Will Women Lose Their Jobs?

A widespread movement against working women is under way with ten million jobs at stake

NORMAN COUSINS

Here is the latest depression cure-all, results guaranteed by its supporters:

"There are approximately 10,000,000 people out of work in the United States today. There are also 10,000,000 or more women, married and single, who are job-holders. Simply fire the women, who shouldn't be working anyway, and hire the men. Presto! No unemployment. No relief rolls. No depression."

This is the general idea behind the greatest assault on women's rights in two decades. Its supporters include not only the something-for-nothing groups which can always be depended upon to support chain-letter movements and share-the-wealth plans, but a large section of public opinion—as yet unacquainted with all the facts—which finds it hard to resist the supposed logic of millions of unemployed men replacing millions of employed women. Impetus to the drive—at least psychologically—is lent by the fact that the payrolls of many communities and private organizations are open only to males.

The first move toward the complete defeminizing of public and private jobs is discrimination against the married woman. Having thus inserted its foot in the door, the old-women campaign seeks eventually to enter and hang up the verboten sign to all women, married or single, employed or seeking employment.

This year, twenty-two states have been the proving grounds for attempted discrimination against married women in public service or in industry. Bills have been introduced in their legislatures with an almost identical purpose: to lessen local unemployment of men through various restrictions against the employment of married women. The bills, however, are not identical in scope or operation. In some states they would limit the ban against women to official positions. In some states, like Illinois and Massachusetts, they would soften the blow of discrimination by permitting married women to remain in public office if their husbands were poorly paid or out of work. But a bill in California—regarded by many women as Job Enemy No. 1—would make illegal the employment of married women in private business as well as public office.

Fortunately for the married woman, discriminatory legislation in many instances fell a victim to summer adjournment of the legislatures. But calendars of at least a dozen states are crowded with bills seeking to curtail employment of the working wife; these bills will have the advantage of early introductions when legislatures reconvene. Moreover, resolutions have been adopted in at least one branch of the legislative bodies of five states against married couples on public payrolls. Governor Dixon of Alabama and Governor Long of Louisiana did not wait for legislative action but issued orders banning employment of wives if their husbands also were working for the state.

Of such concern is this trend to the nation's women leaders that it has been called the greatest issue to affect women since their victorious fight for suffrage. In its recent convention at Kansas City, the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs announced a frontal attack on what it considers the most serious problem it has faced in twenty years. In the eyes of Federation leaders the legislation already introduced is a portent of even more widespread attacks to come.

Unless there is a substantial improvement in business during the next few months, the American people may find in the question of married women in business an issue whose intensity may remind them of the war over woman's right to the ballot. Of course, a sudden boom whose golden wand would wave the unemployed back to private payrolls would destroy the movement against woman's right to work and provide insurance for female job security. But there is no boom in sight. Instead, the present W.P.A. layoffs are certain to dramatize further the plight of the unemployed and arouse public opinion to the urgency of some solution.

That one proposed solution should be the dismissal of women, married or single, from gainful employment is not surprising. Especially on the issue of married women in industry is the proposal understandable, though not sound or even practicable. For one thing, Americans are home-minded. They are for anything that tends toward preserving the family, against anything which might weaken the family as the traditional unit of our civilization. If they are convinced—as many seem to be—that employment of women tends to undermine their normal functions as
mothers and home builders, they might support legal attempts to bar employment to married or even to single women.

There are, of course, many familiar "moral" arguments against the working wife: woman's place is in the home, the management of which is enough work for any person; her first allegiance is to the bearing and raising of children; there is a direct relationship between the increase of women in business and the declining birth rate.

But the main "economic" argument, to repeat, is that men are being kept out of their jobs by women. A corollary is that one working person to a family ought to be enough.

In considering these planks in the "oust-women-from-industry" platform, it is impossible to state flatly that they are wholly justified or wholly fake. A human equation is involved here, one with many variables. It is impossible, for example, to state arbitrarily that married women who work are undermining the American home. When Mrs. Jones puts in eight hours a day at the office she may seem to be slighting her home responsibilities. But let us look below the surface and attempt to see why Mrs. John Jones, average American working wife, has decided to keep her job after marriage.

John Jones, twenty-six, has been courting Mary Smith, twenty-three, for almost two years. They would have been married a year ago were it not that John's salary of $25 seemed too small to support two people, and eventually children, especially since his job, like a good many jobs during depression years, carried no promise of permanency or even advancement. And so they waited, hoping that times would improve and bring John a better position.

The solution came not through a better job for John, but through a job for Mary as cashier in a restaurant. The salary was $18. At first, John was reluctant to consider marriage on such terms. His brother, married ten years earlier, had been able to support his wife; John liked to think he could do the same. But when John and Mary looked around them and observed friends who had prolonged engagements for five and even ten years, without materially improving their prospects; when they realized that they were sacrificing life's normal relationships for nothing but the gamble of a better day, they decided to strike out boldly together. Mary would keep her job, the combined income would be enough for a modest home, and perhaps some day for a family.

John had to swallow his pride, but it wasn't so difficult when he discovered that there were many married men in almost precisely the same circumstances.

This example may seem tailor-made to fit the argument that women who work help make marriage and a home possible in uncertain times. But reliable surveys show that this case is by no means unique; that—allowing for individual variations—it represents a fairly accurate picture of what has been happening in America during depression years.

The Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor reports that in recent years the majority of married women at work have been working not because of a desire for a career or for economic independence but because of the need to provide or supplement the family income. This same conclusion was stressed in a survey among 652 employed wives which Cecile Tipton LaFollette undertook for Teachers College of Columbia University. Of the 652 families studied by Miss LaFollette, 125 husbands—or about 20 per cent—were unemployed, their inactivity ranging from two months to twenty years. Six per cent of the husbands earned less than $1,000, while 25 per cent earned less than $2,000.

An even stronger picture is presented in a study undertaken by the New York State Division of Women in Industry and Minimum Wages. Examining case records of 280,000 families which received help from the State Emergency Relief Bureau, it discovered that the woman was the sole wage earner in nine cases out of ten. And even in non-relief cases,
Should Married Women Work?

Should women work? CURRENT HISTORY put this question to a number of America's most outstanding women, married and single. These are their opinions:

MARY ANDERSON
Director Women's Bureau, Department of Labor

So long as two-thirds of the families in the United States have incomes of less than $1,500 a year, there is a very good economic reason why married women should work. Women's Bureau studies show that about 9 out of 10 married women who are employed or seeking employment are doing so from necessity rather than from choice. One way of meeting this situation would be to guarantee to the husband security of employment and a living wage, thus making it possible for many wives to withdraw from their paid jobs.

But, regardless of the need of the families involved, there should in this country be no restriction against the employment of married women. One of the cornerstones of a democracy is the right of its people to work and to hold jobs on the basis of their qualifications, whether they are married or single, rich or poor. When one group in the population is singled out for discrimination, the way is opened for other inroads on democratic rights.

The argument that married women in public service keep other persons out of work and add to the unemployment problem is fallacious. The number of such women is so small that their discharge would not make a dent on the unemployment problem.

MARGARET CULKIN BANNING
Novelist

When I hear a bit of complaint about some married woman working I do not see an indictment of the sex even though it has made it such. What I see is some man, or woman, working without a job striking blindly at what seems an unfair distribution of work and income.

With such a move women should be tolerant, they should be kind, but they should be no less firm. There are thwarted and bitter people back of every attempt to legislate married women out of the professions. But the remedies are nostrums. They are not even good painkillers. And if we allow the public to try one, soon it will restlessly try another and perhaps legislate another group of useful citizens out of the working world.

MARY R. BEARD
Historian

Since married women always have worked outside the home, tending their cradles with them if need be, since women even made the home originally by work outside, to question the advisability of their so working now is to question the course of all human history. Married women, anthropologists of high rank believe, were the first farmers by voluntary action and married women worked in the fields throughout the ages as well as by the hearth; countless numbers still do; more do when men go off to slaughter men in wars. Married women, anthropologists of high rank believe, invented all the prime industrial arts, possessing the first creative intelligence of a social nature. Married women in the pioneering age of America worked inside and outside the home on every succeeding frontier. One of them ran what is thought to be the first packet line between the new world and the old and went with her cargoes to buy and sell directly. By the manufacturing and business enterprise of married women in America, the economic basis of the independent American nation was largely laid, as British and American statesmen knew perfectly well.

The ringing of an issue about married women's right to work now represents a battle of men for wages and salaries to be shared with wives who work, if at all, within the house, or with courtisans. If the decisions runs against women one moment, anywhere, it will run for them the next moment. Even the Nazis veered almost overnight because they found that they could not operate without the work of women beyond the cradle, whether women were married or single. If there were more intelligence today, we would find ways for all men and women to work and without the brutality of forced labor.

MARGARET CUTHBERT
Director of Women's Activities, National Broadcasting Co.

There's no better answer to this question than the recent decision of the Supreme Court of Massachusetts—

that married women are just as much free citizens of this country as unmarried women or men.

They have the same right to pursue their own lives and to be employed in any occupation they can find, as men.

To deny them this right is an abridgement of their constitutional rights.

The great mass of married women in this country do not work outside their homes but it is a basic principle of this Democracy that any woman should have the right to work if she wishes to. Married women, like other people, have responsibilities based upon their own individual problems.

Who can say that the married woman of today who does not work is secure? Her husband may become ill, be thrown out of his job or divorce her.

In a free democratic society each citizen should be able to choose his or her own way of life.

The only standard or requirement should be the ability of the person to do the job regardless of sex or status.

OCTAVIA GOODBAR
President, National Federation of Press Women

The careers of women, since modern machinery has lifted their burden of hand labor, leave us with a question on our lips: Do individuals rise so high? Is machine emancipation from heavy toil in reality the twinkle of mental and spiritual power?

One consequence of our machine-age is the present grim struggle for jobs between married and unmarried women. The latter insist that wives not only deprive them of employment, but fill jobs that other people might have—thus making marriage impossible for many. Jobs or husbands—but not both—is their battle-cry.

Should we purge three and a half million married women from gainful work? Such purge would have little immediate effect on male employment. Over half the registered unemployed men are laborers and skilled artisans; quite unfit to take places held by women. Even if the working of wives should be discouraged as a detriment to posterity, it still remains to be shown that preventative legislation can avoid an unacceptable impairment of guarantees contained in our constitution.

Impulses born of unemployment psychology provide no good reasons for driving competent women out of honestly won jobs. In the business world there is no marriage nor giving in marriage: only work to be well done. Unemployment is not a sex problem, nor will it be solved by sex discrimination.

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a report of the Young Women's Christian Association showed, on the basis of a survey of 519 married women who were factory workers, salesgirls, telephone operators, and clerical workers, that the overwhelming majority preferred to remain at home but continued at their jobs because the husband's income was nonexistent or insufficient for the bare necessities of life. If additional proof is needed, it is supplied by the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, whose questionnaire on this subject went to 12,000 women all over the country. The replies, according to the Federation, made it clear that "women are working to earn a living—for themselves, of course, but half of them are also earning a living for parents, sisters, brothers, husbands, children, who, in increasing numbers through the years, turn to them as breadwinners and often as home makers as well."

One important thing to keep in mind in all the hubbub over women at work is that less than one-quarter of our adult female population is employed; of 43,000,000 women fifteen years of age and over, 10,622,000 hold jobs. Census figures say that of this number 3,870,000—or one-third—are married. It is possible, however, that the number of married women bears no part of the burden, as more than 2,000,000 unemployed women can attest.

"It is the basic right of any human being to work," says Mrs. Roosevelt.

Discrimination against the married woman is "un-American," says Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins.

With the passing of the Golden Era in 1929 a social as well as an economic adjustment has been necessary. There has been a tremendous reshuffling of values. For many a young man today, employment and wages are both uncertain and insufficient for marriage responsibilities. Instead of lecturing young men about going out into the world and conquering well-paying jobs which will make marriage possible, it might be well to recall that it is not the young who are responsible for the economic rockpile over which we have been stumbling these last ten years. The depression is not of their making but ours. In our eagerness to get to the top of Mt. Million we never stopped to see whether our footing was secure; our eyes could see nothing but a magical summit where people lived in opulence and exhaltation. When the inevitable avalanche came we were swept swiftly to the bottom.

In answer to all of which the out-of-jobs group may say that, yes, we are living in changing times and that, indeed, this is an emergency. And that, they may add, is precisely why extreme measures are needed and justified. Millions of men, many of them with families, are out of work. Most of them would be satisfied with salaries now paid to women. The ouster should begin with the working married woman because she should be dependent upon the man. After that, single women should be withdrawn from jobs. And who will look after them? Well, someone will; someone always does. Besides, unemployment with women is a matter of relative hardship at worst. But with men—especially family men—the hardship is absolute and complete. The state should have the right to step in and, for the greater benefit of all, say who shall work and who shall not.

An intriguing but hardly a practical thought. Because the more you study the figures of the various occupations which would be involved in the taking over of women's jobs by men, the more preposterous the scheme becomes. Imagine an average day in an America without working women:

John Citizen arrives at his office to be greeted by a male receptionist, a male switchboard operator and a male private secretary who opens his mail, arranges his appointments and takes dictation. At lunch his favorite waitress is missing, her place taken by a young man. At three o'clock he visits his dentist and is greeted by a male nurse. At four-thirty Mrs. Citizen calls to complain about
Harry, who has taken the place of the part-time maid, and who refuses to wash the baby's clothes.

At the dinner table, Mary, who has just entered kindergarten, complains about Mr. Mann, the new teacher. Mrs. Citizen resents the personal questions asked by the new male salesclerk when she went shopping for underwear. She also resents the husky baritone voice that means "Number, please," every time she picks up the phone.

Ridiculous? Certainly. But this is what a general purge of all women in industry would mean. It is impossible to carry through a large-scale replacement of one large bloc of labor for another unless there is an identity of functions all along the line. Approximately 3,500,000 men out of work are manual laborers. Which places vacated by women can they take? Approximately 3,100,000 women are employed as domestics. Which men want to take their places? There are about 220,000 salesgirls, whose replacement by men in most cases would be ludicrous.

But perhaps there are not enough people who seriously advocate the complete turning over of over women's jobs to unemployed men to warrant further discussion of this obviously unworkable plan. Perhaps it would be better to consider some of the less drastic proposals. These range from the ousting of married women in public service whose husbands are also on official payrolls to the dismissal of married women whose husbands are able-bodied.

Many of the opponents of husband-wife working teams argue only against the married woman who works even though she may not need the job. Indeed, through this reasoning they have attracted the support of thousands of unmarried working women who feel that single girls should have first call on available jobs. Thus the battle over women's rights—and it is precisely that—is being fought without unity among women. In addition to the single women who advocate eliminating married women from jobs are a great many "non-working" wives who feel that women have no place outside the home; that, as Blackstone once said, a "woman is entitled to no power, only reverence."

But it is impossible to dissociate the attempt to discriminate against working wives from the attempt to discriminate against single women. The difference is merely one of degree: today the law may be mild; tomorrow it will be severe. Once the precedent were established discrimination probably would move straight down the line. First against the married woman in public service whose husband is also employed in an official capacity. Then against the married woman in public service whose husband is employed in private industry. Then against the married working woman whose husband earns a stipulated amount. Then against the married working woman—without any qualifications. Finally, against the working girl, married or not. As long as economic pressure and clamor for jobs persisted the discrimination probably would continue to its ultimate nonsensical end.

Yet even assuming that those who would discriminate against married women in jobs are sincere when they say they will go that far and no farther, are any of their arguments valid?

True, it would be possible to replace a relatively small number of married working women with men—for example, in the teaching profession. True, a number of wives (the exact percentage is anybody's guess) who would be deprived of jobs would experience no great economic hardship, nor would their families. All this, however, would hold for only a relatively small number. The overwhelming majority of women who work, as we have pointed out, do so because they must. Furthermore, even in the cases of those not motivated by absolute necessity, there are economic disadvantages in ousting them from jobs, disadvantages which largely offset any economic gain derived from the reduction of unemployed males. Cecile LaFollette's study shows that married women job-holders generally create other jobs for other workers. Particularly is this true of the woman in the upper salary brackets. A loss of job by this kind of woman would be reflected in a consequent loss of jobs for nurses, teachers, cooks and household maids. Of 682 married working women, Miss LaFollette found that 540 employed help in one form or another.

Her conclusions are supported by an investigation at the University of Wisconsin. It clearly indicates that "married women employ help in the home directly in the form of cleaning, cooking, nursing, furnace tending, and indirectly in the form of laundry and restaurant meals."

Moreover, a survey by the National Federation of Business and Professional Women reveals that 48 per cent of working women, married and single, have one or more dependents. The survey, reaching almost sixty thousand women, shows that one in every six is the sole support of a household of from two to eight persons.

But even outside the economic sphere, arguments against the working wife reveal weakness. There is much talk about the mother's place in the home, very little about the fact that the home has changed. Housekeeping for the average family today is no longer a full-time job. We are no longer living in the days when families numbered a dozen or more, and, what with cooking, baking, canning, washing, spinning, sewing and mending, woman's work was never done. The average American family today numbers three children or less, who are away from home at least five hours a day. Inexpensive, modern gadgets simplify what were once long, tedious household tasks. In short, the home has changed from a producing to a consuming unit.

This change is reflected not only in employment of married women but in the growth of social and church work, and in the spread of adult education, of culture and entertainment groups. In these circumstances, it is difficult to blame the married woman who is not content to remain a semi-idle dependent, but who seeks in business an outlet for her talents and energies. Dr. Richard

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5. The assumption that married women work to satisfy a whim when statistics show plainly that it is almost invariably to meet an economic necessity.

MRS. FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT
First Lady, Social Worker, Newspaper Columnist

Many women, after marriage, find plenty of work in the home. They have no time, no inclination or no ability for any other kind of work. The records show that very few married women work from choice, that they are working only because a husband is ill or has deserted them, or that there are special expenses caused by illness or educational requirements in the home. There may even be fathers, mothers, sisters or brothers to be supported. It seems to me that it is far more important for us to think about creating more jobs than it is for us to worry about how we are going to keep any groups from seeking work.

KATE SMITH
Famous Singer, Radio Star, Commentator

The question has so many angles that a brief answer is difficult. But here goes: I believe it all boils down to whether a capable, intelligent woman should stand idly by when her loved ones are in need, or whether she should pitch in and put her brain and her hands to work to earn the necessary money to provide for them. It is not a matter of sex. Many married women today are successfully rearing children and managing a household—plus holding down a job. The old argument—that if the so-called weaker sex would keep out of the business world men would get work—seems to me to be a fallacy. If that were true, it never would have been necessary for married women to get into business in the first place.

Undoubtedly, the first married woman to hold a job did so to augment the family budget, or to support an invalid husband. One might just as well insist that rich men stop earning money; that elderly men stay at home; that youngsters wait a few years— that all potential wage-earners step aside in order to give married men with a family the opportunities they seek.

MRS. SADIE ORR DUNBAR
President, General Federation of Women's Clubs

There can be no one answer to this question. Certainly the married woman has the same right as any other citizen to work, to create and to use her talents. Certainly she should not be discriminated against because of sex or marital status, for she has the same civil rights as any other citizen. It is also true that she usually confronts the same need of employment as her male companions. Most women who work do so because it is necessary to provide additional funds during illness of the regular wage-earner; because their husbands' wages are inadequate to maintain a decent standard of living for the immediate family and often dependent relatives; or because of the unemployment of their husbands.

Our answer to this question must be based upon facts. In 1910, 24.3% of all women in the United States were gainfully employed. In 1930, 25.3% were employed—a gain of only 1%. This does not indicate the replacement of men by women workers. No one seems to question a man's right to work, although he may have great wealth—or even to question his income from several sources.

Certainly, the married woman has the right to work; whether she should work depends upon the circumstances of the individual family.
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Cabot, of Boston, recently noted that many of his nervous patients were women suffering for want of serious occupational interest.

Nazi Germany thought it could casually disregard these important questions when it decided to oust its 900,000 women workers from industrial and governmental life. For years Germany had been looked upon as the foremost example of a nation in which, to the benefit of the state, equal rights for women were scrupulously upheld. The Nazi regime swept the women out of their jobs and herded them back to the home, where they were told to bear children.

However, as Clifford Kirkpatrick revealed in *Nazi Germany: Its Women and Family Life*, the Nazi conception of woman as a biological instrument soon changed when it was realized that no such large bloc of labor could be displaced—or even replaced—without severely upsetting the national economy. "The 'sacred' mothers went back to the machine," observed Dr. Kirkpatrick, "and the employment of women even increased."

In marked contrast is the attitude of Sweden, where the working woman, particularly the working wife, is taken for granted. Several years ago Sweden was alarmed by a rapidly declining birth rate. Like the United States, it too had economic problems, said to be caused in part by the number of women employed outside the home. A Population Commission was named to investigate all phases of family security. Its recommendations, summarized in the Geneva *International Labor Review* for June 1939, have this to say about the working wife:

"Unless women have open opportunities and consequently free choice in the matter of remunerative work after marriage, there will most certainly be fewer marriages and also fewer children. The Population Commission . . . have not only stressed the necessity for adjusting attitudes and opinions to new social conditions and new family structures, but have also proposed practical measures to restore a greater harmony between the productive activity of women and their function as mothers."

The record of the United States in recent years has not been spotless in the matter of discrimination against married women on federal payrolls. The Economy Act of 1933 contained a provision—the famous Section 213—against dual job-holding by married couples working for the government. Congress has since admitted the mistake, and has repealed the ban, but the damage had been done—an example had been set for discrimination-minded states.

In its study of the effects of Section 213, the Department of Labor—itsself headed by a married woman, Frances Perkins—found that 50 per cent of those who lost their jobs because it was unable to obtain employment as late as three years after it went into effect. Seventy per cent of the job losers were in the income group under $2,000. Altogether, 1,355 names were removed from the government payroll. The results, according to the Department, were "unhappy." Any state toying with the idea of a local "213" will find ample evidence, in Report 1562 of the Department of Labor, that its efforts are likely to miscarry.

State legislators who have been thinking of possible discrimination against married women might also ponder an advisory opinion rendered this summer by the Massachusetts Supreme Court. Considering a bill to ban married women from public service, the Court declared it was contrary to both the State and the federal constitutions to "discriminate arbitrarily against any class of citizens," adding that women—married or unmarried—are members of the State, and "like other citizens are entitled to the benefit of the constitutional guarantees."

It would be futilely optimistic to feel that this one court decision will be enough to halt the discrimination bandwagon. Whether it can be stopped must depend on the strength of our determination not to set aside one of the fundamental upshots of our democratic structure for a "solution" to our economic problems, when in fact it will be no solution at all. For in the final analysis this question of women and jobs will be fought out on the issue of equal rights and opportunities for men and women alike.

The "Montclair Way"
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jingling in his pocket more than $500,000 in cash.

Montclair is conspicuously a wealthy community; it is, so to speak, a d e luxe dormitory for successful New York men of affairs. That was no help to the cause of good government; it was, in fact, a severe handicap, for your commuter notoriously ignores home affairs, neglects to vote, and leaves government in the hands of the little local ring. It is harder to arouse the Montclairs to civic action than it is to stir up interest in the self-contained towns.

If it can happen in Montclair it can happen anywhere; good municipal government is perfectly possible whenever citizens buckle down and really go after it.

Of course, you have to get the right kind of men in office. Montclair's commissioners are convinced that business organizations should not merely encourage, but require, their executives to take part in local government, even though it takes time from their regular duties.

Montclair's commissioners have been actuated by a compelling philosophy. They believe, deeply, that democracy grows from its roots, that the best way to preserve and nourish it is to make local government healthy and vigorous through the participation of everyone in the community.

Despite the demands of their own businesses, they have given their time and skill to their community because they feel that only a wide awake, interested citizenry in every town in the country can keep the American way permanently alive.

And they're a little cocky these days, because they've seen their philosophy justified by actual experience.