

# newsfeature

NF/3

September 3, 1974

## EUROPE: THE YEAR OF THE WOMAN

The European Common Market has decided to make 1975 the Year of the Woman. By the end of that year, most forms of discrimination in pay, job opportunities and promotion that can be reformed by law should have been removed.

A recent survey of inequalities in pay and working conditions for women in the three countries which joined the European Community last year -- Denmark, Britain and Ireland -- showed similar problems to those revealed in a 1970 study of Belgium, France, Germany, Holland, Italy and Luxembourg.

The situation varies from one industrial sector to another, and some sectors are having financial difficulties complying. Women are less unionized than men, and jobs almost exclusively done by women tend to have unnaturally low wage scales, thanks to job classification. Women tend to be last hired, first fired. The most "liberated" countries are the wealthiest, and almost everywhere the civil service is the most enlightened employer.

Equality for women is enshrined in Article 119 of the original Rome Treaty of 1957, setting up the Common Market. Since then, progress has been slow -- but faster in the Seventies.

In Ireland, women and unmarried men have been getting 20 per cent less than their colleagues in teaching and the civil service. In other sectors, the under-pay differential for women varies from 40 to 15 per cent. Women civil servants were automatically dismissed when they married. So are nurses, still, in many British hospitals.

In Britain, the sex-wage differential varies from 30 to five per cent. In Denmark, most differentials were removed in the Sixties, and the highest remaining--soon due to disappear-- is five per cent.

Says a European Community report: "Denmark is the only country where....no difficulties exist any more... since the conclusion of the National Agreement of April 1973."

Most Common Market countries have no national minimum wage; a lapsus which hits women more than men. Discrimination also exists in access to training programs and in pension plans-- because they live longer.

European employers justify discriminatory attitudes to women workers on grounds of their lesser physical strength, higher absenteeism and greater turnover rates. To eliminate some of the hairsplitting, the new British act refers, in an unconscious pun, to equal pay being extended "for the same or broadly similar work."

Many European institutions pay lipservice to sexual equality. France inserted such an amendment in 1946, Italy in 1948, Germany in 1949, Luxembourg in 1965, Belgium in 1967. Belgium applies criminal sanctions to offending employers.

In Holland, equal pay is based only on collective agreements, not law, but the Dutch government has the power to cancel discriminatory accords.

Ireland and Italy, where women's conditions are worst, have equal pay inspectors with the widest powers. Luxembourg and France are criticized in EC reports for spreading their inspectors too thinly and giving them too many other tasks. Germany and Holland have no inspectors.

In Germany and Italy, women workers paid by the hour can no longer be penalized for a supposed lower yield, nor for their costlier social protection. New measures have been introduced to protect women who work at home: in Italy, over a million do so, but only 40,000 are covered by collective agreements. Most laws assume a man is head of the family. If a woman is, she has to prove it.

Another major problem is that unions are often as misogynistic--or more so--than employers. The executive Commission of the European Communities has urged the labor movement to clean its own house. The Commission plans proceedings before the European Court against member states which do not faithfully apply Article 119.

But some discrimination will undoubtedly remain-- including reverse discrimination. Under the new, comprehensive Equal Pay Act in Britain, men can still be required to work longer hours, to retire later and to pay higher life insurance rates. And they will get no paternity leave.