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II.

The General Argument For Equal Pay.

PAY—WHAT IS IT?

In advocating equal pay for equal work as the only just basis of payment, it is essential to be quite clear as to what is meant by the word "pay". For the great majority of those who work for a weekly or monthly wage the content of the pay envelope is the sole source of regular income. There is therefore an inevitable tendency to look at the pay from a personal and individual standpoint and to be dissatisfied with one's pay because, as income, it does not adequately meet outgoings whether these are imposed upon one or voluntarily undertaken. We have to remember that, however much we are dissatisfied with our income as failing to meet the expense of living as fully as we should like it to do, in so far as this income is pay it becomes a question not of what we can or should live upon, but of what we earn. Those who work for their living are merchants with labour to sell and should not receive for their labour less than its price. Whatever income the employee may need or desire as a citizen, all the employee can demand from the employer as PAY is what he or she EARNs, as a craftsman. Craftsman is here used to include both sexes and as synonymous with wage-earner to cover all those who receive their income as the price of their labour for the community, whether the income is paid by the State or private individual.

Taking all the wage-earners of the country as one immense group, there are numerous and large variations in the wages earned by individuals. Wages vary according to the nature of the craft practised, the age and skill of the craftsman, the length and expense of the training involved, the responsibility of the post held by the individual. Such variations in pay are accepted since under the present system they are based on earning capacity.

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JUSTIFIABLE VARIATION.

For example, the Staff-nurse earns and receives higher pay than the probationer, by virtue of skill and experience; the station-master than the porter on the grounds of responsibility; the steeplejack than the shop-assistant because of the danger of his daily work. Nobody resents paying the specialist more than the general practitioner, one is paying the first for a more extensive and specialised knowledge obtained at heavy cost; the fully qualified engineer receives higher pay than the factory hand who carries out the same repetitive process mechanically, day after day. There are great variations of pay between one craft and another, between two branches of the same trade, and between individuals holding different positions in the same profession: but all these variations in pay are accepted since they are based as equitably as possible on earning capacity—and variations based on some other characteristics of individuals or even groups of individuals would be resented and disallowed. Such personal attributes as health, race, religion, birthplace, accent, school, social position, size of family may singly or collectively have helped or hindered any worker in obtaining any post in any trade or profession but once the post is obtained then the pay received by the worker is the pay appropriate to that job in that craft, i.e. the pay received by the worker is the money earned or the price paid for the labour provided.

UNJUSTIFIABLE VARIATION.

The struggle for Equal Pay still goes on because while the personal characteristics mentioned above are discounted as irrelevant in deciding what salary a worker shall be deemed to earn, the factor of sex is in a very large number of occupations allowed to affect pay to the extent of allowing a totally different and invariably lower scale of salaries to be established for the workers who happen to be women.

Amongst those who support a variation of salary according to sex, the only serious opposition to Equal Pay comes from the group who say, "A man wants more money than a woman because he has a wife and family to keep". As voicing the indisputable fact that four people cannot live as comfortably as one on a certain wage, this statement can stand. As a reason for giving family allowances or pensions to the members of a household who, through health or age, cannot earn a wage, it can also stand. As a reason for giving higher WAGES to those wage EARNERS who as individual citizens have acquir-

ed voluntarily or otherwise the responsibility of keeping other people in addition to themselves, it cannot stand. If wages are to be logically considered and justly apportioned, it must be consistently borne in mind that the worker must receive as pay what he or she earns and no worker should receive less than he or she earns. If a particular group in any calling feels that their earning capacity is assessed too low, that their labour is priced too cheaply for them to live normally conditioned lives then they have a clear case for demanding a rise in salary, but that demand must be made for all who are doing the same job as the dissatisfied group. The higher salary negotiated must be paid to all those who earn it regardless of the way in which any individual man or woman wage-earner in the particular calling chooses or is forced to spend it.

EQUAL PAY IS JUST PAY.

Such is the general argument for Equal Pay for Equal Work. It might be summarized in two sentences. Pay is money earned for work done. Every worker should be paid what that worker earns. If that basis of earning capacity be accepted as the basis for wages, then it should be a simple matter to get Equal Pay established in every craft where women perform work of equal value with men, and it is only necessary to demonstrate the equality of work done by women and men in any trade or profession to establish, so far as that particular group of women workers is concerned, the justice of their claim for Equal Pay.

EQUAL PAY FOR TEACHERS.

In the teaching profession, the equality of the work has never been called in question. All teachers receive the same preparation for their work; all are required to pass the same proficiency examinations and the same medical tests; all, on obtaining a post, are expected to teach the same number of children for the same number of hours; all are expected to show ability to teach the same variety of subjects; all have to assume the same responsibilities and are expected to conform to a certain standard of professional efficiency in carrying out these responsibilities. The attendance of children taught by women teachers earns the same grant for the Local Education Authority as the attendance of children taught by men teachers. If it is accepted as a general principle that all workers should be paid what they earn, regardless of sex, then it is indisputable that women teachers should be paid all they earn, not the fraction of it they receive at present.

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