

Hackney rooms bringing proof that she had only had 3s. during the week.

"Queen Mary's Sweat-shops!" was the slogan I coined to attack their parsimonious standard, the influence of which was to depress even the existing most beggarly economic status of the woman wage earner. Our members took up the phrase with avidity, and cried it in the ears alike of conventionally-minded patriots, and East End clothiers seeking cheap labour. How unnecessarily low was the standard fixed for the unemployed woman war worker by those who affected to be the unique custodians of her interests, may be gathered from the fact that 3d. per hour was below the minimum rate fixed by the Clothing Trade Board. Moreover, the Distress Committees operating under the Unemployed Workman Act were at the time actually paying to unemployed women in their workrooms 10s. a week, plus an allowance for each dependent child, and providing a free dinner valued at 6d. a day and the fares to and from the Workroom. A woman with five children would draw from the Distress Committee 16s. 6d. a week, fares and free dinners. In the Queen Mary Workrooms she would get a bare 10s. and have to find her own fares, and pay 3d. a day for her dinner and a penny or twopence for tea. Unhappily the Distress Committee work was largely a dead letter, so far as women were concerned.¹

Even before war prices had raised the cost of living, the Distress Committee scale had been denounced by the Labour movement as parsimonious. The Labour War Emergency Committee was demanding that war relief should be at the rate of 12s. 6d. for one adult, 17s. 6d. for two, 20s. for two adults and a child, with 2s. 6d. for each additional child and 3s. 6d. extra in London. As members of the Labour War Emergency Committee, Mary Macarthur, Susan Lawrence and the others had joined in adopting this scale; then had thrown over their Labour colleagues by establishing the 10s. maximum for the Queen Mary workrooms. In my opinion it was a gross betrayal; in theirs it was "practical politics," I presume.

From their inauguration until February 1915, when war work had largely liquidated unemployment and relief work came to an end, only some 9,000² women passed through the Queen's workrooms. Yet they had set the common standard for women's war relief wages organised under other auspices, and they undoubtedly contributed towards riveting sweated wages on the women who were flocking into all branches of industry to replace men. This was the desire and intention of the employing interests, which blindly regarded cheap labour as the greatest of industrial boons. Again and again the ladies of the Trade Union

¹ Many women were refused relief work on the ground that their fathers or husbands should support them, although they were themselves unemployed and destitute. Out of 145 women who registered with the Distress Committee in Poplar within a period ending Nov. 7th, 1914, only 5 were recommended for work, and only one actually obtained it. In West Ham amongst 880 women who were registered only 17 got work.

² According to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

League, who were managing Trade Unionism for women, heedlessly sold the pass to the employing interests. Only women who were in regular employment before the War might be employed in Queen Mary's Rooms, yet a common excuse officially offered for the miserable payment was that the women were being "trained." Such experience as they got was mainly in garment making, in most cases not of a sort which would fit them for factory work. They were largely employed in repairing and converting old garments which had been given by charitable persons for distribution to the poor. Many of the workrooms were managed by amateurs with knowledge entirely restricted to home dressmaking.

It was promised that the ill-paid workers would in no case compete with women engaged in the ordinary labour market. The workrooms opened by the Lord Mayor's Committee in Manchester were refused a grant because the dolls and toys made there were offered for sale. Yet this pledge proved unreliable. The *Scotsman* announced that Colonel Cranston had ordered the shirts for his regiment from the Queen Mary Workrooms in Edinburgh; the *Morning Post*, that commercial orders for 1,000 dressmakers and others had been placed with Miss Macarthur's own Central Committee. Sir William Chance indignantly complained that the Central Committee had offered to supply socks at 2s. 9d. per dozen to a certain West Country industry, the proprietors of which had replied that they would not countenance such disgraceful sweating.

The New Constitutional Society for Women's Suffrage was refused a grant for its workroom because it paid more than 10s. a week, although the workers there were unemployed professional women who had been accustomed to substantial earnings. The organisers of the Queen Mary Workrooms in Southampton gave work to women in response to need, irrespective of red tape. After a fortnight the fact became known to the Central Committee that work had been given to women who had not been wage earners before the War, but who were now in urgent need, because their husbands were unemployed. Orders were given to turn these women away as ineligible. At bottom this ruling, whoever may have been responsible for it, sprang from the fear of providing a respite for men whom economic compulsion was driving into the Army.

The Trade Union ladies on the Central Committee for Women's Employment were among the notable early examples of the political truce which caused Trade Union officials to place what was regarded as National Unity before the wage standards of their members. They bent themselves to the task of supplying employers with labour—at almost any price. In this case the failing doubtless sprang from fallacious reasoning, based on the irrelevant premise that half a loaf is better than no bread.

The Cabinet Committee arranged for John Burns to receive us on September 16th. In the centre of a long row of officials he greeted us