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Present:

Chairman: Mrs. Marie Helene Lefaucheux
Members:
- Mrs. Elsie Frances Byth
- Dr. Cecelia Tsieu-Ling Zung
- Mrs. Bodil Begtrup
- Mrs. Lina P. Tsaldaris
- Mrs. Fortuna Andre Guery
- Mrs. Lakshmi Namdian Menon
- Mrs. Amalia C. de Castillo Ledon
- Mrs. Adila Beyhoum El-Jazaeri
- Mrs. Mihr Pektas
- Miss Mary Sutherland
- Mrs. Elisaveta Popova

Miss Dorothy Kenyon
Mrs. Isabel de Urdaneta

Representatives from Specialized Agencies:
- Mrs. Mildred Fairchild-Woodbury
- Miss Jeanne H. Chaton

Representatives from Inter-Governmental Organizations:
- Miss Minerva Bernardino
Consultants from Non-Governmental Organizations (Category A):

Mrs. Marie Couette: World Federation of Trade Unions

Secretariat:

Mrs. Amanda Labarca: Chief of the Section on the Status of Women
Mr. Edward Lawson
Mrs. Claude Day: Secretary

The Principle of Equal Pay for Equal Work for Men and Women Workers
(Item 9 of the Agenda).

Mrs. MENON (India), before explaining her government's attitude towards the question of equal pay for men and women, wished to make some remarks concerning the information on India given in document E/627/Add.11. That was an official document with an unlimited circulation which might, therefore, fall into any hands. It contained a certain number of figures which were much out of date, accusations against States Members, and erroneous statements. India was several times described as a backward country. But a country whose economy was not fully developed was not necessarily as backward as countries whose people did not enjoy civil freedom, where most women were compelled to work against their wish and to entrust their children to public institutions. The document reproduced a figure for 1931 as though India had not published statistics since that date. Since that time a generation had reached adult age, and both the social and the political structure of India had radically changed.

It was stated in the document that 8 million women were in domestic employment and that the number employed in industry was twice as high. On the contrary, the total number of all industrial workers, both men and women, was 5 million.

The document, in speaking of one pottery in Madras, did not give a true picture of the level of wages in that industry, since there were hundreds of potteries in Madras. WFTU had many times distorted the facts in order to suggest that perfection only existed in the Soviet Union and that elsewhere all was confusion and misery.

Mrs. Menon had no doubt that the data brought forward by WFTU came from unofficial sources or from an organization working to overthrow the Indian government and discredit it abroad. She would like to submit a draft resolution, requesting the Secretariat or the competent Specialized Agency to verify data contained in communications from non-governmental organizations, relating to Member States, before its publication in United Nations documents.

/As regards
As regards the principle of equality of pay for men and women, the Indian government had already informed the Secretary-General that it would subscribe to Resolution 121 (VI) of the Economic and Social Council. It was endeavouring to apply the principle, taking account of the special character of the Indian economic structure.

In a large number of Indian industrial centres, basic wages in the cotton and jute industries had, for some time, been the same for men and women. In western Bengal, however, the wages of women engaged in spinning and weaving were 75 percent of men's wages. On plantations men and women were likewise paid at different rates.

On the other hand, in the liberal professions, discrimination was favourable to women, who were often paid higher wages. The difference between the rates for men and those for women were due to certain economic and social considerations -- family charges (the man being expected to feed the family); the effects of social disability on the output of women workers; illiteracy (more common in women); and the absence of norms of work which would facilitate comparison between the output of men and women.

The principle of equal pay had been reiterated in the minimum wage law of 1948, which provided for the fixing of minimum wages without distinction as to sex in certain branches of industry, such as oil works, flour mills, tobacco factories, plantations, roads and bridges, building trades, quarries, the timber industry, public transport, woolen carpet and shawl weaving, and agriculture.

A tendency to adopt the same basic wage for men and women was noticeable. But India was a relatively undeveloped country in a stage of political adolescence, and a certain time must elapse before the principle of equal pay could be put into effect generally. The ILO could help to speed up the evolution which had already begun by making recommendations on the matter at its 33rd session in 1950. The Central Commission on Salaries, recently set up, had in its report published last year, recommended equal pay for men and women in the central and provincial public services.

Mrs. EL-JAZAÆRI (Syria) described the broad lines of Syrian legislation in the matter. The Syrian labour code accepted the principle of equality. If women were forbidden to work in the mines, in quarries, in the manufacture of explosives and all undertakings recognized as dangerous or laborious, it was for their own protection. Law No. 106
of the labour code granted a woman certain advantages, such as leaving indemnity on giving up her work on marriage, 40 days paid leave after confinement, etc. Law No. 135, called the Statute of Officials, in force since 1945, was still more liberal in this respect.

Mrs. TSALDARIS (Greece) gave the Commission information concerning women's work in Greece. Women who had the required ability were admitted to all the professions on a basis of equality. The restrictions imposed by the law of 1912 and by the international treaties, concluded under the auspices of the ILO, to which Greece had adhered, were protective measures prohibiting women from working in the mines, in unhealthy occupations and at night.

With a view to guiding women in the choice of professions, the State had set up several schools for the teaching of the manual and domestic arts, as well as domestic colleges which also gave courses in agriculture and silk-culture.

Mrs. Tsaldaris then explained in detail the functioning of social insurance, medico-social assistance and the holiday scheme as they affected women.

There had been absolute equality of pay between men and women for a long time in public institutions and services, and in certain private firms. On the other hand the collective agreements of 1937, which for the first time fixed minimum wages and salaries, established a distinction between men and women workers in commerce and industry.

It was only after the liberation that the principle of equal pay for equal work was admitted generally, since which time equality of wages and salaries existed in theory. In practice, however, there were various factors (length of service, pre-war basic wages, etc.) which had a bearing on the adjustment of wages. The differentiation between the wages of the two sexes was most pronounced in the remuneration for manual work.

The government had taken account of the appeal of the Secretary-General of the United Nations concerning the adoption of the principle of equal pay for equal work and the preliminary decision of the 31st International Labour Congress. It had announced its adoption of the principle of equality in its communique of September 10th 1948, concerning wages and salaries.
Mrs. BYTH (Australia) remarked that statistics did not always reflect accurately the standard of living. In studying the question of a woman's salary, it must not be forgotten that the wife often only worked to increase the family income. In Australia women's wages, which before the war, in certain extreme cases, amounted to only 54 percent of men's salaries, had increased to 60 percent - 80 percent during the war in many branches of activity. In a number of industries women's wages had even equalled those of men. Since the war, the proportion had become stabilized at 75 percent in the industries that normally employed women workers; such as the textile, foodstuffs, boots and shoes, and paper industries and in hospitals and clinics. In the teaching profession, women's salaries were 80 percent of those of men; in the liberal professions, there was no discrimination of sex and salaries were equal for both. The figures quoted showed that the picture drawn by Mrs. Popova was far from correct. Moreover, in comparing the minimum salaries of men and women, it should not be forgotten that the minimum wage of the man was in reality a family wage. Equality of pay ceased to benefit a woman when the husband's wage was insufficient to support the family and the wife was obliged to work as well.

Mrs. Byth considered that the Soviet Union draft resolution merely stated principles already recognized and was not a step forward. She hoped governments, as well as non-governmental organizations, would contribute towards the effective application of the resolution of the Economic and Social Council by transmitting to the ILO all statistics and other data likely to facilitate its work.

Mrs. LEDON (Mexico) explained that, as in the Declaration of Human Rights adopted at Paris in 1948, the principle of equal pay for men and women was incorporated in the Mexican Constitution of 1917 (especially in article 123) which was so popular that a street in Mexico City had been named after it. It had also been included in the Latin-American Charter of Social Rights, adopted by the Bogota Conference in June 1948. She admitted, however, that the principle was not yet fully applied in either Mexico or the other Latin-American countries. The Commission should, therefore, stress the importance it attached to the principle by adopting a resolution, combining the two draft resolutions under consideration. It was, in fact, essential that the ILO should study at the earliest possible moment the terms and conditions under which the principle of equal pay should be applied, a question of primary importance to women all over the world.
Miss KENYON (United States of America) criticized the Soviet Union draft resolution because it attached too much importance to the efficacy of laws in this field. Laws were not the only means of accomplishing the desired results; voluntary agreements between workers and employers were also important in giving effect to the principle of equal pay. The United States had preferred, as far as possible, to give a free hand to the groups concerned, and the law only intervened where necessary in the public interest.

In the public services in the United States, that is, in jobs paid from Government funds, equal pay was the general rule, and this was usually provided by law. For instance, in the Federal Government, for the last 30 years, the conditions of work had been governed by law, with wages fixed according to the nature of the job and not according to the sex of the worker. It was therefore not true, as the Representative of the Soviet Union had said, that there was no Federal law in the United States in regard to equal pay.

In private industry, too, the principle of equality was gaining ground daily through collective agreements and in other ways. The National Association of Manufacturers had adopted the principle and had addressed a memorandum to the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the subject. Public opinion in favour of the application of the principle was growing. To supplement voluntary agreements, the United States was pushing a Federal law applying the principle to private industry and commerce. Nine states had already adopted legislation to that effect.

The United States draft resolution presented an advantage, in comparison with that of the Soviet Union, in that it invited the ILO to make use of the results already achieved in the application of the principle of equal pay. It was the ILO that should receive all necessary information to enable it to undertake a detailed study of the question.

At the suggestion of the CHAIRMAN, Miss Kenyon read her draft resolution.

Mrs. POPOVA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) observed that the draft Federal law, mentioned by the United States Representative, had been in process for three years and had met with the immutable opposition of the employers, who had, up to date, succeeded in delaying its adoption in spite of the pressure of public opinion.
Miss KENYON (United States of America) pointed out that Mrs. Popova's earlier statement that the wages of women workers in the United States "might" amount to 50% of those of men workers was not based on any reliable documentation, and was wholly untrue. Moreover, if that were true, how could it happen that employers laid off women workers in large numbers, as the Soviet Union Representative had also affirmed? Would they not rather have laid off the more costly men workers?

Miss Kenyon repeated her previous statement that legislation in the United States had put into effect 30 years ago the principle of equal pay for equal work for men and women in the Federal service. In recent years efforts had been made to give further effect to the principle. This of necessity was a task that would take time. The legislative machinery of any democratic country functions slowly because of the necessity of convincing people who vote freely according to their consciences.

Miss Kenyon reminded Mrs. Popova that in her report on conditions in the Soviet Union she had omitted one important category of women workers. She therefore asked Mrs. Popova whether the women in the Soviet slave labour camps received equal pay for equal work.

Mrs. POPOVA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) replied that she had cited, in support of her statements, official as well as unofficial sources. She considered that the question raised by the United States Representative was not relevant to the present debate.

Miss SUTHERLAND (United Kingdom) considered the efforts of the ILO very encouraging. The complexity of the question should not, however, be forgotten.

The Representative of the WFTU had compared the monthly wage earnings of a man with those of a woman in the aeronautic industry in the United Kingdom. These figures did not, however, show the difference in the real wage, since they included not only the basic wage, but also overtime pay, and men in general worked more hours overtime than women. In reality, the difference in wages tended to decrease. In the last ten years, the wages of women workers in the United Kingdom had increased by 224%, while those of men workers had only increased by 190%.

In order to achieve complete equality, the principle of a specific wage for each kind of job would have to be adopted. Particular attention
would have to be paid to the remuneration of jobs reserved for women (nurses, domestic servants, etc.) since the low level of wages in those categories was an obstacle to the achievement of equality of pay in the situations open to both sexes.

Miss Sutherland said her country could not accept the proposal of the Soviet Union, the aim of which was to effect equality of pay by legislation. In the United Kingdom, workers preferred to settle such questions by direct negotiation with employers, both in private transactions and in State or municipal undertakings. The trade unions in the United Kingdom were not just government bodies, and they would not be willing to give up the principle of free negotiation.

In Miss Sutherland's opinion, social services and professional training should not be regarded simply as means of permitting women to achieve equality of pay. In the United Kingdom it was considered that each mother and each child had the right to the benefits of the social services, even if the mother did not work in an industrial or other undertaking.

Moreover, the presence of married women in industry was not necessarily a sign of progress. On the contrary, it was usually the insufficient earnings of the husband which obliged the wife to work. In citing the fact that a million women had left factories in the United Kingdom since the end of the war, Mrs. Popova had said that that had been caused by discrimination. The truth was quite otherwise. The United Kingdom, which did not maintain a large army on war footing, had enabled three million demobilized men to take up their places in industry by freeing a large number of women who devoted themselves to their households. If such was not the case in the Soviet Union, one of the causes was, no doubt, the general poverty from which that country suffered. In the United Kingdom a workman earned the equivalent of 1 lb. of bread in seven minutes, and in 450 minutes he earned enough to buy a cotton garment. In the Soviet Union, it took 70 minutes work to earn 1 lb. of bread and 1911 minutes to earn a garment, which meant that both parents were obliged to work to feed their children. The western countries of Europe had been in the same situation in the 19th century, but there had been a great change since that time. Whilst the textile industry in the United Kingdom at that time gave preference to women employees, who received a lower wage than men, there was at the present time a real shortage of women workers in that industry.
Real progress consisted in giving married women the right either to work or not to work. Liberty of work did not exist where hunger brought constraint.

Furthermore, it would be unjust to grant an equal wage to unmarried men and women and to workers who had family charges. The benefits of social services should not be overrated. However good medical assistance might be, a mother could not entrust a child that was seriously ill to its care alone. Equality of pay might be said to represent a form of economic justice; but it did not achieve social justice. To attain that end consideration must be given to the maintenance of the prosperity and unity of the family by means of family allowances.

The Representative of the United Kingdom said her Government intended to put into effect equality of pay in the public services. That measure could not unfortunately come into force until the economic situation allowed.

The Commission rose at 1 p.m.