

4. The American Federation of Labor Embraces Equal Pay for Equal Work, 1917

“Every labor organization in the country should be keenly interested in the welfare of women in industry,” remarked a labor man in this city. “In all adaptable employments women have an equal right to positions. They should be encouraged rather than discouraged. With the transition of industry during the war period the employers, true to their well known concepts, will endeavor to substitute women at a lower wage scale than they are now paying their male employes. It is already being done. Patriotism is the cloak with which they are endeavoring to hide their financial gains by a lower labor cost. Women are being employed in railroad shops and other forms of employment entirely unsuited to them while thousands of men are available for these positions. The opportunity which the war affords unfair and unscrupulous employers to secure cheaper labor by the employment of women should be met by vigorous action by the unions of labor in the localities where this practice is being inaugurated. Equal pay for equal work should be the slogan. Every central body in the country should provide for a standing committee to collect data in its locality relative to the employment of women. If those who are substituting women for men are not paying wages formerly paid to men a local campaign should be inaugurated against the practice and the facts given the widest possible publicity and the officers of the American Federation of Labor informed. When a nationwide campaign for equal pay is instituted by the labor unions the results will not only be beneficial to women who will enter industry, but the standards established by the unions will largely be maintained. We should not delay our efforts. It will be infinitely easier to check a tendency than correct an abuse.”