

# WOMAN'S SUFFRAGE AND WOMEN'S WAGES.

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It is often said that women need votes in order to enable them to obtain proper treatment in the labour market. Some women indeed, seem to think that, by means of the franchise, they could raise the wages of their sex to an equality with those of men.

But if we understand the real causes of the inferiority of Women's position as wage-earners, and consider the only possible ways of improving their position in this respect, we shall see how little reason there is for connecting the subject of votes for women with women's wages.

The following are surely among the **principal causes why the wages earned by women compare unfavourably with those of men:**

(1) Women are physically weaker and, speaking generally, less effective as workers than men.

(2) Men, as a rule, depend entirely upon the wages received for, and devote their entire energies to, the work which they perform; and these facts tend to render it necessary for employers to pay them a fair living wage. On the other hand, vast numbers of women workers are partially supported by husbands, parents, or other individuals, or by charity or other relief, while a large proportion of them can devote only a portion of their time to their work. The competition of these women tends to keep down the wages even of those who wish to support themselves entirely by, and can give their whole time to, their work.

(3) Women workers are, as a rule, entirely unorganized; they

belong to no trade unions, and entirely lack the strength of combination.

The following may be indicated as among the possible **remedies** for what is wrong in the existing situation: —

**(1) Combination in trade unions.** By such organisation women workers in the textile trades of the North of England have already secured comparatively fair wages and conditions of labour

**(2) The fixing of minimum rates of wages in particular trades by properly established Boards.**

**(3) The increase of voluntary co-operative undertakings on the part of workers.**

**(4) The more even distribution of the female population throughout the territory of the Empire, by means of emigration.**

**(5) A general modification of a social and industrial policy, so as to procure a more equable distribution of wealth.**

How could woman suffrage promote any of these remedies?

The franchise may possibly have helped men to obtain the due recognition by law of the right of combination. But this right is now equally open to women.

The following facts seem to show how entirely ineffective the political franchise is to secure good wages, or even work. Agricultural labourers have had the suffrage for nearly a quarter of a century; yet their average wage is still only 15s. or 16s. a week. Vast numbers of the voters of London are still miserably paid. The problem of unemployment is even more urgent in the case of men than in that of women. During the last sixty years the wages of women have risen at a faster rate, and more consistently, than those of men. In particular, domestic servants, whose industry is one of the largest in the kingdom, have obtained an increase in wages of a particularly striking character.

Laws cannot alter the facts of Nature. Women, as producers of wealth, are not equal to men. If the legislature attempted to compel employers to pay women the same wages as they paid to men, the business of the country would be deranged, financial disaster would ensue, and women, as well as men, would be worse off than they are now.

All possible improvements in the position of women workers can be secured without giving them the franchise. On the other hand,

they could not get better wages by means of votes.

**Woman Suffrage therefore has nothing to do with wages, and the interests of woman workers can be promoted, and are constantly being promoted in quite other ways.**

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