

could buy the same merchandise for 11% less on June 16, and for 32% less on July 16. What's more, because sales are falling off under the impact of warm weather and cosmetic hosiery, retailers can't be sure of unloading Grade B hosiery bought now before July 15, when they are due to reduce prices by 32%.

So hosiery men once more are wafting their woes to Washington, and requesting postponement until Nov. 1 of the effective date for Grade B prices, but they aren't counting too much on another OPA reversal. The last two deadlines stuck.

Battle for Girdles

How to bolster milady's figure while rubber supplies dwindle is problem confronting the foundation garment industry.

Next week when the corset and brassiere buyers crowd the industry's semi-annual market week in New York, they will not be primarily concerned with making America's feminine silhouette hourglass or pencil slim. Life has been serious for the foundation garment industry since war began, and its big worry is how to support the female figure in the style to which it is accustomed with drastically limited supplies—and no rubber except what stocks it has on hand.

● **Almost Rubberless**—Girdles have had less and less rubber since March, 1942, when WPB halted production of both knitted and woven elastic fabrics. Manufacture of elastic thread stopped in December, 1941. Since then, manufacturers have stretched supplies, cut down on elastic pantie girdles, and conserved stocks in accordance with amended order L-90, which generally limits elastic inserts to a maximum of 36 sq. in. per garment.

Having eked out some 18 months' production from the stockpile, most producers have thus far not offered a rubberless girdle—partly because they hope the rubber director will yet find a way to allot some synthetic rubber for girdles but principally because designers have yet to find the equal of rubber's elasticity in fabric substitutes. There is no altering the fact that hip circumference is greater by inches when a woman is seated than when she is standing, and though knitted cotton and rayon may stretch, they won't contract again with the efficiency of rubber elastic.

● **"Retread 'Em"**—This situation has led desperate manufacturers to urge repair services on retailers, many of whom have maintained such service departments but never pushed them. "If you can't sell girdles, retread 'em," says the Form-



A Good Steering Gear Demands a Good Control

—Illustrated above is the hydraulic **TELEMOTOR** and one type of hydraulic wheel house transmitter built for Webster-Brinkley's electric steerers by *Kirsten*

● This unit is designed for the operation of contactor circuit of electrical steering gear—making possible an advantageous reduction in size.

We are able to produce such equipment completely and with expedience because we have an outstanding staff of engineers...the right tools operated by skilled machinists...designers capable of creating a needed tool on the spot...our own non-ferrous foundry...an organization that operates smoothly.

We can help you with your problems in similar assemblies requiring machining to close tolerances; write or wire for particulars.

KIRSTEN PIPE COMPANY

3129 Western Ave.

Seattle, Wash.

● For the duration—entirely devoted to production for the war effort.



QUICK CHANGE

Keeping a finger on the public style pulse is an important requisite of smart merchandising. When young handies exhibited a tendency toward neat pleats, drape shapes, and stuff

cuffs, one Los Angeles merchant was quick to advertise his stock of zoot suits (left). Last week, the zoot-suited figure vanished from the sign. Los Angeles riots between service men and youths in extreme duds had sent the zoot suit into public distavor.

fit Co. of Chicago in a current advertising and sales program. To sell the idea to the trade as a means of keeping corset departments in operation for the duration, Formfit raises the bogey of a disappearing market. Advertising in the trade press, the company asks retailers to remember how corsets almost passed out after the last war, and warns them to protect themselves now from another corsetless era.

One Formfit executive in a published article has gone so far as to state that "women can live without corsets, if they have to, and after the last war they did." Contradicting this is impressive evidence gathered by the Corset & Brassiere Assn. of America to show that women in general and war workers in particular cannot get along without corsets. This group has the argument of sales figures on its side to prove that the 'twenties were no corsetless era as the Formfit article implies.

• **From Corset to Girdle**—Total sales were only \$40,000,000 in 1914, according to the census of manufacturers, reached \$75,000,000 by 1919, and remained consistently above that figure throughout the following decade until the depression. What happened in the decade after the World War was a shift from corsets with bones and lacing to lighter elastic girdles.

The fear that women donning slacks and overalls for war industry would abandon foundation garments has given way to a struggle on the part of the industry to provide for war workers' demands. Pantie girdles, which before the war were soft little roll-ons for the junior trade, now are available in size 44 waist with reinforcements.

• **Checkup on Uplift**—The Department Store Economist surveyed five war plants employing 1,000 women and found that many who had not worn girdles before going on the war job are wearing them now. According to a Charm magazine survey, all women workers in two Buffalo war plants wear girdles. In Chicago, of 53,723 business girls surveyed, all claimed to wear both girdles and brassieres, while 99% of industrial workers in two Cincinnati plants wear both girdles and bras. The survey also indicated that, on the average, women buy between two and four girdles a year, and more brassieres.

Industrial welfare directors and women's counselors in industry support the industry's cause, saying that corsets are essential for preventing fatigue, particularly in middle-aged women who have had children. After all, say industrialists, the labor supply today has to be put to work immediately, and there is no time for a period of training and exercise

in order to strengthen the muscles of new workers.

• **British Experience**—The dissatisfaction of women war workers in England with the British "utility garment," which was produced in an effort to satisfy the demand for girdles when rubber became scarce, is counted on by U. S. manufacturers to avert a similar mistake here. Many British workers secured medical prescriptions for expensive custom-made garments rather than accept the standardized utility foundation garment.

Because retailers usually have a higher margin of profit on sales of the corset department than on any other, they have been reluctant to stop customary promotion of these items, despite depleted stocks and repeated warnings from producers of the drastically curtailed supply.

• **For Health, Not Fashion**—Along with suggested restraint on promotion, manufacturers are trying to induce retailers to join their industry's campaign and advertise foundation garments as an essential to health rather than as an implement of fashion. Normally, corset promotion is more or less inconsistent with buying habits. Advertising is concentrated almost entirely on novelties and high style, although such items account for a small proportion of sales volume. For example, a few years ago when one of New York's largest Fifth Ave. shops featured the "wasp waist," the promotion doubled total sales in the corset department for about six weeks, but "wasp waist" garments accounted for not more than 3% of the volume. Today emphasis is shifting completely to health and antifatigue advertising themes.

To help bewildered retailers, an advertising guide is furnished to dealers by the Corset & Brassiere Assn. of America. Stores are urged to (1) stress the importance of proper fitting and to note the economic waste involved in over-the-counter sales later returned because garments don't fit; (2) point out what corsets "do" for women in assuring better posture and preventing fatigue; (3) propagate hints on how to prolong the life of garments (frequent washing—BW—Sep. 19'42, p57—and expert repairing are suggested); (4) urge women to buy only what they need; (5) adhere to OPA ceiling prices; and (6) keep trade names alive in institutional advertising.

• **No Slide Fasteners**—The don't list is equally long. Retailers are asked particularly to avoid such statements as "No more Talons after this," or "This is a pre-L-90 style." Since the industry for months has been without slide fasteners and has had to get along on sharply curtailed steel supplies for other types of fasteners and for stays, there are few garments left for which such claims could be exploited.