

Labour problems

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LABOUR PROBLEMS.

By THÉO CHOPARD.

In a month's time the SAFFA will open its doors in Zurich. The SAFFA is an exhibition devoted to the life and activities of Swiss women. It is exclusively the work of women, and its entire aim is to show the part played by women in the national community. An important section of the SAFFA will illustrate the Swiss woman's contribution towards the economic development of the country.

There are 650,000 women in Switzerland who take part directly in the economic activity of this land. Nearly 200,000 of these women are married, widowed or divorced, and one-third of them have one or more children who are minors.

In Switzerland, as elsewhere, the absence of the mother from the home during the greater part of the day raises serious problems. The concurrent servitudes — of the job, the household and the education of the children — imply a danger of overwork and of tension which is prejudicial to family happiness. As for the children, the fact that the mother has an outside job has a bad influence on their upbringing. The inadequacy of the husband's wage or salary is one of the principal reasons which incite so many mothers to take on an outside job.

But, although so many women have to face an extenuating task and are obliged to work for some eighty to ninety hours per week, there are others, who are childless or whose children are already grown up, who have not got enough to do. Household chores do not take up all their time, and they would like to accomplish something useful. In this connection, more thought should be given to the establishment of part-time work — this also for those mothers who have small children. They could, moreover, help to lighten the burden of nurses in hospitals, or that of the mothers who have to go out to their jobs. There are still some very fine initiatives open to feminine solidarity.

If, however, both the number of women who have jobs and the number of jobs that are now open to them are constantly on the increase — in Switzerland as well as elsewhere in the industrial countries — the fact remains that, for equal work, their remuneration is still inferior to that of the men. This social injustice is universal, but very difficult to extirpate. This is not due so much to the fact that they do not always have the same opportunities for courses of study and for technical training as the men, but because, as a rule, they do not make use of them to the same extent as the men do. There still exists the prejudice, which is far too widespread, that it is not "worth while" for a girl to attend a high school or to serve an apprenticeship. No error could be greater, however, than that of considering a trade or profession as being a mere "side-line", just something to do whilst waiting for marriage — which may never take place. The girl who has not served an apprenticeship or gone in for higher studies finds her activities limited, right from the start, to unskilled labour and to work of a subordinate kind; and it is always unskilled labour which is the first to suffer from the consequences of economic depressions. The fact should also be borne in mind that a married woman, also, may be obliged one day, as a result of unforeseen circumstances, to go back to work. It will be very

much easier for her to find a job if she has had some proper training.

It is only to that degree to which women, while not underestimating domestic work, will adopt a more positive attitude towards their chosen trade or profession, that it will prove possible to do away with those barriers and discriminations which still exist. It is to these problems that the SAFFA will strive to draw the attention of women — and also of men. Such problems being of a universal character, it would be desirable if similar exhibitions were to throw light on them in all other countries, too.

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