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# **WOMEN IN INDUSTRY**

During spring 1917 the United States began shipping thousands of men overseas to fight in World War I. This immediate strain on the U.S. labor force created problems for industry, which became overburdened by wartime production requirements. The War Labor Administration, a division of the U.S. Department of Labor, worked to resolve these problems in part by replacing male workers with female ones. Realizing that women's labor issues needed to be addressed specifically, as well as to prevent them from disrupting wartime production, the Department of Labor created the Women in Industry Service (WIS) in 1918.

This cooperative-based bureau was run by women for women. Most of its policy suggestions for addressing women's labor issues were later implemented. Although the end of the war in November 1918 meant the return of men to industry, the WIS succeeded in bringing governmental attention to the rights of women laborers. The WIS operated until 1920, when Congress granted the bureau permanent status through

public law; the organization then became known as the U.S. Women's Bureau. As the only federal organization devoted to the welfare of working women, the Women's Bureau became a powerful advocate for their rights, conducting industry research and helping to shape public policy regarding their welfare.

- **1898:** United States defeats Spain in the three-month Spanish American War. As a result, Cuba gains its independence, and the United States purchases Puerto Rico and the Philippines from Spain for \$20 million.
- **1903:** Russia's Social Democratic Party splits into two factions: the moderate Mensheviks and the hard-line Bolsheviks. Despite their names, which in Russian mean "minority" and "majority," respectively, Mensheviks actually outnumber Bolsheviks.
- **1910:** Revolution breaks out in Mexico and will continue for the next seven years.
- **1914:** On 28 June in the town of Sarajevo, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Serbian nationalist Gavrilo Princip assassinates Austrian Archduke Francis Ferdinand and wife Sophie. In the weeks that follow, Austria declares war on Serbia, and Germany on Russia and France, while Great Britain responds by declaring war on Germany. By the beginning of August, the lines are drawn, with

the Allies (Great Britain, France, Russia, Belgium, Serbia, Montenegro, and Japan) against the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey).

- **1916:** Battles of Verdun and the Somme on the Western Front. The latter sees the first use of tanks, by the British.
- **1918:** The Bolsheviks execute Czar Nicholas II and his family. Soon civil war breaks out between the communists and their allies, known as the Reds, and their enemies, a collection of anticommunists ranging from democrats to czarists, who are known collectively as the Whites. In March, troops from the United States, Great Britain, and France intervene on the White side.
- **1918:** The Second Battle of the Marne in July and August is the last major conflict on the Western Front. In November, Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicates, bringing an end to the war.
- **1918:** Upheaval sweeps Germany, which for a few weeks in late 1918 and early 1919 seems poised on the verge of communist revolution—or at least a Russian-style communist coup d'etat. But reactionary forces have regained their strength, and the newly organized Freikorps (composed of unemployed soldiers) suppresses the revolts. Even stronger than reaction or revolution, however, is republican sentiment, which opens the way for the

creation of a democratic government based at Weimar.

- **1918:** Influenza, carried to the furthest corners by returning soldiers, spreads throughout the globe. Over the next two years, it will kill nearly 20 million people—more than the war itself.
- **1921:** As the Allied Reparations Commission calls for payments of 132 billion gold marks, inflation in Germany begins to climb.
- **1925:** European leaders attempt to secure the peace at the Locarno Conference, which guarantees the boundaries between France and Germany, and Belgium and Germany.

### **Establishing the Women in Industry Service**

- ❖ The Women in Industry Service (WIS) was established as part of the DOL in July 1918 to address the labor issues of women separately from those of men, specifically as they related to the war effort. The bureau's main purpose, as instructed by Secretary Wilson, was to "develop standards and policies to insure the effective employment of women while conserving their health and welfare." Two experts on women's employment, Mary Abby van Kleeck and Mary Anderson, were appointed as the WIS's first director and assistant director, respectively. Van Kleeck and Anderson kept in close

contact with other DOL divisions that worked on issues relating to women in industry.

- ❖ To develop a consistent program that best addressed the needs of women in industry, the new bureau cooperated with all state departments of labor that dealt on any level with the problems faced by working women. The Council on Women in Industry, comprised of female representatives from every division of the DOL, was founded to help coordinate these efforts. Subjects discussed by the council included safeguards for establishing new occupations for women, regulation of night work under war conditions, enforcement of state labor laws, and equal pay for equal work.
  
- ❖ Although the WIS ultimately compiled a formal policy outlining several key issues regarding women's employment during the war, many of the program's elements were not implemented, as World War I ended only four months after the bureau's creation. However, some action was taken with regard to each of the recommendations. In the meantime, the War Labor Policies Board added clauses to government contracts requiring compliance with state labor laws and worked with the WIS to

develop a cooperative effort between national and state agencies regarding the enforcement of the clauses.

❖ In addition, the WIS conducted a survey in, that focused on the occupational health hazards faced Niagara Falls, New York women employed in chemical industries. A committee made up of representatives from the Surgeon General's Office of the U.S. Army, U.S. Public Health Service, and New York Industrial Commission discussed the survey results and together with the WIS made recommendations for improved labor conditions including sanitary safety. The WIS also discussed with several labor organizations the need to control night work for women's safety and health.

❖ In October 1918 the WIS presented to the secretary of labor and the War Labor Policies Board a tentative draft of standards to be used to govern the employment of women in industry; the standards were met with approval and were only somewhat modified on 25 October. This was a huge accomplishment not only for the WIS as a whole, but also specifically for its director, van Kleeck, who was instrumental in developing the draft.

- ❖ The standards, which addressed issues such as equal pay for equal work and reasonable work hours, were used as the basis for a reconstruction program after the end of the war. Copies of the program were broadly distributed to the state departments of labor as well as to numerous organizations that took an active interest in the welfare of working women, making the program an official part of the public discourse in December 1918.
- ❖ On 11 November 1918 the WIS had submitted a memorandum to the chairman of the War Labor Policies Board addressing some of the employment challenges women faced during the readjustment period and suggesting that all attempts be made to lessen unemployment and "reinstate the largest number of women in normal occupations for which they are adapted." The memo included a direct call for the permanent status of working women to be recognized and for protective legislation to be implemented, addressing their welfare as wage earners. More subtly, the memo promoted the idea that women should be part of the decision-making process affecting their professional lives.

## **Women Face Challenges Working in Male-Dominated Workplace Cultures:**

Women working in male-dominated industries face a variety of challenges, including:

- Societal expectations and beliefs about women's leadership abilities.
- Pervasive stereotypes, such as that of the "caring mother" or office housekeeper.
- Higher stress and anxiety compared to women working in other fields.
- Lack of mentoring and career development opportunities.
- Sexual harassment.

**Women use various mechanisms to cope with working in male-dominated work environments, such as :**

- Distancing themselves from colleagues, especially other women.
- Accepting masculine cultural norms and acting like "one of the boys," which exacerbates the problem by contributing to the normalization of this culture.
- Leaving the industry.

Reference : <https://www.catalyst.org/research/women-in-male-dominated-industries-and-occupations/>