

# GETTING RID OF THE WOMEN

by A. G. MEZERIK

## 1

THE Women's Bureau of the United States Department of Labor recently received a letter that ended: "Wishing you success in your work and hoping for the day when woman may relax and stay in her beloved kitchen." The writer of the letter was a good friend and well-wisher to the female of the species, a union man, and no mossback — he was young enough to wear the nation's uniform. Blithely taking it for granted that every woman is bursting with eagerness to leave her job and get into an apron, he echoed a sentiment which is rising all too fast among male workers, union and non-union, and among employers in mass-production plants.

In the great factories, the ominous sound of the old saw, "A woman's place is in the home," is heard above the music now piped into the workrooms to make conditions more attractive for the still badly needed women workers. The management of Jack and Heintz, an airplane parts concern notorious for inflated wages, has sugar-coated its own version of women's manifest destiny to cook and breed by holding out the vista of the post-war gadgeted kitchen to which their female workers will graduate by request.

Across the land, this notion jeopardizes the future of women in industry; and in too many cases women themselves provide arguments for employers who are preparing to go from talking about how women want to go back home to firing them. Reporters travel the country and interview women in war centers. They write stories replete with color and human interest, starring quotations from women to the effect that home is the rightful place for any woman — that women don't want to work, they want to be loved. Large numbers of women thoughtlessly assert that women have only a secondary claim on jobs. Even when women reach minor executive positions — the best open to them — they too often accept the fact that a man carrying equal responsibility will get more money.

Add also another cause of post-war trouble. Women workers have not been the best of union members. They came into the plants after the workers in the

unions had already won their big organizational gains. Wages were stabilized and hours fixed. Since the women had no part in winning these gains, they have been all too slow, from the point of view of the male union members, to show any sympathy toward the union. "Worse yet," says R. J. Thomas, president of the United Automobile Workers, "numbers of women have been actively hostile to the idea of paying their union dues."

Even though the number of women in trade-unions increased from 800,000 at the time of Pearl Harbor to 3,000,000 now, many of the recruits remain unenthusiastic, going along because they have to. Since they see no benefits from the union, they feel that they are wasting money when they pay their dollars, although the great improvement in wages and working conditions for women since the last war is directly attributable to the strength of organized labor. But women have shown little recognition of this fact, since, even now, only one out of every five working women belongs to a union.

The ensuing friction has caused real doubt that some union men will easily accept women as co-workers. Mr. Thomas is truly gloomy about the prospects, not alone because of the attitude of male workers, but also because, in his own words, "women have not yet, in the mass-production industries, shown any real sense of responsibility in fighting for their own needs."

The overwhelming majority of new women workers failed to realize early enough that they might want to continue to work in the plants or that necessity might force them into competition for jobs. Enterprising magazines and advertising agencies have used public opinion polls to ascertain the attitudes of women. At the start of the war, the polls indicated that as many as 95 per cent of women war workers planned to quit as soon as victory was certain. Perhaps that was the gay and glib thing for the girls to say when the war looked as though it would last forever. With every new victory, however, the end of the war came closer, and the polls began to reveal that the percentage of those planning to quit was dropping sharply.

The trend has been steady, until now every one of the 80,000 women working in Chicago radio plants wants to stay on. In Detroit, 85 per cent of the women polled in the automobile industry expressed

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*Atlantic* readers will recall A. G. MEZERIK's "West Coast Versus East—The Tug of Peace," which appeared in our May, 1944, issue. Mr. Mezerik has spent the past year in further studies of employment and economic conditions in the principal industrial areas of the United States.



the same desire, even though only one out of four had worked in any job before. Elmo Roper reports that, nationally, at least two out of every three women war workers hope to continue on the job. But the damage has been done: the public has absorbed the idea that women will move out voluntarily.

## 2

THE effect will be worst for the women in those plants where they are newest. An ever growing number of women who never needed to earn their own living before are confronted with the necessity of continuing to be breadwinners for themselves and their families. These are the women whose sons or husbands, lost in the war, can no longer provide support for the family. These are the girls who will be part of a post-war army of unmarried women. Here, too, are the many married women who see a black future if they abandon their new economic status.

The new obstacles to their remaining at work are powerful. First, there is the nation's responsibility to the returning soldier. The veteran has been promised his old job. He will get it. There are over eleven million men in the uniform of the United States. Granted that half or even more want to go back to school or to agricultural and non-industrial work, those who are coming back into industry still number into the millions. The truest thing in the world is the loyalty of women and their desire to see the returning soldier with a job. No woman would oppose the returning soldier's right to his job; yet the stark fact of economic necessity will compel many a woman to look beyond her now shortened vista and say there are lots of other jobs besides those rightfully to be taken by veterans.

The end of the war will also bring plant shutdowns for reconversion. There will be an inevitable contraction of the number of jobs available for both men and women when factories are being converted back to full peacetime operation. And, as is not only fair but also required by the bargaining contract of nearly every plant with its labor union, the available jobs must be given to employees on a basis of seniority.

What seems equitable and what works out best for the woman who wants to stay on the job are not at all the same. Seniority means that a worker shall, by virtue of loyalty to the job and staying with it through good times and bad, acquire certain rights. Basic to these rights is the theory that the employee longest on the job shall not be laid off until all those who have been there a shorter time have gone. When hiring begins again, employees are to be taken back in the order of length of employment. Since women in the mass-production industries are mostly new employees, they stand low in the seniority lists; and on this premise alone, they will be laid off first and rehired last.

Discouraging as this picture is, it is by no means complete. The National Women's Trade Union League reports that industrial women have little if any real seniority protection, and it indicts both employers'

policies and union contracts. In many plants it is specified that women taking jobs formerly held by men are being hired only for the duration. Others set up a seniority classification for women which gives male employees post-war priority. And there are many other devices in use which negate the security which seniority is designed to establish.

Women are facing the kind of cycle which confronts a youngster just out of school who is told she cannot be hired because she has no experience, and who can get no experience because she won't be hired. All this is doubly disturbing, because the priority of the male sex to the jobs, plus the growing misconception as to women's permanence in industry, leads into what appears, on the surface, to be the new version of the battle of the sexes.

While the factory manager, even where he is not keen to retain women, is careful to restrain any evidence of his bias against them, the same cannot be said of other men in the plant. Shipyards, for instance, prior to the war, were a man's world. From the day that women came to work, many foremen and other supervisory employees showed the same resentment about the intrusion of women as do the crusty members of a men's club when feminine voices are heard in their hallowed confines. Some men workers show this same hostility, too many of them still subscribing to the idea that the world is divided between what they call "men's jobs," meaning where they work, and "women's jobs," meaning a kitchen or, in a few cases, nice clean work in an office or a store.

No one has told these men, so conscious of their superiority, that the United States Department of Labor has broken down every existing type of industrial work into 1500 jobs, 1050 of which they say women can do as well as men, and 350 of which are partly suitable for women. Perhaps the men would be even more violent if they realized that their easy assumption of masculine excellence hangs by the slender thread of 100 job types.

This antagonism of the male, whether employer or employee, has not only complicated the post-war prospect of the woman worker but has also shaken her confidence in the value of the contribution she is making now. After every major victory, many a woman working mostly out of patriotic motives believes that whatever urgency there has been about her staying on the job is over: she packs her things and quits. Women who have to support themselves and their children on the money they earn, or who understand better the great part which their effort plays in the winning of the war, swallow their resentment and keep on working.

Labor unions in mass-production industries learned long ago that they had an important educational job to do on their male members. Labor members of the War Labor Board have fought for equal pay for equal work regardless of whether a man or a woman does the job. They have been far from successful on any broad basis. Though hundreds of contracts today pay lip service to equal pay for equal work, the brutal truth is that it does not exist except in the beginners' jobs.



Men move quickly out of that cellar, but women rarely do, and then only with difficulty. In Detroit the average hourly rate for men is \$1.23, for women \$1.11. In many states women average only two thirds of the pay that men get. This situation menaces the future wage scales of both men and women.

Trade-union leaders have also tried to instill in the male members of the unions an attitude of acceptance of their women co-workers. But that road has been rough. The men do not easily give up their prejudices.

### 3

IT is not only the workers who are resentful and prejudiced. So are executives of big plants. Frederick C. Crawford, chairman of the board of the National Association of Manufacturers, in an article applauding women war workers, closes his lovely words of hope with: "From a humanitarian point of view, too many women should not stay in the labor force. The home is the basic American unit." Employers perhaps do not know that in England, where women have been drafted for work for a long period now, the birth rate has gone up.

But in the United States that good old family unit looms large in the eyes of many an employer — so large that he discharges women at the first sign of a cutback in war orders. Despite all the present talk about a national service act, there is already an unemployed army of women, most of whom would like to go back to work. Over 300,000 women have been laid off on cutbacks. They have not been rehired. A recent survey of 20,000 Detroit women workers reveals that 72 per cent of the discharged women had no jobs weeks after the layoffs, though they wanted them. Negro women, who find it hard to get a job in anything but the service fields, are rarely rehired.

How interested industrial management is in the post-war work problem facing women shows up, too, in the roster of a meeting of national organizations called by the Women's Bureau. Though both the CIO and A. F. of L. were represented, no organization of employers participated. Industry was represented by only two companies, each of which sent a woman from its industrial relations department — hardly the fountainhead of company, much less industrial, policy.

There are, of course, managers who want women to stay on the job, but even they are not optimistic. Henry Kaiser has said that he believes 50 per cent of the women in war work will want to stay in that kind of work. Kaiser likes the way women perform their duties, he told me, and is actively sympathetic to their remaining on the job. But, unless business is booming and, as he phrases it, unless there is plenty of credit available, he freely admits he could not hold to that ratio of 50 per cent.

Mr. Kaiser's hopes for employing women exceed those of the other executives in the mass-production industries. Throughout these industries where women are newest, worker and manager alike are discussing whether women have a place in the shops. They have

already gone far in absorbing the idea that the question under discussion is "Shall women work?"

To raise, in 1945, the issue of woman's right to work is sufficiently startling. That, however, is the formulation to which the confused discussion has inevitably headed. It has its origin in the concept, furthered by both sexes for many years, that women are, after all, an emergency group, a labor reserve for industry, who are called on to fill in when men are not available because they are off to war. As long as this concept of woman's place exists, women industrial workers will be pushed around while they are employed, given only those jobs at the low end of the ladder, denied upgrading or promotion at the same pace that applies to men, paid lower rates, and finally, when the war is won, be pushed out.

The record of the last war and its aftermath is there to look at. Two and a half million women went to work then, many in factories. They were photographed in their coveralls, applauded nationally in song and story for their efficient, indispensable services. Heroines of the home front they were — as long as the war lasted.

The awakening followed Armistice Day so closely that, in the minds of many women, it still seems like a lugubrious hangover of that welcome event. The women, so lately the darlings of the nation's factories, were summarily sent home to stay. Conductorettes, railroad train women, even elevator operators, doffed their uniforms. Women were evicted from the factories and from the traditionally male jobs in transportation. Men made speeches, all centering on that famous place which is woman's. To make certain that she accepted the invitation to go there, the speech-makers threatened personal escort if she delayed. Married women were forced out of teaching and a hundred other pursuits in which it had taken them years to establish themselves.

Certain unions decreed that women must forthwith voluntarily leave their jobs, and the women left, though they felt that the use of the word "voluntary" hardly described their actions. When they refused to be gracious about resigning themselves to hunger and unemployment, the National War Labor Board of those years made it official; and in upholding the ouster of women enforced by one union it deprived many women of the right to earn a livelihood. By the end of the 1921 depression, almost all the women added during the war had been crowded out.

The excuse for all this fervor on the part of the men was their fear that women, if they remained at work in the plants, would work for lower wages than the men could live on, and so become unfair and undesirable competitors. But since so many women, then as now, needed jobs, the result was to force them into competition for jobs in the service industries, in offices, in hospitals, and in many other places. The already low level of wages speedily sank, depressing, as it descended, the general purchasing power. All this showed up in the pay envelopes of the men workers soon enough, for the men found that employers were driving their wage scales lower to meet the national average, made low by the paltry sums paid to women.



The women-baiters had a poor argument. Since millions of women must work, they will find jobs and they will work for the best they can get in the way of wages. Men can protect their own wage scales only if they protect the wage scales of women as well as the right of women to jobs. A woman will not undercut for any reason except the one which motivates a man — to get the job. As an educated, sophisticated member of the labor force, a woman will know she cannot be used to break unions, wage scales, or strikes.

As late as 1940, when eleven million women were working, nearly all in the low-paid categories which are traditionally woman's work, — in stores, offices, and institutions, — there was a great army of unemployed women. Two and a half million women wanted jobs and couldn't find them. Today they have jobs, and so do four and a half million other women, who were not employed at all before the war.

While many in this group will return after the war to their homes, or if they are very young to schools, a large number are girls who have grown up during the war and who are going to want permanent jobs along with the newly created army of breadwinners for war-crippled husbands, brothers, and fatherless children. In all, the experts estimate that fifteen million women will want post-war jobs — an increase of four million from before the war. Since there are now well over four million women employed in the mass-production industries, it is in this very spot, where women are in most danger, that they must look for permanent placement.

On the record there is many an accomplishment which would justify the belief that women are entitled to jobs in industry. They have distinguished themselves in highly technical work. Their aptitude with precision parts requiring delicate and painstaking operations is greater than that of men. They have proved better than men in aircraft motor inspection and on jobs requiring both patience and finger dexterity. They have been, on the whole, apt pupils, learning new jobs quickly and bringing to bear on most jobs a long tradition of good housekeeping which is more important than it might seem, for waste of materials can be very costly indeed in mass production. And many plants are today engineered so that women do a large number of jobs. Changes in machinery have reduced physical labor while increasing efficiency. The increased use of cranes, hoists, and lifts forced by the new women workers will benefit men as well, in the days to come.

#### 4

**B**UT there isn't enough on the credit side to counteract the debits. To the facts of soldier priority on re-employment and of seniority restrictions must be added two more reasons, both depressing. One goes back into the past with its age-old subordination of women. That discrimination is too familiar to be detailed again, except to point out that men generally feel that men always support women but that women work for pin money, cosmetics, and clothes, rarely

paying even their own board and almost never supporting dependents — a whimsical notion when looked at in a war widow's home.

High-lighting women's future, or lack of it, are the handicaps from which they suffer on account of comparatively recent legislation. Even the unemployment to which so many males are beckoning their women colleagues is not so well cushioned for the woman as it is for the man. Unemployment benefits are based on wages earned when there was a job, and women workers almost always get less money than men do. If a woman is married, she isn't eligible for unemployment insurance even if she is starving for want of a job, for the law assumes that when she was fired, or quit her last job, she forthwith took over household duties. She has to prove the contrary.

There are other legislative bottlenecks. Unless the wages and hours laws are extended, millions of women in the service industries will be without a legal floor. Federal and state laws for labor protection have been suspended because of the emergency. Unless legislatures now in session act, — and there is little likelihood that this year, with its continuing manpower shortage, will bring any remedies in this respect, — women will have to wait until 1947 for their next opportunity.

These are legal hurdles, but there are also readily understood human problems. What then of the aversion to hiring women over forty-five? Even now in Detroit that is the rule, though a man sixty-five years old is eligible. The attitude of the employer, and all too frequently of the worker, is that a woman is through when she is forty-five. And both seem surprised when a woman past that age is not a prototype of Whistler's "Mother." Yet the women in the age groups of forty-five and up who will want jobs by 1950 is estimated at a million.

The most curious of all the factors in the condescending attitude of men toward women is the persistent treatment of women as a minority. They are not a minority today; 53 per cent of the voters in 1942 were women. It is the men who are the minority, for there are fewer males in the country than women. And as man-made wars grind on, there are even fewer.

Perhaps it is because they do not know their own strength that they do not take over; but for whatever reason, women have not yet moved along to help themselves to equality — much less the superiority to which their numbers entitle them. As matters stand, in discussions and in action, they are still treated as a minority, though in 1944 they held down one out of every three jobs available in the country, along with every non-paying householding job the country over. (The Negroes are our largest real national minority, and they total only 10 per cent of our population.) Yet women continue to be pushed from pillar to post to the kitchen.

All the tensions which operate against the continuance of women in industry are of course heightened by the fear that there will not be jobs enough to go around. It is easy to see that three large industries will contract sharply: aviation, ammunition, and shipbuilding. Women are now employed in great numbers in these



industries. Pragmatically the men are going to drive for the jobs that will remain, and they are going to get them, unless we have something approaching full employment.

On every side forums, the radio, and the press discuss the goal of full employment. But the speaker, nine times out of ten, means full employment for males. Yet only if there is employment for women as for men, and only if wages are based on occupations and not on sex, shall we achieve a sound economy. Up to now there is no evidence that the many committees which get out the full-employment pamphlets, and whose representatives make the speeches, recognize this situation, and there is equally little evidence that any but a handful of women are making a fight to combat it.

As yet there is no sign that women will be a force in the reorganization of the world any more than they have been a force in their own fields of war food rationing or in relief and rehabilitation. The brutal truth was expressed by Mrs. Anne O'Hare McCormick when she charged that too many women are mere passen-

gers, content to let others struggle and die to haul them through the storm. I, being a man, should not have put it so starkly as that, but I subscribe to the idea.

For men have not changed much. Though thousands of women are in the armed forces and 45 women have been killed and 250 decorated, women have not won the right to lead or to be recognized as leaders. Men in politics and in industry go right along acting as though women are a favored economic class, to be kept nicely to reflect the success of the male.

Men are ganging up on women in industry, and it is up to the women to go into action to stop that old-fashioned attitude from denying them jobs and opportunity. They should not be lulled to sleep by all those frills installed for their pleasure in war plants which badly needed what they called a temporary emergency force of women. Lavish rest rooms, beauty shops, nurseries, and music by Muzak are not much good to a woman standing in the rain at an employment gate with a "No Women Help Wanted" sign on it.

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## KIDNAPING A GENERAL

by MAJOR JOHN NORTH

### 1

#### TO THE GERMAN AUTHORITIES IN CRETE

GENTLEMEN: —

Your divisional commander KREIPE was captured a short time ago by a BRITISH raiding force under our command. By the time you read this he and we will be on our way to CAIRO.

We would like to point out most emphatically that this operation has been carried through without the help of CRETANS or Cretan PARTISANS, and that the only guides used were serving soldiers of His Hellenic Majesty's Forces in the Middle East, who came with us.

Your General is an honourable prisoner of war, and will be treated with all the consideration due his rank.

Any reprisals against the local population will be wholly unwarranted and unjust.

*Auf baldiges Wiedersehen!*

(sgd.) P. M. LEIGH-FERMOR  
Major, Commanding Raiding Force

(sgd.) STANLEY MOSS  
Captain, Coldstream Guards

P. S. We are very sorry to leave this motor car behind.

IT WAS in this fashion that, in the early summer of last year, General Kreipe, commander of the 22nd Panzer Grenadier ("Sevastopol") Division and holder of the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross, after service in France and on the Leningrad and Kuban fronts, took his leave of this war.

He was destined to hold his command in Crete for little more than a month. Doubtless he had arrived there with every expectation of having a restful time, for he would be some 750 miles from the nearest fighting front. However, two British officers — Major P. M. Leigh-Fermor, commander of the raiding force, and Captain Stanley Moss of the Coldstream Guards — were ordered to make sure that he would not be disappointed in his expectations; they removed him to Cairo.

In 1940-1941, Major Leigh-Fermor had been British Liaison Officer to the Royal Greek Army in Albania and in Greece. Since the summer of 1942 he had been British Liaison Officer in German-overrun Crete. It was therefore no new experience for him to "drop" into the island in the literal sense of the word. For this particular operation he dropped in the first week of February, 1944. His second-in-command, Captain Moss, was prevented from landing at the same time because of a sudden clouding of the sky. During the

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A British Staff Officer who served at Allied Headquarters in North Africa in 1943 and who has been ever since on the western front, MAJOR JOHN NORTH is the author of several works on military subjects, including the definitive study of the Gallipoli campaign of World War I.