

**WOMEN IN THE  
PRINTING TRADES, A  
SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649288298

Women in the printing trades, a sociological study by J. Ramsay MacDonald

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**J. RAMSAY MACDONALD**

**WOMEN IN THE  
PRINTING TRADES, A  
SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY**



WOMEN IN THE  
PRINTING TRADES.

# WOMEN

IN THE

## PRINTING TRADES:

A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY.

EDITED BY

J. RAMSAY MACDONALD,

WITH A PREFACE BY

PROFESSOR F. Y. EDGEWORTH.

INVESTIGATORS:

MRS. J. L. HAMMOND,

MISS A. BLACK,

MRS. H. OAKESHOTT,

MISS A. HARRISON,

MISS IRWIN, and Others.

64/92  
11/4/05

LONDON:

P. S. KING & SON,  
ORCHARD HOUSE, WESTMINSTER.

1904.

## PREFACE.

---

My only qualification for writing this preface is the circumstance that, as a representative of the Royal Economic Society, I attended the meetings of the Committee appointed to direct and conduct the investigations of which the results are summarised in the following pages. From what I saw and heard at those meetings I received the impression that the evidence here recorded was collected with great diligence and sifted with great care. It seems to constitute a solid contribution to a department of political economy which has perhaps not received as much attention as it deserves.

Among the aspects of women's work on which some new light has been thrown, is the question why women in return for the same or a not very different amount of work should often receive very much less wages. It is a question which not only in its bearing on social life is of the highest practical importance, but also from a more abstract point of view is of considerable theoretical interest, so far as it seems to present the paradox of *entrepreneurs* paying at very different rates for factors of production which are not so different in efficiency.

The question as stated has some resemblance to the well-known demand for an explanation which Charles II. preferred to the Royal Society: there occurs the preliminary question whether the circumstance to be explained exists. The alleged disproportion between the remuneration of men and women is indeed sometimes only apparent, or at least appears to be greater than it is really. Often, however, it is real and great where it is not apparent.

On the one hand, in many cases in which at first sight women

seem to be doing the same work as men for less pay, it is found on careful inquiry that they are not doing the same work. "The same work nominally is not always the same work actually," as the Editor reminds us (Chapter IV. par. 1). "Men feeders, for instance, carry formes and do little things about the machine which women do not do." In this and other ways men afford to the employer a greater "net advantageousness," as Mr. Sidney Webb puts it in his valuable study on the "Alleged Differences in the Wages paid to Men and to Women for similar Work" (*Economic Journal*, Vol. I. pp. 635 *et seq.*). The examples of this phenomenon adduced by Mr. Webb, and in the evidence before the Royal Commission on Labour, are supplemented by these records. To instance one of the less obvious ways in which a difference in net advantageousness makes itself felt, employers say: "It does not pay to train women: they would leave us before we got the same return for our trouble as we get from men." At the same time it is to be noticed in many of these cases that though the work of women is less efficient, it is not so inferior as their pay. For instance, a Manchester employer "estimated that a woman was two-thirds as valuable in a printer's and stationer's warehouse as a man, and she was paid 15s. or 20s. to his 33s.," (p. 47, note).

In other cases the difference between the remuneration of men and women for similar work is not obvious because they work in different branches of industry. For example, only five instances of women being employed as lithographic artists are on record (Chapter IV. par. 1). Other branches of the printing trade are as exclusively women's work. Such data afford no direct and exact comparison between the remuneration of the two classes in relation to the work done by them respectively. As Mr. Webb concludes, the inferiority of women's wages cannot be gathered "from a comparison of the rates for identical work, for few such cases exist, but rather from a comparison of the standards of remuneration in men's



and women's occupations respectively." "Looked at in this light," he continues, "it seems probable that women's work is usually less highly paid than work of equivalent difficulty and productivity done by men." As Mrs. Fawcett points out in an important supplement to Mr. Webb's article (*Economic Journal*, Vol. II. p. 174), women are crowded into classes of industry which are less remunerative than those open to men.

Recognising the fact of different remuneration for the same amount of work, we have next to consider the causes. It is evident that the sort of explanation offered by Adam Smith for difference of wages in different employments will not avail much in the case with which we are dealing. The lower remuneration of women is not brought about by way of compensation for the greater "agreeableness" or other pleasurable incident or perquisite of their tasks. Possibly we might refer to this head, as well as to others, the circumstance that women having in prospect the hopes of domestic life are likely to take less interest in their trade than men do who cast in their lot for life, if this difference in future prospects is attended with a difference in the effort of attention given to work in the present. But doubtless the explanation is to be found chiefly not in compensation produced by the levelling action of competition, but in the absence of competition between men and women—in the existence of monopoly whether natural or artificial, to use Mill's distinction (*Political Economy*, Vol. II. Chapter XIV.), together with custom and what Mill calls "the unintended effect of general social regulations."

A natural monopoly is constituted by the superior strength of man, the occasional exercise of which, as just noticed, entitles him to some superiority of pay for work which at first sight may appear almost identical with that of women. The experience recorded in the following pages does not afford any expectation that this kind of superiority tends to vanish. "There is an almost unanimous chorus of opinion that women's work as compositors is so inferior to men's that it does not

pay in the long run" (Chapter IV.). Speaking of the physiological differences between men and women in relation to their work, the Editor concludes that "when all false emphasis and exaggeration have been removed a considerable residuum of difference must remain."

Custom and the somewhat capricious sense of decorum counts for more than might have been expected in restricting women to certain industries, and accordingly, on the principle emphasised by Mrs. Fawcett, depressing their wages. "I know my place, and I'm not going to take men's work from them," said a female operative to an employer who wanted her to varnish books (Chapter IV.). "Why, that is men's work, and we shouldn't think of doing it," was the answer given by forewomen and others to the question why they did not turn their hands to simple and easy processes which were being done by men (Chapter V.).

Among artificial monopolies must be placed that which is constituted by legislation. The Factory Laws, of which a lucid summary is given (Chapter VI. § 1), impose certain conditions on the work of women which, it may be supposed and has been asserted, place them at a sensible disadvantage in their competition with men, who are free from those restrictions. But the evidence now collected goes to prove that the disadvantage occasioned to women in their competition with men by the Factory Acts is not appreciable; thus confirming the conclusions obtained by the Committee which the British Association appointed to consider this very question (Report, 1903). The evidence of the large majority of employers in the printing trade is in favour of the Acts; the evidence of employées is almost unanimous. Of a hundred and three employers "not half-a-dozen remembered dismissing women in consequence of the new enactment" (Chapter VI. § 2). Of a hundred and three employers who expressed an opinion, twenty-six stated that in their opinion legislation had not affected women's labour at all, sixty considered it to have

been beneficial, and seventeen looked on all legislation as grandmotherly and ridiculous (p. 82). The opinion of the employers is much influenced by the experience that "after overtime the next day's work suffers." The still stronger feeling of the workers in favour of the Factory Acts is partly based on the same fact: "Long hours," said one, "don't do any good, for they mean that you work less next day: if you work all night, then you are so tired that you have to take a day off; you have gained nothing" (p. 86). Upon the whole the moderate conclusion appears to be that "except in a few small houses the employment of women as compositors has not been affected by the Factory Acts" (p. 75). What little evidence there is to the contrary is exhibited by the Editor with creditable candour (p. 80). It is admitted that a "slight residuum of night work" may have been transferred to male hands.

Trades unionism forms another species of "artificial monopoly," the organisation of men in the printing trades being much stronger than that of women. The difference is partly accounted for by the fact, already noticed in other connections, that woman having an eye to marriage is not equally wedded to her trade. Some frankly admit that "marriage is sure to come along, and then they will work in factories and workshops no longer" (p. 42). Whatever the cause, it appears from the Editor's historical retrospect that women's unions have not flourished in the trades under consideration. All attempts to organise women in the printing trade proper, as distinguished from the bookbinding industry, have failed. Even the Society of Women Employed in Bookbinding, though organised by Mrs. Emma Paterson, seems to have had only a moderate success. Thus the men unionists have had their way in arranging that their standard wage should not be lowered by the influx of cheap labour offered by women.

Some unions indeed admit women on equal terms with men, with less advantage to the former than might have been expected. A regulation of this sort adopted by the London