

Married Women Workers and the early Great Depression

Saskatoon, 1929-1931



Transcribed and curated by Chris Willmore
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Cover photograph: Anonymous photograph, c. 1910 – 1930, curator’s collection.

“They fill the positions that young girls should have”¹ (1929)

Sir – Kindly grant me a space in your valuable paper with regard to our local stores and offices re married women, many of whose husbands are earning high salaries. They fill the positions that young girls should have, instead of staying at home and being a real wife and mother.

I say, if the husband is ill and cannot work that is different, but a man is a very poor sport who allows a wife to take the position of a poor young girl.

Is there any wonder that so many of our young girls go wrong? Their parents give them a good education and prepare them for a position, but what becomes of it? They go looking for work and are told: “We are sorry, but we are filled up,” but notice they don’t say “with married women.”

Only a short time ago some mother’s poor girl was hauled before court on a charge of vagrancy; she sobbed bitterly and was given a few hours to leave town. Think, if one of these fine ladies had said “My husband is getting good pay, give her my portion,” it would perhaps [have] saved her from further wrong. I know of some of them that drive to work in their big cars while other por girls cannot get a living.

Where is our labor council? It is time they woke up to the situation and got busy.

Now all you mothers fight for the working girl and do not buy from stores where they employ these so-called married women who are working for just “pin money,” as I heard one poor sap say, then perhaps our girls will get a little consideration and be able to earn and live a clean life.

ONE OF THE MANY MOTHERS

“Unemployed women”² (1930)

Sir – I notice what a lot is being said about, also being done for, unemployed men in the city and province, but I do not see any fuss made about the unemployed women. How is it that women who usually earn so much less than men and who usually have far more expenses, in the case of a widow or single woman all alone, than the average single man, seem to be able to save enough to keep themselves out of the bread line?

Of course, in the past, the average domestic worker was paid a suitable amount for her work and therefore was able to save a bit. Now there seems to be a conspiracy on the part of the average employer to reduce women’s wages so low that they will not be able to save, so in future we shall have women in the bread line. I believe we have to thank the foreign peasant women for this; thank them for the employer who

¹ From ONE OF THE MANY MOTHERS. (1929, June 29). *The Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, p. 17.

² From Mrs. L. Jones. (1930, March 8). UNEMPLOYED WOMEN. *The Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, p. 21. Probably written by either Clare E. Jones (1886 – 1967), wife of L. Jones, Julia E. Jones (born c. 1885, date of death unknown – remarried? Wife of Leslie Jones, the only L. Jones in the 1930 Saskatoon directory) or Lydia Weisser Jones (1897 – 1953).

will say “there is plenty of women who will work for their board without wages.” Where are they to get clothes without wages?

It is time some people began to think a little seriously and not try to grind decent women and girls to the lowest wage or none at all, or next winter the city will find they have women as well as men to look after, judging from the appearance of lots of homes. There need not be any unemployment among women, but there is, and will be while the foreigners are encouraged with their low standard of work and living.

MRS. L. JONES

“Robbing these single young women of a living”³ (1930)

Sir – Will you grant me a little space in your letter box columns in reply to Mrs. L. Jones on the above question? This good lady seems to have the idea that the foreign women are the cause of this unemployment. Well, I beg to differ, as I think I am safe in saying that there are too many married women (not foreigners) holding down jobs in our offices and stores and robbing these single young women of a living. And most of these married women’s husbands are in good steady positions and earning good salaries. Their excuse is that the wife is only going to work until they have paid off for the house they are buying. But that is all bunk, as I know some of these people are living in flats and have no intention of buying a house. What a life to see these young husbands rushing home at twelve o’clock to open up the can of pork and beans and sitting looking at each other like a calf looking over a gate. If this is the present style of living, well, I am glad I was married twenty years ago.

It cannot be said that these single girls are green and cannot do the work, as the majority of girls are spending a year in business college and then cannot get a job because the girl who gets married today is back on her job tomorrow.

And the wages that these single women should be earning would help her parents should the father be out of work.

I am not saying anything against the widow or the wife whose husband is out of work, but we shall always have this unemployment question until you can convince these young married people that money is not everything.

F.J.R.

³ From F.J.R. (1930, March 15). UNEMPLOYED WOMEN. *The Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, p. 23.

“The young married woman is not altogether to blame”⁴ (1930)

Sir – Regarding the letter headed “Unemployed Women” which appeared in the issue of March 15, I may say that I thoroughly agree with F.J.R. and his views. This topic was taken up five or six months ago by a mother who could not find a town position in Saskatoon for her educated unmarried daughter owing very largely to the usurpation of married women (with husbands earning) of these positions. Her letter was sent to the Trades and Labor Council, if I remember correctly, and a meeting about it took place later at which Rev. Donnell and Mr. Dealtry spoke. I do not remember that anything was done about it or any attempt made to remedy the situation.

However, it is again on the tapis and personally I think that at the present period of the unemployment crisis it is time some definite stand was taken as regards this. The young married woman is not altogether to blame. She would doubtless prefer living in a flat to emptying daily ashes from the domestic stove or furnace in her modern house if she had one and the super-numerous tasks that occupy a housewife in a city home. The present trend of most young married couples is not to create a home and rear a child or two, but to escape obligations as far as possible. I do not say all. There are, I hope, many young married men who feel they are only fulfilling their marriage contract honorably in wishing to be the sole provider for the home, and it is to these all honor is due. If they happen to fall ill and be debarred from earning, such as these would probably be sensible enough to change over and let their wives be the breadwinners, if possible.

The ones who are to blame in the employment of married women workers are the ones who engage them. I do not think these employers ask if the husbands are earning and how much they earn. This should be done before being engaged. If the husband is earning \$100 per month, the wife should not be employed. I think this statement will provoke controversy and I hope it does, for that is the intention. While no one speaks or writes there is no discussion, and I think our letter column, so much prized by a good many readers, was organized for that reason. One hundred dollars per month in the hands of a capable married woman can support a comfortable home of middle-class standard. I do not say it will provide for a creche of children, but the average employer does not usually pay his helpers in proportion to their size of family, therefore the helper must be prepared to “cut his garment according to his cloth” and indulge only in as many luxuries as his purse will allow.

If certain organizations can make rules about the non-employment of married women (such as our public library, public school board, telephone exchange, etc.) why cannot other firms and private people do the same thing? – be fair to humanity and take upon themselves to help lessen this evil, which, believe me, will not decrease but increase as time goes on, if not restricted.

NIL DESPERANDUM

⁴ From NIL DESPERANDUM. (1930, April 5). MARRIED WOMEN WORKERS. *The Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, p. 23.

“It’s a shame and a disgrace”⁵ (1930)

Sir – In the face of such hard times and unemployment as exists in Saskatoon at the present time, I think it only fair and just that steps should be taken to remedy the condition as far as possible.

Why do firms in our city employ married women whose husbands have good positions? It’s a shame and disgrace that this condition exists here. Is there no way to compel married women to give over, and give the girls a chance to make a living?

Single girls have been thrown out of employment and married women kept where firms found it necessary to cut the staff down. This is a gross injustice.

I have talked with several business and professional men and their excuse has been that married women are more steady and efficient, in other words, more dependable. This may be true in some cases, but I know there are single girls who are just as dependable and who really do need the work badly.

Married women whose husbands earn a good salary should not be employed, and a law could be passed to deal with this situation right here in Saskatoon, and in the name of justice it should be done.

Another condition that I am not so familiar with but have been told [of is] that city work let out on contract makes no provision to employ even the taxpayers of Saskatoon. The contractor brings in his own help and men who have always found work here on streets and roads are out of work now. Is this fair to the citizens of Saskatoon? I will say it is not.

Last but not least, I know also that men and girls can come here from most anywhere and get what work there is, and our own citizens are turned down. Why should anyone outside of our city get the preference? They come from overseas and all over, and it should not be allowed. I was told that they always try to give work to the girl who has come here alone, as she has no home here. Why not send her back where in all probability she is needed to help her mother? The theatres and dance halls have lured her to the city, and she is given work that rightly belongs to the girl who lives here, whose parents are trying to buy a home and in that way adding to the prosperity of our city.

LADY CITIZEN

“Can they honestly say they are satisfied”?⁶ (1930)

Sir – I would like to endorse the letter that Lady Citizen wrote regarding the above subject. This lady certainly gave the plain facts of the existing conditions as they are today.

It is strange that this question has never been taken up by our city officials and others who are supposed to be interested in this serious unemployment question,

⁵ From LADY CITIZEN. (1930, April 12). MARRIED WOMEN WORKERS. *The Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, p. 15.

⁶ From LIVE AND LET LIVE. (1930, April 16). MARRIED WOMEN WORKERS. *The Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, p. 15.

and I am told, for a very good reason why [this] is, that quite a few of the wives of our government officials and other big salaried men are on the pay roll and acting as their stenographers. I hope this is not true, as it helps to make matters worse.

If the question was put to some of these so-called husbands, can they honestly say they are satisfied by turning their wives out to work for other people's gain and also the bread they eat, or if it is to swell the bank account, as it happens in some cases, they do not live together long enough to enjoy?

And we are all aware of the fact that the agreement made between these young married couples that there will be no children to leave their money to.

So now married ladies who have a husband who can very well afford to support you, see if you can't give some of our single girls a chance to earn the living that you are robbing them of.

If your husband is any man at all he will buy you all the pretty clothes you want, and I am sure he would like it much better if you would stay home and cook him a good meal.

We would like to see a letter in the Star-Phoenix from some of you ladies why you are going out to work when you don't have to.

LIVE AND LET LIVE

“Too bad, too bad!”⁷ (1930)

Sir – I have read in Saturday's issue the lugubrious wail of “Lady Citizen” over the employment situation. Too bad, too bad! The number of married women employed by business and mercantile firms in this city is relatively so small that the question is not a serious one. But why in a free country should married women be debarred from helping to maintain their homes? “Lady Citizen” is evidently jealous of some neighbor woman who would not prefer to call herself by the aristocratic title “lady.” There are lots of homes with good sized families where the earnings of the father are insufficient to fill all the hungry mouths. I say, then, all honor to the mother who, usually at great sacrifice, is willing to go out and at all times take positions involving hardship and drudgery, positions which many of the complaining girls would not “demean” themselves to accept. “Lady Citizen” had better use her time, such as she can spare from bridge and golf, for the advocacy of a better cause, and leave the good, honest, hard-working women to enter the lists on equal terms with the movie-going, cigarette-smoking and often irresponsible listless girls whose cause the “lady” champions with such interested zeal, but with not a very wise discretion.

PLAIN WOMAN

⁷ From PLAIN WOMAN. (1930, April 16). MARRIED WOMEN WORKERS. *The Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, p. 15.

“How is it that they hired these women”?⁸ (1930)

Sir – On reading your paper on Saturday I noticed that “Plain Woman” said something about someone being jealous because the married women are taking the place of young girls. Now, did Plain Woman ever try putting her girls through high school, then through business college, and then have them walking around unable to get work? Business college alone costs \$20 a month without cost of books and clothes, and it takes from six to eight months for them to get through. All our leading business places, including the Board of Trade, have married women working for them and they will tell you that the married women are the steadiest. Well, how is it that they hired these women before they were married? Were they any steadier than any other girl before they were married? What I would like to know is, why did these women get married if their husbands can’t keep them? How do other women live and raise families and educate their children on their husband’s salary? My advice is for us mothers to get together and boycott all business places which have married women working for them who have husbands getting \$125 a month. Where a woman is a widow or has a husband who is out of work, there is some excuse.

ONE WHO KNOWS

“In fairness to the married women”⁹ (1930)

Sir – I have read with interest some of the letters in the Star-Phoenix under the above heading, and whilst agreeing with a good deal that has been written, I cannot help at the same time realizing that some have been written in a biased manner, and I think in fairness to the married women I would trespass on your valuable space to say a few words on their behalf.

The question naturally arises, what exactly do your correspondents mean when they write “a married woman whose husband is in a good position?” Say for instance the husband is earning \$100 to \$120 per month and he has a wife and 3 or 4 children to keep on this. Would this constitute “a good position,” in the minds of these correspondents? I think not, as I fail to see how any family could get along and live fairly respectably, without the further help of the married woman in this case, taking into consideration the present high cost of living in rent, fuel, clothing, and food. And therefore I say a married woman has every right, if she can do so, to hold on to a job if she is lucky enough to be able to get one. And to her must be given the greatest possible credit for helping out, when through no fault of his own, in the majority of cases, the husband is not able to earn sufficient to support the family.

As far as work is concerned, and with all due respect to the younger girls, if I was an employer of labor, which I unfortunately am not, with nearly 50 years of business experience, I would staff my store or office as the case might be, preferably

⁸ From ONE WHO KNOWS. (1930, April 26). MARRIED WOMEN WORKERS. *The Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, p. 22.

⁹ From BE FAIR. (1930, April 26). MARRIED WOMEN WORKERS. *The Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, p. 22.

with married women. For one thing they have the interests of their employer more at heart. I have noticed time and time again that the average single girl thinks, or appears to think, only of the clock. When will it be time to quit? And her outside engagements always seem to be of vastly more importance than her employer's. Yes, Mr. Editor, give me the married women every time!

Surely this immense province that we are privileged to live in should be able to produce enough work for everybody who is willing to work, whether they be married or single.

[I am] trusting that those who take up this matter will give the married woman the same fair treatment that they ask for the unmarried.

BE FAIR

“They cannot be bothered with such things as children”¹⁰ (1930)

Sir – Will you grant me a little space in your letter column to reply to “Be Fair” on the above subject? I would like to ask the writer of that letter: Would he be surprised to know that the majority of married women working in our cities as stenographers and saleswomen have not even one child to help support, let alone two or three?

He should know that it is a thing of the past with these present day marriages. They cannot be bothered with such things as children.

And when we speak of these married women workers with husbands in good positions, we know a lot of them getting from \$150 to \$300 a month.

Let me also tell you that I have respect for the woman who works and is struggling to bring up a family of three or four, and her husband only getting \$90 a month, and her job is scrubbing floors after everyone else has gone home. I take my hat off to that woman. And again you bring in the excuse that the single girl is always watching the clock. Do you know that a lot of single girls who are lucky enough to have a job are giving all their wages to keep the home going, as in some cases the father is out of work? She often has a day's work to do when she gets home on account of the mother being sick.

I am pleased to hear that you are not an employer, as our country would be in worse condition than it is today regarding the labor market.

Now, Mr. “Be Fair,” you seem to be an old timer around the city; surely you must know that I am correct in what I have stated. I am open to be contradicted if not.

LIVE AND LET LIVE

¹⁰ From LIVE AND LET LIVE. (1930, May 3). MARRIED WOMEN WORKERS. *The Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, p. 19.

“Is your daughter as efficient”?¹¹ (1930)

Sir – Hoping that those who have written to the Star-Phoenix denouncing married women working in the city or elsewhere would stop and think the matter out for themselves. I would like to ask a few questions of these people. First, do you object to a married woman helping you with your spring cleaning, washing, and sewing? Second, how many of you prefer to get a married woman to help you and enable to send your daughter to business high school or university? Third, is your daughter as efficient at any of these occupations as the married woman? Fourth, is she as willing to do this kind of work as the married woman who is at home? Fifth, if she is, why not let her fit herself for such a position in life?

Mr. Editor, a few weeks ago I spent a few days at home in Saskatoon and attended a women’s meeting, and this matter was discussed. Those who were present at the meeting will remember that I remarked that a good deal of the blame was attached to the parents of the girls who allowed them to take up work they were unfitted for, also that the tendency, unfortunately, was for the country people to send their girls into the city for a short course and expect them to compete with efficiency.

The teacher and the nurse, no matter whether her home is in the city or the country, goes to the country to work at the profession and because she has a diploma and has earned it by hard work and efficiency is capable of giving satisfaction. She puts up with hardships in driving or walking to her work in all weather – the teacher in the day and the nurse in the night time, and she is looked upon as a help in the community. Why not give your daughters a training in household science, in order that they may have the same standing in the community that the teacher and the nurse have? If a young lady can do your butter-making, bread-making, etc., better than you can yourself, she is not your inferior, Mr. Farmer.

CONSCRIPTION

“We would get a divorce, then I would work”¹² (1930)

Sir – In regards to the discussion about married women working, I wish to say a few words.

Some seem to think that if married women are not allowed to hold jobs it will solve unemployment. How? I fail to see it. It only postpones the problem. Why prevent married women from working? Why not stop all girls from working and encourage marriage? Just as sensible. If I were married and a law were passed to stop me from helping my husband, we would get a divorce, then I would work. Later we would re-marry. Anything to please our bonehead friends. Imagine the egotism of some people, to tell others that they must not work because they themselves, poor things, haven’t the capacity for producing the goods.

¹¹ From CONSCRIPTION. (1930, May 3). MARRIED WOMEN WORKERS. *The Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, p. 19.

¹² From “MARY PICKFORD”. (1930, May 3). MARRIED WOMEN WORKERS. *The Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, p. 18. “Mary Pickford” is a pseudonym – the stage name of a popular actor.

One writer in your column claims it is quite possible to live on \$100 per month. Certainly! Quite possible to live on \$20. A sow and a litter of eight can be sustained for \$5 per month. The married women who don't have to work to help keep the wolf from the door are usually wives of the fellows who make money from the sweat of their employees. Bear this in mind. There is plenty of food, clothing, shelter, etc., in the world, yet one has not the privilege of working when one wishes to. Why? Because the world is cornered by our fat-bellied financiers.

Listen to this one. A certain man had a deep well which always had a good supply of drinking water. The surrounding country was dry. People came for water and the owners said: "You may draw water from my well, but for every pailful you take you must put one pailful in my storage tank yonder." Fine! Much employment. Everybody happy! Presently the tank was full. The owner said: "Ten of you may continue drawing water, as I need about ten pails a day. The rest of you, I am sorry to say, will have to be laid off." Then there was unemployment and gnashing of teeth. Maybe some bright bird suggested that the married women be kept away. Perhaps some with horse-sense would compel the owner to let the people draw from the huge tank they filled themselves – make it public property. Not a bad idea.

I hope you get the idea. It works out in our industrial life, but the majority of people are too much saturated with the capitalist complex to see through it. I don't blame them, poor things. They were born in that system and they are too blind to help themselves. The system of competitive and capitalistic industry was all right in the old days when man's moral impulse was numb. But now instead of stoning idiots we pity them. Instead of burning heretics we converse with them and find that a high percentage are above average intelligence. And instead of allowing anyone to buy our right to work we ought to insist that he work with us and have us as joint owners of whatever business we are at.

When someone says "socialism," most people have an idea it means that you must divide up your savings with the first poor beggar who asks it. No. We don't want that. Get as much wealth as you wish, but what any thinking person does insist on is that you not be allowed to buy up land so that others cannot farm it. That you not be allowed to own a factory which pays a 213 percent dividend and its workers starve. Consider textile workers and the owners of textile factories a few years ago.

Most people are sadly ignorant of the causes of unemployment. They know nothing of social economic principles, and as long as they are that way it is hopeless. Ignorance is the chief cause of misery.

“MARY PICKFORD”

“Why did she marry him?”¹³ (1930)

Sir – I have been reading with much interest the controversy regarding married women workers. It seems to me very plain that “Plain Woman” has an axe to grind. Is she so selfish that the only good she can see in her life is whatever brings results her way? If her husband is not able to support her, why did she marry him? In the case of a sick husband or one out of work, no one finds any fault with the wife for helping out. More power to her, I say. I respect her for it. But the woman who keeps a single girl out of a job for pure greed and selfishness is responsible for a great many girls going wrong. What can they do, some of them probably coming in from the country? Even in our cities we have lots of them who have to pay room and board. They have to keep looking decent, and how are they going to do it? Girls are not all cigarette-loving party fiends, as our friend would like us to believe.

As to married women being more steady, let the employer use a little judgment when he is hiring a single girl. Invariably when he is hiring a girl he looks for something young and sweet-looking so he can flatter her into taking less money than he would care to offer to her more mature and experienced married sister.

There are, I grant you, lots of girls whom a look at their faces would tell one how their time was spent, but that is usually the girl a man takes if he is looking for a girl! I have worked among both married women and single girls for a good many years, and I fail to see when the former can put anything over the latter providing the same chances and the same discretion is used in hiring them. “Be Fair” must also be one of the married women workers and therefore the only fairness she can see is where everything comes the married women’s way. Evidently she has no girls of her own. If she had, how would she like to see them raising families and working out as well? It can’t be done, and let me tell you, it is not the married women who are raising families who are the worst offenders. Their duty lies in another direction. It is the childless married woman who is the greedy, grasping creature, whose husband is so spineless that he cannot earn enough to keep her, or is glad to have her give her attention to something else than his own unlucky self.

If a man is not in a position to keep a wife, why does a woman marry him? It seems to me a lot of women marry for footwarmers. “Be Fair” says a married woman has her employer’s interest more at heart. Don’t be foolish enough to believe that. She is thinking of her house cleaning and dish washing with her spineless one as help.

As “One Who Knows” says, why were these married women employed before? I don’t blame the married woman so much as I do the employer, and when these employers learn that a good many women today prefer to deal with mail order houses than patronize a house which employs married women, then we may keep some of the money in town that is at present going out of it. Mail order houses may employ married women too, but at least the offence is not so flagrant as it is doing business with them direct. “Be Fair’s” argument is very weak as to what constitutes a living wage. If \$100 or \$120 a month is not enough for a couple with two children to live on,

¹³ From LIVE AND LET LIVE. (1930, May 10). MARRIED WOMEN WORKERS. *The Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, p. 21.

what about the single girl who is earning half that amount and then has to take her turn in being laid off with the woman whose husband is earning that much, and in many cases much more?

I have neither husband nor girls of my own, but I have always tried to be human with young girls, and if I had a business of my own I wouldn't be a bit afraid to employ single girls and compete to advantage with "Be Fair's" houseful of married help. But I would try to employ girls who did not just live for six o'clock. There are lots of them left if employers used a little judgment in hiring and handling them.

LIVE AND LET LIVE

"The reasons given do not seem fair or just"¹⁴ (1930)

Sir – I have been reading in your paper some reasons why young married women should not hold salaried positions. To me the reasons given do not seem fair or just. If two men form a partnership, both unmarried, no one would say that one of them should give up work, even if they were two brothers or father and son living together. But let a man and a woman form a partnership by marrying, the man making \$150 a month which is not such a fabulous sum for two to live on and save a little for a rainy day. The young wife is able to earn, say, \$50 per month, and would like to continue working after she is married. But no! If some had their way there would be laws made whereby no married woman would be allowed to earn a salary, providing her husband is earning enough to buy her food.

I know there are many single women who would like good jobs, and I do hope there will be some way found whereby work will be provided for all who want to work. There was a time when marriage seemed quite a permanent institution found[ed] on quite a solid rock, and [couples] withstood many on the matrimonial seas, but now marriage often seems to be built on sinking sand.

A short time ago I read that in the state of Oregon there was one divorce to every two marriages. This state may have a pretty high percentage of divorces, but even in Canada the number of homes broken up by divorce is alarming. No wonder the young married woman desires to keep her job after she marries, and why should she be forced to give it up while the divorce laws are as they are at present? I do not think one needs any great vision to see that wedlock today is not the most secure position in the world. I do not know how to solve this problem of finding jobs for the jobless, but [I] do not think the married woman should be the only one to pay the price while waiting for someone to figure out the solutions of the unemployment problem.

J. B. ROSS

¹⁴ From Ross, J. B. (1930, May 10). MARRIED WOMEN WORKERS. *The Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, p. 21. The article incorrectly attributes the letter to Julia Dorinda Ross of Seven Persons, Alberta. Cross-referencing information on her grave with the 1921 census confirms that the author is Julia Belinda Ross (1863 – 1946). As of the 1921 census, she lived on a grain farm with her husband, Robert Ross, and an adult nephew who worked as a farm laborer. Interestingly, while her husband was Baptist, Julia herself was Roman Catholic.

“There would be no need for the wives to turn out”¹⁵ (1930)

Sir – Perhaps you will be good enough to allow me a few lines to answer the letter in your paper of May 3 with the signature of “Live and Let Live” under the above heading. [...] ¹⁶

With all due respect, I consider after reading the letter that I am quite as capable of knowing what is just and right in this regard as he is, and perhaps more so, as if it were my good fortune to be an employer of labor, one of my first concerns would be to give a good living wage to my employee whether or not they happened to be married or single, and this want, to my mind, is one of the chief causes of so much distress and real hardship in the business world today.

If the husbands were given an adequate wage, then there would be no need for the wives to turn out and work to “keep the home fires burning.” I grant that there are some firms who have a conscience in this regard, but there can be no denying the fact that there are many who do not give a fair wage for honest toil.

Only the other day I heard from one man who was married and employed by a big concern in Saskatoon at the munificent wage of \$20 per week. This is certainly a big salary to bring up a family of four children and a wife on. This particular man was laid off owing to slackness of work.

I would indeed be surprised to know that the majority of married women working in our cities have not even one child to bring up. I am still further surprised to know that the writer knows of a lot of women workers whose husbands are earning from \$150 to \$300 a month. The writer certainly is here allowing a good margin (for his imagination, maybe).

Anyway, he ought to read my first letter again, and he will there see that I wrote in support of the married woman whose husband was only earning from \$100 to \$120 per month.

There seem to be very few men, around Saskatoon, anyway, who are earning \$300 per month. Perhaps in North Battleford, where he writes from, the scale of salaries reaches this average; if so, North Battleford is the place to work in, but I fancy that Saskatoon, with all its growth of latter years, ought to be in a position to hold its own with North Battleford in this respect.

Yes, Mr. “Live and Let Live,” I like your title, but your letter reads to me a little sarcastic for such a title.

I like the sentiments expressed by Mary Pickford, Winnipeg. And I admire her in what she has written: “Ignorance is the chief cause of misery.”

I would like to see this subject thrashed out by someone capable of understanding the matter from a really unbiased standpoint, as I am afraid that a

¹⁵ From BE FAIR. (1930, May 10). MARRIED WOMEN WORKERS. *The Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, p. 21.

¹⁶ A duplicated line corrupts the following short paragraph, which I have omitted from the main text: “First of all, let me thank the writ- he (or she) is pleased to hear that I he (or she) is pleased to hear that I am not an employer of labor, etc.”

lot of what has been written emanates from a biased and prejudiced mind, and can do more harm than good to the industrial world.

BE FAIR

“Many people are confused in their thinking”¹⁷ (1930)

Two unemployed men were watching a steam shovel digging a large hole in the ground. “If they employed men with spades on that job they would have work for 200 men,” said one. “Yes,” said the other, “and if they used teaspoons they could employ 2,000.” This fable illustrates the fact that every time a new invention is used in industry it appears to throw men out of work. When machinery was first applied in spinning and weaving there were loud complaints that domestic handicrafts would be destroyed. Displaced workers many times rioted and did damage to factories. Today everyone knows that modern prosperity is due to the use of machinery. Every new labor saving device temporarily causes unemployment, but its ultimate effect is sure to be beneficial.

When a married woman is added to a payroll the apparent effect is to take a job from some person who is obliged to earn a living. This is another case where appearance and reality are at variance. The employment of married women is perfectly good economics. It does not reduce the number of jobs, for that number is not static, but varies with the consuming power of the community. This question has been a topic of public controversy in Saskatoon for some time. Many people are confused in their thinking about it. On Wednesday evening at the Labor Temple Professor W. A. Carrothers will speak to a public meeting on the economic effects of employing married women. His analysis of the subject should clear up some misconceptions.

“Employment of women discussed by economist”¹⁸ (1930)

“Prohibition of married women working will not solve the problem of finding employment for single girls.”

Prof. W. A. Carrothers, of the economics department at the university, last night made this statement addressing a meeting at the Labor Temple. He had been invited to speak by the Saskatoon Trades and Labor Council and by the local Retail Clerks’ Association.

Prof. Carrothers acknowledged that if married women were stopped working it might solve the problem for a year, but it was part of a bigger problem, and as the world moved on, so in a short time the situation would be just as acute.

¹⁷ From Married Women Workers. (1930, June 17). *The Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, p. 11.

¹⁸ From Employment of Women Discussed by Economist. (1930, June 19). *The Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, p. 10.

He admitted there was need of machinery based on social legislation to care for employment, but said it was bad economics to put the burden of unemployment on the shoulders of any particular group.

Employment of married women was part of the question of the employment of women, which was merely a part of the greater question of general unemployment.

Tracing the growth of employment of women in Canada, he said that in 1891 there were less than 200,000 women employed, of whom five percent were married. In 1921 the number of women gainfully employed had increased to 500,000, of whom nearly 20 percent were married. It was a significant fact that in the last 30 years the number of women employed had increased 150 percent, while the number of married women had only increased 81 percent.

One should not lose sight of the fact that many women today got married with the determination of continuing work after marriage. A survey in the United States of 519 cases, taken over a wide area, showed this was true in 182 cases. He hastened to explain he was not discussing the matter ethically, but from the economic standpoint.

He had read the letters in the press, he said, with interest, but was rather surprised at the failure of the writers to analyse the reason for women working. These causes he divided into a number of classes: women who worked because their husbands had ill-health, because they were widows, were separated from their husbands, because the husband's income was not sufficient to maintain the family, to attempt to save for old age, to provide better education for their children, and then, the class who worked because they preferred that to home life, and the kind who wanted extra "pin" money to provide desired luxuries or gaiety.

Who should deny the women of the first classes the right to work? he asked. It was delicate ground to tread on. The bugbear of unemployment, the uncertainty of any employment, caused many women to try and work to set aside a few dollars for the rainy day, the efforts to pay off family debts, to support dependents. All had to be considered.

Prof. Carrothers did believe it was the number who worked to increase their husband's earnings to provide luxuries who caused most bad feeling, but he asked what right the single girl who earned to get "pin" money had to hold down a job? In his opinion, she sinned just as much.

He was very certain that the number of married women who wanted to work outside the home, or who did it for luxuries, was a very small part of the whole, and for that reason he believed prohibiting them would not solve the greater question very much. He refused to comment on the moral rights of the case. If the wife earned more than the husband it was just as logical to say the husband should stop working. Who should do the regulating, anyway? It interfered with the individual's liberty in a particular way.

A solution might be to give each person less to do, but that was acknowledged bad economics, for the state functioned best when every effort was used to its uttermost. Such [a] procedure was dangerous, and [amounted to] interfering with fundamentals of economic progress. Expediency was bad business.

Machinery, he said, had caused the problem, and a solution had yet to be found, but he was convinced that dismissing all married women would not prove any solution. The general world unemployment was a far bigger question and the result of other factors, which in a year or two might right themselves. He said he would like to see a census taken in this city of married women who worked for fun, or to get extra money for pleasure. That number, he was sure, would be very small and not contribute at all in the larger issues. Economics proved that married women who worked, played a very minor part in the larger question.

After his address several questions were asked. One man stated that he had brought up six children. Two of his daughters could not get employment. This, he claimed, was due to married women working. Unless he supplied them with cash their only recourse was to go on the streets.

This Prof. Carrothers denied. He believed that women who went on the streets did so because they liked gin and the ensuing life. He reiterated his opinion that married women counted for little in the general scheme of unemployment.

Gerald Dealtry asked two or three questions which Prof. Carrothers answered, as he did to a question by Rev. T. A. Donnell as to whether he did not think prohibiting all women working would solve unemployment. Dr. Carrothers did not think so.

After the speaker left to attend another meeting a general discussion on the question ensued.

About 75 persons were present at the meeting, over which Ald. A. M. Eddy presided and during which he remarked that judging by the number present it did not look as if unemployment was the vexed question it was presented to be.

“Minded to step off the paths of virtue”¹⁹ (1930)

Sir – I have been an interested reader of the controversy being carried on in the Star-Phoenix with regard to married women workers.

It is my opinion that any fair minded married woman who is without children and whose husband is earning a living wage should not stand in the way of young girls obtaining work, which is their only means of support, unless they are minded to step off the paths of virtue.

To quote a case in point. I personally know of a man in the employ of the Canadian Pacific Railway who is drawing a salary of eighteen hundred dollars per annum, whose wife is employed by a large retail establishment and is pulling down a salary in the vicinity of nine hundred dollars per annum. These people are without children and I leave it to any fair, broad-minded individual if any woman in this position would not be better advised to confine her attention to her home, instead of stealing the bread and butter from the mouth of some young unmarried woman and depriving her of a respectable livelihood.

INTERESTED READER

¹⁹ From AN INTERESTED READER. (1930, June 21). MARRIED WOMEN WORKERS. *The Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, p. 19.

“Husbands do not earn enough”²⁰ (1930)

Sir – I have read with interest the speech made by Professor W. A. Carrothers, head of the economics department of the University of Saskatchewan, and the remarks of the Rev. J. A. Donnell, which happened in last week’s paper regarding married women working. Professor Carrothers states he has read the letters in the press regarding this question, and he was “rather surprised at the failure of the writers to analyze the reason for women working.” Perhaps our editor will allow me a little space in his valuable paper to enlighten the public about one reason why women have to work after they are married.

Most of the women who are toiling out day in and day out are forced to do it. Why? Simply because their husbands do not earn enough to meet the high cost of living and pay the high rents which exist in Saskatoon. There are men employed at the university who are working for \$50 to \$80 a month. These men are married with families to support, and their wives, through no fault of their own, are forced to go out and work. Some are doing scrubbing, cooking, sewing and clerking. These women are working, and working very hard for every dollar they earn.

How far does \$80 go, and clothing to be bought and something to be put aside in case of sickness? This is the reason why so many married women are working out, not because they love the idea, but because they are compelled to do it, and if they don’t do it, their only alternative is to seek relief from the city relief officer, or wait until The Star Fund comes around and go there and ask for their winter clothing. I am a married woman working out, and when I have finished my work at night, instead of being able to go out with my husband, I have to go home and cook and wash and sew for my family. I don’t grudge doing it because we can hold up our heads and know that no one can point a finger at us or call us “Charity Brats,” but if I didn’t work out, we would be like a great many of our neighbors, depending on the Salvation Army, the relief officers and The Star Fund. Let those who object to married women workers try and bring down the rents and the high cost of living in Saskatoon, and at the same time let them use their influence and see if they can’t get the married men a living wage. When they do that, dozens of married women who are working out will be only too glad to throw up their jobs and stay home.

“What is to become of such girls?”²¹ (1930)

Sir – I wonder when all the present howl is being made regarding unemployment, which evidently pertains to men only, why does not some good

²⁰ From MARRIED WOMAN WORKER. (1930, July 5). MARRIED WOMEN WORKERS. *The Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, p. 19.

²¹ From FAIR PLAY FOR WOMEN. (1930, November 27). UNEMPLOYED AMONG WOMEN. *The Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, p. 17.

Christian woman buckle on her armour in defence of her own sex, who are faced with the same distressing position as the male unemployed?

The writer is a lady who has been in ill health for some time and who had a want ad²² inserted in your paper on November 11 for a woman to wait on her and assist in other household work. On the eve of the same date girls still in their teens, middle aged and elderly women began to congregate. This procession of needy women continued for two days, numbering at least 75. Sometimes five were at our door at once. Needless to say, it was impossible to interview them all. It was pitiable though to listen to the tales of woe from those women I talked with. Many of them were cleanly attired and bright young women who appeared anxious to earn an honorable living. Some of them affirmed that their positions were taken by other girls who offered their services in exchange for room and board. Others were frail women with a little family whose husband was out of work, while but a few had a husband who was able to bring in the bacon. The majority I interviewed were girls with their homes elsewhere. Some might say: Why did these girls not lay by sufficient currency for a rainy day? I believe all will admit that the usual wages paid such girls when times were good was not more than sufficient to keep her dressed fairly well.

What is to become of such girls? The future must surely look gloomy to them. Could not some influence be brought to bear which would enable these girls to get honorable employment with a wage that would enable them to purchase the necessities of life? Mr. Editor, this looks to the writer as the forerunner of a life of shame for these girls. We hear so much comment about girls who do not care to work, that their ambition is only to run the streets. Had anyone had such a theory. and [then] experienced that which the writer did in the last few days, they would surely have changed their minds, and would have come to the conclusion that yet many of our city girls are striving to live up to their mother's doctrine.

Is the time not opportune for a few good Christian mothers to hold relief meetings and have those in dire need register, the same as our male unemployed are doing? I think that I am safe in saying that out of the vast amount that the federal government voted for relief purposes, there is not a working man, single or married, who has not figured on his allowance while the unemployed women are obliged to fold their arms and utter no word of protest. Is this a square and Christian-like deal? A man out of employment can for twenty-five cents roll his body in a blanket in many of the west side rooming houses and at least sleep warm. What would become of the unemployed young women were they to do likewise? Possibly they would be escorted to Prince Albert. A girl, to protect her honor, is obliged to seek the home of a lady she knows for lodging, as many of our rooming houses will turn them down should they be seeking a bed. The above picture seems almost too horrible to be true, though such are facts which can be fully substantiated. At the Chinese restaurants where many girls had employment as dishwashers their positions were taken by the Chinese [owners'] own countrymen. They would, I presume, also discharge the waitresses, did

²² "WANTED – NURSE OR HANDY WOMAN to help with invalid. Apply 125 Ave. L, South." From an ad on p. 23 of the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix* for November 11, 1930. According to the Saskatoon directory for 1930, this address was the home of George Martin, a retired farmer.

they not know from past experience that such spelt disaster to their business. Many of these girls spent the little money they did have walking the streets seeking work. Now they are homeless. What can be expected of such girls? Mothers, think. Were your own girls faced with the same distressing position?

In conclusion I wish to say God bless the female unemployed of our western cities today. This letter, though poorly composed, I trust will stir the hearts of women who are blessed with health and means to organize in behalf of their own sex and endeavor to arrive at some solution whereby destitute women will receive their just proportion of the millions voted for the relief of unemployment, and which should apply to both sexes.

FAIR PLAY FOR WOMEN

“There should be some permanent arrangement”²³ (1930)

A letter published in *The Star-Phoenix* this week spoke of the plight of unemployed women, especially girls living away from home. Their dilemma is even more difficult than that of a jobless man. They cannot rough it, beg meals, sleep in freight yards or adopt the other expedients open to a man on his beam ends. The letter published in this paper no doubt caused some citizens to think with a shock that the numerous relief measures recently put into effect have included no assistance for unemployed women.

The Star-Phoenix finds on inquiry that something has been done, in Saskatoon at least, by voluntary action on the part of Y.W.C.A. officers. They made a survey and collected the names of unemployed women in the city, including unmarried girls, widows and the wives of disabled or idle men. They then inquired into the circumstances of each person on the list. This was done some time ago and subsequently many of the younger women have been placed in families where they may earn board and lodging by doing housework. Other steps are being taken to prevent destitution and the distressing results which may follow when the destitute person is a young woman.

The women who organized the survey deserve the thanks of the city. But there should be some permanent arrangement for dealing with the problem which they voluntarily tackled as an act of social service.

“Overcrowding the profession”²⁴ (1931)

Imbued with the opportunities of service to a future generation, but warned of the uncertainties of employment in the teaching profession today, 380 young men and women held their closing exercises at the Saskatoon Normal School recently.

²³ From *Unemployed Women*. (1930, November 29). *The Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, p. 13.

²⁴ From *Stiffer Courses For Normal Schools Are Cited By Anderson*. (1931, May 29). *The Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, p. 6.

Hon. J. T. M. Anderson, B.A., D.Paed., who only seven years ago said farewell himself to the institution – he resigned from the staff then to enter the political arena – returned as premier and minister of education to deliver the address at the ceremony. Dr. J. S. Huff, commissioner of education for Saskatchewan and former principal of the school, was also invited to wish Godspeed to the 1931 class, but was unable to be present.

Plans for stiffening of normal courses were outlined by the premier in his address, an address which extolled the glories of the profession but in the same breath mentioned the growing number of unemployed teachers. Dr. Anderson warned that unless economic conditions changed greatly there would be between 1,000 and 1,500 unemployed members of the profession in the fall. There were 700 unemployed at the present time, he said, and 1,200 new teachers were being turned out in the province this month, many of whom would not secure schools.

The premier predicted that grade 12 education might soon be necessary before admittance to normal schools, that the normal school courses as well might be lengthened and that a new system of granting certificates might be introduced to reduce the number of ex-teachers returning to active service.

No legislation in Canada forbade married women from teaching, but it was the return to the schools of nearly 1,000 farmers' wives, who were teachers before marriage, that was overcrowding the profession today.

To overcome this condition a plan was being considered whereby certificates would be granted to graduates for three to five-year terms, to be renewed by the department of education in the case of satisfactory teachers who planned to remain in the profession. The department would hold the right to refuse reinstatement. Ex-teachers were in some ways, the premier thought, inferior to young graduates as they became "stale" and were not steeped in up-to-date methods.

"Eliminating married women from the profession"²⁵ (1931)

Sir – I was among those who listened to the address of Hon. J. T. M. Anderson at the closing exercises of the Saskatoon Normal, and I wonder what the women of Saskatchewan will think of his plan of granting short term certificates with the idea of eliminating married women from the profession.

I am one of those who was very glad indeed to furbish up a little old second class certificate and get out to support and educate the children, after 15 years' absence from the profession. For six years consecutively and since then intermittently, I taught rural school work in Saskatchewan. I am not afraid to place my inspectors' reports and testimonials beside those of any rural school teacher in Saskatchewan. Of course the program of studies was new to me and the grading different, but I can claim one hundred percent of passes for my grade 8 pupils and naturally am gratified to find that most of them are doing well in high school.

²⁵ From WOMAN TEACHER. (1931, June 13). MARRIED WOMEN WORKERS. *The Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, p. 4.

In 1924, a board of trustees in one of our rural schools, in despair over the deplorable conditions of their school, following a succession of indifferent youths, decided to try a married woman. I taught their school for two years, then they engaged another married woman, who taught for three years, and now they have a third married woman carrying on, to the satisfaction of all concerned.

And what do the mothers of Saskatchewan think of this proposition? The mothers who slave from dawn to dark that their girls may get their chance? How often have I heard them say: "I want the girls to have something to fall back upon." We want our girls to marry, but must they be penalized for so doing? Imagine the howl that would go up were our engineers, lawyers, and doctors told that their certificates would be canceled if they perpetrated matrimony. Why pick on the teachers?

Maurice Hindus, in "Humanity Uprooted," writes about the status of women in Soviet Russia. "Nor is there any discrimination against married women. They, too, can hold whatever jobs they are fitted to perform, whether in the teaching, medical, engineering professions or in industry. Neither a school board nor a factory manager nor anyone in charge of hiring workers has a right to refuse a woman applicant a position just because she is married." It appears to me that this question might well be taken up by representative women's organizations in this province. A timely expression of opinion may prevent injustice being done. Are the women interested?

WOMAN TEACHER