

## **GROUP 1: Women in Clerical and Commercial Positions**

This class of occupation offers suitable employment for properly qualified women. There is a constant demand for women stenographers and clerks in business and professional firms, and within the last few years this has extended to the banks. Clerical work is congenial, the surroundings are generally comparatively good, the hours of employment reasonable, and the chance of a living wage and of steady employment is afforded. Women who have received a good secondary education and are well grounded in English, and who have had a thorough business training have no difficulty whatever in obtaining good positions, with the prospect of rapid advancement.

Women employed in banks begin at \$400 or \$500 a year.

Stenographers earn from \$600 to \$1,200 a year, in exceptional cases even as high as \$1,500, although young girls may begin at \$25.00 a month. The majority are handicapped by a deficient education; the lack of knowledge of their own language, of spelling, punctuation, and of elementary composition and letter writing is a matter of general comment. After short courses at one of the private business schools, these young women seek employment for which they are only partially trained. Small wonder if their work is more or less unsatisfactory to their employers; nor can they themselves ever hope to attain to the more responsible and remunerative positions. These are reserved for the exceptional or thoroughly trained woman.

In this group of wage-earners have been included the telephone operators. In Montreal there are at least 800 women employed who earn from \$20.00 to \$80.00 per month, according to their efficiency. These employees are trained by the Company, and the work is arranged in three shifts. Work at night and Sundays is more highly paid. Apart from the nervous strain, which appears unavoidable, telephone operating seems a desirable employment for women.

Business and commercial training—apart from the four years' course offered by the Commercial and Technical High school—is at present chiefly to be obtained in private business schools. Short courses undoubtedly appeal very strongly to the immature and inexperienced and to those who are anxious to earn a living as soon as possible. The business school not only gives the desired instruction, but quite frequently acts as an employment bureau.

The advisability of instituting short commercial courses in Technical Schools, open to those already well grounded in English, and affording a thoroughly practical business training, is, we believe, worthy of consideration. There is an ever increasing demand for such courses.

## **GROUP 2: Saleswomen in Shops**

There are many women wage-earners in shops who come under Group 1, and some, those engaged in millinery and dressmaking, are included in Group 3. In Group 2 are included only those engaged in selling.

In the higher grade department stores there are very few girls of 14 years of age, and these few generally act as errand girls. In less highgrade establishments and smaller shops, young girls may more frequently be seen, but at present not to such an extent as some years ago, before the introduction of the various cash-carrying systems.

Comparing the position of the shop-girl with that of the girl in domestic service:—

The shop-girl has clearly defined duties, and her hours of work have a definite limit, generally from 8 o'clock in the morning to 5:30 or 6 at night (with some exceptions), all her evenings and Sundays are free, and during these leisure hours she is her own mistress. At her work she is under the same supervision and discipline as her associates; from the moment she leaves her work till she returns to it, she is practically free to choose her own society and take what recreation she prefers without let\* or hindrance. She considers that her social position is superior to that of a domestic servant, and as evidence of this she is addressed as Miss (Mrs), while the domestic is called by the Christian name. Again, she is not at the constant beck and call of one individual, confined to one house and the monotony of the daily round, but goes to and from her work, and is brought in contact with an ever varying stream of life which lends an interest and even a charm to her environment.

The disadvantages, not always realized, are sufficiently grave, but might be easily obviated. She often has but scant home comforts, perhaps has to prepare her own hurried breakfast; she must face the weather at all times; in many establishments she is required to stand the whole day long, not being permitted to sit down for an instant, a requirement most assuredly injurious to her physical well being. Frequently the ventilation is extremely bad, and the employee constantly

breathes a vitiated atmosphere, with sometimes extremes of temperature and exposure to draughts. Her wage is very often barely sufficient for her maintenance, and she may have difficulty in making both ends meet. In her leisure hour she naturally seeks amusement and relaxation, only to find that, as a general rule, recreation of a desirable character is offered to her only at prohibitive prices. If she is boarding, she seldom has any place in which to receive her friends, and very often there is no one to whom she can look for authoritative guidance. And thus it is that in an innocent search for pleasure natural to all, she is frequently exposed to temptations of a particularly insidious nature, the true character of which she sometimes does not recognize till too late.

There is a distinct need for comfortable and respectable boarding accommodation at reasonable rates, for working girls of all classes. It is to be hoped that there may soon be a business women's hotel. There should also be social clubs for working girls, affording parlours and halls, where innocent and desirable recreations might be provided and where both men and women might pleasantly mingle together in a thoroughly wholesome environment.

The work being done by the YWCA is more excellent, but does not more than begin to meet the need.

### **GROUP 3: Women in Industrial Establishments**

In this group the inquiry was addressed to seventy-one (71) establishments. In about 22 instances no report could be obtained. There was either an absolute refusal to answer, a polite but repeated evasion, or a failure to send the promised answer.

Out of 71 establishments, 49 employers responded to the enquiry; 25 different kinds of industry were included, and reports were given of 22. A table is appended giving the number of varieties of industries, with approximate number of women employees, wages, hours of employment, standard of education, etc., etc., from which particular conclusions may be drawn if desired. The more general conclusions of the committee may be summarized as follows:

In most of the industries there is very little demand on the part of the employers for girls under the legal limit. Often the work is too heavy for young girls. In some instances no effort is made to ascertain the ages of the younger employees, more particularly where there is a scarcity of

hands; this is more especially the case in large mills, and it is in such cases that the labor laws need stricter enforcement.

The minimum wage in most factories is about \$2.00 per week (occasionally as low as \$1.75) for untrained hands. In factories new and inexperienced hands are at first put on a weekly wage while being taught the work, but are in a short time advanced to piece-work. For piece-workers there is very seldom any promotion other than increased earning power up to a certain maximum limit. Only in very exceptional cases has the worker an opportunity of being transferred to a different department or a higher grade of work. She is doomed to go on working at one little process—and her wages depend entirely on the degree of manual dexterity and unremitting industry of the individual. If she is deft and industrious and works full time, she can earn a comparatively good wage—from \$10.00 to \$15.00 per week. A few exceptional women in exceptional industries earn as much as \$20.00 or \$25.00 per week. In laundries the workers have more chance of learning the whole process and those who are skilful ironers may earn on piece-work \$12 to \$15 (max.) per week.

The conditions in dressmaking and millinery establishments are somewhat different. Young girls absolutely unskilled are taken in as apprentices, and not paid at all or begin with an allowance for carfare or 50 cents a week. They have a chance of learning most parts of the business, with the exception of cutting and fitting, and are paid according to their ability from \$1.00 to \$10.50 per week. Really skilled workers get from \$11 to \$25 or even \$30 per week.

In the custom tailoring establishments the work is nearly all skilled and wages range from \$5.00 up—the maximum for women being about \$20 or \$25 per week. There is a demand for skilled workers for which there is no corresponding supply here. The tailors state that they find it necessary to import labor, under great difficulties. There is no opportunity for acquiring such training at present in Montreal.

There is a demand on the part of the employers and employees alike for training in needlework and machine operating—also for skilled workers in leather and for skilled laundresses.

Employees desire opportunities for the acquirement of French or English, a better primary education, facilities for training not only in hand sewing, machine operating, cooking, millinery

and dressmaking but an opportunity for obtaining such a training as would give them at least a chance of entering the various industries as skilled workers, at a fair wage. When they enter as unskilled hands, there is no prospect of promotion before them. The vast majority of women workers fall into the unskilled class—those ranked as skilled are frequently merely deft at one small process.

Factory employees place the minimum living wage at \$7.00 per week, but others place it as \$8 or \$9 or even \$10 per week, and as an ordinary worker earns from \$4.50 to \$5.50 per week, the average worker is not paid a living wage and is therefore not economically independent. A great many girls live at home or with friends and relatives, and in this way are boarded at low rates or contribute to the support of the family. Board outside the family cannot be obtained under \$3.50 or \$4 per week. The balance of the wages has to go for clothing, car-fare, recreation and incidental expenses.

Employers, as a rule, approve of evening classes, in theory at least. It is felt that the opportunity should be afforded workers of improving their education, academic, commercial or industrial. In practice, however, many disapprove strongly. They state that after working ten hours a day, the body and mind are fatigued and the evening should be spend in recreation. The strain of attending classes in the evening is too great and unfits them for the daily work.

As a matter of fact, there is small evidence of women in factories taking advantage of the evening classes already opened. It is the wage-earners of the 1st and 2nd groups and domestic servants who attend evening classes at present.

Women wage-earners are absolutely ignorant of labor laws, only being familiar with the particular conditions which affect them individually. Some of them suggest shorter hours or better pay.

Finally, in regard to the educational standards, the average shop woman has had a primary education of some sort, but seldom up to the highest grade—she can read and write and do simple arithmetic. In many factories the majority of the employees are utterly illiterate, others can barely read, or read and write with difficulty. In no single instance has the standard been considered sufficiently high. There has been an almost unanimous expression of opinion in favor

of compulsory education. At present whether the child attends school or not rests with the parents; it is impossible to obtain statistics in regard to the number who never attend school. The question arises: What are the girls doing who leave school at from 9 to 10 to 14, who are not permitted by law to work in shops and factories?

\*[obstruction]

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Source: C. Derick, "General Report on Women's Work," *Royal Commission on Industrial Training* Part IV (Ottawa, 1913) 1975–1976.