported recently.

Little is heard about new Labor legislation. Another question to come before the House will be the constitution of the Ontario Board of Licenses. Cost misadventure. It may be that a single commissioner will handle the work. It is known that Chairman Flavell is not anxious to continue the work, and, with his retirement, the board must be abolished and a single person put in as head of the works. Further extension of the T. & N. O. will also receive attention.

DOMINION STEEL CO. TO DISCUSS PROBLEMS WITH EMPLOYEES.

The announcement of a reduction of 17 per cent in the wages of the employees of the Dominion Iron & Steel Company, effective on January 17, will not be reconsidered, E. P. Merrill, general manager of the company, told a delegation of employees who waited on him. Cost of production, he added, must come down, but he was willing to discuss means of reducing the cost of living among the employees of the plant.

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Comparative Hours of Study re Medicine and Osteopathy versus "Chiropractic"

A Comparison of the Educational Requirements of Practitioners in Medicine and Osteopathy who are licensed to practice in Alberta and "Chiropractors" who are not licensed to practice in the Province of Alberta.

	Education Requirements for the Practice of Medicine and Osteopathy	Education Requirements of the Palmer School of Chiropractic
High School—		
English	540 hours	540 hours
Algebra	270 hours	270 hours
Plain Geometry	270 hours	270 hours
Foreign Language	270 hours	270 hours
History	360 hours	360 hours
Physics	180 hours	180 hours
General Science	180 hours	180 hours
Chemistry	180 hours	180 hours
Physiology	180 hours	180 hours
Fundamental Studies in the Healing Art Common to all Schools—		
Histology	120 hours	120 hours
Anatomy	120 hours	120 hours
Physiology	120 hours	120 hours
Embryology	120 hours	120 hours
Chemistry	120 hours	120 hours
Pathology	120 hours	120 hours
Bacteriology	120 hours	120 hours
Diagnosis	120 hours	120 hours
Hygiene	120 hours	120 hours
Gynecology	120 hours	120 hours
Genito-Urinary	120 hours	120 hours
Surgery	120 hours	120 hours
Obstetrics	120 hours	120 hours
Juniperum	120 hours	120 hours
Eye, Ear, etc.	120 hours	120 hours
Pediatrics	120 hours	120 hours
Dermatology	120 hours	120 hours
Orthopedics	120 hours	120 hours
Psychiatry	120 hours	120 hours
Symptomatology	120 hours	120 hours
	7,968 hours	7,074 hours
		495 hours

The hours given under the heading of "Chiropractic" are the hours taught at the Palmer School of "Chiropractic" at Davenport, Iowa, and is the standard of education upon which they are seeking legislation to practice in Alberta. However, the majority of those now practicing studied at this and other schools, when only a two weeks' correspondence course, or a six weeks' to a six months' attendance course was required. "Chiropractors" should be required to qualify by the same regulations by which medical men and osteopaths qualify to practice in the Province of Alberta.

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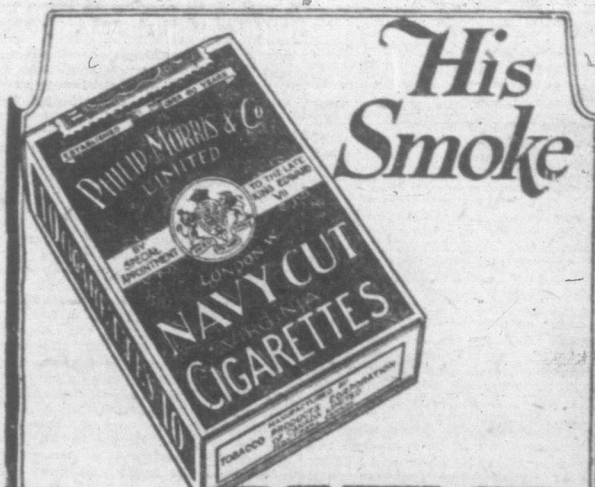
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