

**WOMEN'S EDUCATIONAL AND
INDUSTRIAL UNION, BOSTON,
DEPARTMENT OF RESEARCH,
STUDIES IN ECONOMIC RELATIONS OF
WOMEN, VOL. VII, INDUSTRIAL HOME
WORK IN MASSACHUSETTS**

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VOLUME I, Part 2. Vocations for the Trained Woman: Agriculture, Social Service, Secretarial Service, Business of Real Estate. By Eleanor Martin, Margaret A. Post, Fellows in the Department of Research and the Committee on Economic Efficiency of College Women, Boston Branch, Association of Collegiate Alumnae. Prepared under the direction of Susan M. Kingsbury, Ph.D., Director. 1914. 8vo. Cloth. Price, \$1.50 net. Postage extra. (Weight 2 pounds.)

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STUDIES IN
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VOLUME VII

INDUSTRIAL HOME WORK IN MASSACHUSETTS

BY
THE DEPARTMENT OF RESEARCH
WOMEN'S EDUCATIONAL AND INDUSTRIAL UNION
BOSTON

PREPARED UNDER THE JOINT DIRECTION OF
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PREFACE

Is industrial home work a survival of the domestic system of production?

Is it a return to the domestic system whereby the tendency of production to escape from the home may be checked and women may evade economic parasitism with its resultant social, economic and moral slavery?

Or is it a phase of modern industrialism bearing an intimate relation to every feature and problem of modern production?

The first intimation of the widespread custom of so-called home work came to the Department of Research in 1910-1911, while pursuing a study of the manufacture of machine-made clothing. At that time our social experts confidently asserted that there were in Massachusetts no sweated industries. And indeed the sentiment prevailed that whatever of home work existed was either a very small, well-regulated system, applicable only to wearing apparel, or was a survival of the domestic system of production, and appeared in the form of products sold through women's exchanges or directly to the consumer.

Now, there is without doubt a group of workers, we do not know how large or how important, who carry over the eighteenth century custom of production in the home. These appear as "home milliners," "home dressmakers," "home bakers" and laundresses, who employ less than five workers and do not therefore form "shops," according to Massachusetts law. But the workers who had commanded our attention and aroused our interest formed a far larger and very different group. They did not provide their own materials. They did not produce a completed article. Many of them did not perform a skilled operation. They did not sell to whom and where they wished, but they received from a factory a certain amount of material which they were to fashion into a specified form and send back to the factory for a specified wage, or they received a partially completed article or part of an article together with material upon which they were to perform a specified process, partially or fully completing its manufacture. None of the handicraft stage with all its inspiration for creation remained. The market was no longer open to them, in which they could sell their product, including their labor, to the highest bidder,

knowing exactly what part of the total production was due to their skill. They could sell only their labor, and this must be in a much more restricted market, and therefore at a much more unsatisfactory bargain. Industrial home work, so called, existent in Massachusetts is therefore not a *survival* of the handicraft nor even of the domestic system of production.

Some of us saw, or thought we saw, herein the glorious possibility of a *return* to domestic production, if not the domestic system of production. Here a woman could spend idle days or hours, or the hours when other domestic processes were under way and not requiring close attention, in earning the dollars which her mother and grandmother saved by spinning and weaving and baking and candle making. But this extended investigation has brought conclusive evidence and leaves no vestige of a doubt. The present system is in no sense a return to the domestic system, nor does it show any tendency to rehabilitate production in the home whereby women may evade economic parasitism.

Industrial home work is distinctly a *phase of modern industrialism* bearing an intimate relation to every other phase of modern industrialism. In it we see exemplified in its highest development, (1) subdivision of labor; (2) reduction of activities of the workers from those of a trade to that of a process; (3) imposition upon the worker of the burden of charges for waste, inefficiency and transportation; (4) irregularity of employment due to the seasons, to shortage of work, or to rush of work, whereby the burden of unemployment is thrown entirely upon the worker; (5) piece payment whereby hourly earnings can be given only at the maximum amount possible to secure, and actual earnings or even rate of earnings are most difficult to discover; (6) uncertainty of contract; and (7), most noticeable of all, the number of hands through which the work passes from producer to consumer, as seen in the increasing employment of sub-contractors, agents, workers and subworkers. The attendant evils of child labor, of overstrain, of long hours of labor for women, of unsanitary conditions for the worker, of extension of disease to consumers are in danger of being present to a more marked degree than in regular factory life.

The home has become, then, an annex to the shop, whereas under the earlier system, even when conditions were most distant from the pure handicraft system, the shop was an annex to the home. Under the present order of things the home is a part of the shop from the point of view of manufacturer, from the point of view of employee,—in fact from every point of view except that of the responsibility of the State to