WOMEN WORKERS IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Production and Patriarchy in Conflict

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To Mrs Oliver and Mrs Shipley,
war workers of South Shields.

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Abbreviations

AEU	Amalgamated Engineering Union
ATS	Auxiliary Territorial Service
BEC	British Employers' Confederation
BOE	Board of Education
CCA	Churchill College Archive
Co-op	Co-operative Wholesale Society
DCIC	Deputy Chief Industrial Commissioner (MOL)
DC	Divisional Controller (MOL) (geographical divisions to which they belonged abbreviated in conventional way)
EWO	Essential Work Order
FBM	Federation of Boot Manufacturers

FWAB	Factory and Welfare Advisory Board (MOL)
LA	Local Authority
LEA	Local Education Authority
M-O	Mass-Observation
M-OA	Mass-Observation Archive
MOF	Ministry of Food
MOH	Ministry of Health
MOL	Ministry of Labour and National Service
MOS	Ministry of Supply
MRC	Modern Records Centre
NSDN	National Society of Day Nurseries
NUBSO	National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives
NUGMW	National Union of General and Municipal Workers
NSAGB	Nursery School Association of Great Britain
PRO	Public Record Office
RC	Regional Controller (MOL) (geographical regions to which they belonged abbreviated in conventional way, e.g. NW North-west)
RWO	Regional Welfare Officer (MOL)
RCEP	Royal Commission on Equal Pay
ROF	Royal Ordnance Factory
TUC	Trades Union Congress
TGWU	Transport and General Workers' Union
WSS	Wartime Social Survey
WAAF	Women's Auxiliary Air Force
WAC	Women's Advisory Committee (TUC)
WCC	Women's Consultative Committee (MOL)
WLA	Women's Land Army
WRNS	Women's Royal Navy Service
WVS	Women's Voluntary Service

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One of the conclusions of this book is that even in the Second World War collective provisions for domestic work were limited, and women had to depend upon their own families and friends for the support necessary for them to undertake work outside the home. This is no less true today. While acknowledging with gratitude the collective child care facilities which were available for my two children while I was writing the book, particularly the University of Lancaster Pre-School Centre, I wish to thank especially warmly Joan Wood, Aline and Buci Torday, and Marjorie, Victor and particularly Mark Easterby-Smith, for their part in creating the conditions in which this project was brought to completion. I should also like to thank Oliver Fulton for his comments on the new preface.

PREFACE TO THE PAPERBACK EDITION

Since the publication of the first edition of *Women Workers in the Second World War*, interest in the impact of the war on women has grown. Thames TV/Channel 4 devoted an episode of 'People's War' to women and gave the issue a high profile in the other programmes in the series, and numerous local history and oral history groups have set about collecting women's personal reminiscences of wartime.[1] Two collections of essays concerned with the question of the nature of the social changes which the war promoted have been published: Harold Smith's *War and Social Change* and Arthur Marwick's *Total War and Social Change*.[2] In both, the impact of the Second World War on British women is discussed. Smith argues that wartime change was superficial and temporary and that in 1945 women wanted to get back to how things were in the 1930s, to which my reply in Marwick's volume was that, although there was no revolution in women's status overall, particular groups of women did experience changes, though not necessarily improvements, in their position. For example older and married women's participation rates in paid employment rose during the war and were sustained afterwards, largely through the expansion of part-time work as a consequence of experimentation with it during the war, as a way of meeting the labour shortage. And as far as personal change was concerned, there is inescapable evidence in auto-biographical testimony that numerous women felt that their lives had been transformed during the war, even if things went 'back to normal' afterwards.

The latter point has led to further questions of two sorts. One is to inquire more closely into the impact of the 1939–45 war on women's personal lives and how it compared with women's experiences during the First World War, only 25 years earlier. These are the themes of *Out of the Cage* written jointly by myself and Gail Braybon.[3] We constructed our comparative analysis from as many personal accounts as we could find, seeking answers from them to questions concerning the changes wrought by the war in the workplace, at home, in patterns of courtship and marriage, and in women's health. The other area of inquiry concerns what women learned from the Second World War, in three senses. Firstly, were new types of education and training available to women during the war, and if there were changes in them, were they permanent? Secondly, if women learned new skills, how useful

were they to them? Did they fit them on a long-term basis for types of work they would not have been able to do before the war, or were they simply acquired 'for the duration' and never used again? Thirdly, many women recall the disruption of war vividly, including leaving home, mixing with new types of people in unfamiliar environments, being in danger and managing seemingly impossible combinations of tasks. What did this teach women about themselves as women? Did it reinforce age-old expectations, or did it release women with new and different views as to their potential into the post-war world of the forties and fifties?

These questions indicate that, in spite of the growing number of books and articles, interesting and important aspects of the relationship between women, war, and social change have yet to be explored. This is the place to raise rather than answer such questions.[4] But it is perhaps not arrogant to suggest that *Women Workers in the Second World War*, like Gail Braybon's equivalent volume on the First World War[5] which is also being published in a new paperback edition, provides an essential base from which such excursions can take place. As one of its reviewers argued,[6] *Women Workers in the Second World War* is the first book to set out the basic questions concerning the possible ways the Second World War may have altered women's position in society, in terms of capitalist and patriarchal relations, and to investigate the role that official policy played in stimulating or retarding such changes. It also broke new ground methodologically in seeking to explore not only the tensions among officials, but also the responses of women themselves to official policy, through sources such as the diverse materials of the Mass-Observation Archive and the more narrowly focused data collected by the Central Office of Information's Wartime Social Survey.

This book takes as its subject matter wartime policies in the areas of mobilisation for war work, child care, shopping, working hours, and 'dilution' at work. The analysis developed here suggests possible approaches to some of the questions raised above about what women learned from the war. Firstly, it is likely that there was conflict among policy makers and others in a position to influence the way women were deployed at work, about how far changes in education and training should go, and about the degrees of skill which women should acquire. Secondly, policy makers with an interest in perpetuating the conventional distribution of opportunities between the sexes are likely to have pressed for change to be as superficial and temporary as was compatible with meeting the emergency. Others are likely to have seen

economic advantages in deeper or more lasting change, though the permanence of any change is likely to have depended on circumstantial expedience rather than commitment to a reduction of the grip of patriarchal structures on society. Research will put these ideas to the test. My feeling about this second edition[7] however, is that though much new work has been done and much remains to be done, *Women Workers in the Second World War* provides both a theoretical framework and substantive analysis from which future research may launch itself into new areas.

Notes

1. Thames TV/Channel 4 'People's War', screened Autumn 1986 and repeated Autumn 1988; P. Schweitzer, L. Hilton, and J. Moss (Age Exchange Theatre Trust) (eds), *What Did You Do in the War, Mum?* (London, Age Exchange, 1985); J. Schwitzer and K. Thompson (Hornsey Historical Society) 'Children and Young People in Wartime', *Oral History Journal* 15, no. 2, Autumn 1987; Pat Ayers, *Women at War. Liverpool Women 1939–45*, History and Society of Merseyside Series, (Liverpool, Liver Press, 1988); Kath Price, *What did you do in the War, Mam? Women Steelworkers at the Consett Iron Company during the Second World War* (Open University, Northern Region, December 1984).

2. H. Smith (ed.), *War and Social Change. British Society in the Second World War* (Manchester University Press, 1986); A. Marwick (ed.), *Total War and Social Change* (London, Macmillan, 1988). *See also*: M.R. Higonett, J. Jenson *et al.* (eds), *Behind the Lines. Gender and the Two World Wars* (Yale University Press, 1987), a collection of essays on women in the two world wars in France, Britain, Germany and the USA; D'Ann Campbell, *Women at War with America: Private lives in a Patriotic Era* (Harvard University Press, 1984).

3. G. Braybon and P. Summerfield, *Out of the Cage. Women's Experiences in Two World Wars* (London, Pandora, 1987).

4. See my forthcoming article, 'What Women Learned from the Second World War', to be included in Roy Lowe (ed.), 'Education and the Second World War: Studies in Schooling and Social Change', Special Issue, *History of Education*, Autumn 1989.

5. G. Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War. The British Experience* (London, Croom Helm, 1981; paperback, Routledge, 1989).

6. T. Sharp, *International Affairs* 16, no. 4, autumn 1985: 698–9.

7. The main changes which I have made in this edition consist in the correction of minor errors and the updating of references, notably to the Mass-Observation Archive's Topic Collections and Diaries, which were in the process of being catalogued when I consulted them.

1 INTRODUCTION

Women, war and social change have been subjects of interest and debate since the 1960s. Betty Friedan and, later, Juliet Mitchell argued that women's lives were profoundly changed for the better during the Second World War, because of the need for women's labour and the readiness of the state to intervene to release them from their homes for war work. After the war, they claimed, in both the United States and the United Kingdom, the reverse occurred. Women were not wanted in the labour force, state provisions were removed and a cultural offensive was launched to return women to domesticity.[1] Arthur Marwick argued against such views that some changes in women's experiences during the war have been exaggerated. He pointed for example to enduring ways in which femininity was represented and argued that conscription affected relatively few women. On the other hand, following the approach of Richard Titmuss in the 1950s, he argued that 'total' war inevitably altered some aspects of women's lives and that, contrary to the view that wartime changes were reversed after the war, women were rewarded for their participation with permanent changes, notably in terms of state provision for child care, access to men's jobs and equal pay. He argued that, above all, women gained in 'self confidence', a difficult proposition to verify historically.[2]

The interpretation developed here differs from those of both Friedan and Mitchell, and Marwick. In a nutshell, my argument is that, in spite of challenge and expectation of change during the war, continuity with pre-war attitudes and practices towards women was considerable in the areas of both domestic work and paid employment. In exploring these aspects of women's lives in wartime I have concentrated on state policy. This is both because the earlier debate was conducted in terms of its effects and because before investigating attitudes towards women during the war more widely I felt a need to clarify the meaning for women of the extension of the government's reach into social life demanded by the Second World War. It was, after all, a conflict not just between armies but, as the original expounders of the concept 'total war' put it, between the entire productive capacities and therefore civilian populations of the protagonists. It rapidly became apparent that there was not one but a set of policies towards women and that they could not be treated as 'background' separate from other

attitudes, but were themselves a vital focus for ideas about women's place in social relations. The state was not, as I had assumed, a set of neutral structures. Wartime ministries were highly active brokers, mediating between entrenched views about women held in and out of government and the pressures of the war economy for ever-increasing numbers of women workers and maximum production. The deals achieved were enormously important in determining the extent to which these pressures were allowed to change gender divisions at home and at work during the war.

The focus of this book is, therefore, the making and implementation of official policy towards women during the Second World War. The Ministry of Labour and National Service is prominent, because of all government ministries it had the greatest responsibility for designing and implementing policies for the mobilisation of women. It is of course important to understand the context in which the MOL was working, so Chapter 2 outlines the history of women in the period before the war, concentrating on women's varied experiences in paid employment and in the home. The MOL met considerable problems in trying to move women from one type of job, whether in or out of the home, to another which counted as 'war work'. Chapter 3 looks at these difficulties and at the efforts of the MOL to reconcile mobilisation with conventional expectations about women's roles in the context of evidence about women's own attitudes to being mobilised.

Its experiences during the year 1940/41 forced upon the MOL the understanding that mobilisation could not be accomplished without taking account of the real work done by women in the home and it looked to other government ministries and outside interest groups to co-operate in the development of policies which would relieve women of all or some of this work. This process of negotiation, and the experiments which accompanied it, made public a conventionally private area. But the strength of the expectation that the domestic was a private zone was reflected in the great hesitation of government ministries and of groups like local authorities, retailers and industrial employers over assuming responsibility for any domestic activity. Thus the Ministry of Health and its local officers had very definite ideas about the limitations of their role in child care and about the correct place in it of the mother and the home and the Ministry of Food was more concerned to protect the interests of retailers than to promote the relief of the work of shopping. Industrial employers too were loath to involve themselves in domestic work of any sort and were wary even of changing the hours of work required of their workers to accommodate the

time demanded by domestic work. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 examine the interplay between the assumptions of these groups about domestic work and the need to mobilise women and to sustain their productivity at work, in the three areas of child care, shopping and the hours of work.

In all three, principles were established which could have led to profound changes. Child care could have been transformed by the principle of collective responsibility embodied in wartime nurseries. Shopping and cooking could have been altered by new retailing practices in which the shop did the work for its 'members' and by the provision made by employers and local authorities for collective feeding. The gender identity of domestic work could have been changed by the recognition of the socially necessary labour demanded by the home, embodied in new ways of arranging working hours for men as well as women in industry. But although the logic of mobilisation of women for war pointed towards these goals, the steps actually taken contained no more than the seeds of change. The strength of conventional expectations within the government ministries concerned and among groups outside, including some women themselves, was such that change in every area of domestic responsibility was heavily constrained, in spite of interventions from those who saw change as desirable.

Finally, just as mobilisation put 'at risk' the gender division embodied in domestic work, so it created potential for change in the sexual division of labour within industrial work. Chapter 7 investigates the policy of 'dilution' of male by female labour, which was orchestrated by the MOL, though conducted by employers and trade unionists. The purpose of dilution was to promote the absorption of women into the industrial structure and the release of men into the armed forces. It could have broken down the division of 'men's' from 'women's' work, and the differentials in pay and status between them. In fact its implementation put into sharp focus the question of the desirable place of women in the workforce from the points of view of employers and male workers. The conflict arising from it demonstrates the tenacity with which industrial employers held on to the idea of the inferiority of women as a weapon which could be used against both men and women workers in order to cheapen labour. But this conflict had another outcome. By the end of the war some male trade unionist leaders spoke as though they had moved away from adherence to gender-based interests and understood men and women at work to have a common interest in job opportunities and equal pay. This would have been an important shift in trade union thinking but evidence

about the practice of both the skilled and the general trade unions towards women throughout the war suggests that it was, like earlier demands from men for equal pay, a position adopted in order to protect the male rate and job, in fact underpinned by the conventional assumption that the two sexes had unequal rights of access to and remuneration for work.

This then is the shape of the book. Its theme is that the war economy placed the government in a position in which it had to make decisions about changing women's roles at work and at home. In doing so government ministries had to work with those groups whose own practices would be affected by changes in women's role. They included local authorities, retailers, industrial employers and trade unionists. The interests in and assumptions about women's place in social relations of each group were 'flushed out' by this process, in the sense that policy-making demanded that they be given overt expression. My conclusion is that these assumptions were remarkably resilient, to the extent that they profoundly constrained the provisions made for the changes demanded by the circumstances of war.

There is currently a debate among Marxists and feminists as to whether women's unequal position in society can be explained more adequately by reference to the structures of capitalism or patriarchy. Put simply, the analysis of women in capitalism depicts women as specially exploited workers. Capital requires them to be reproducers of both children and male labour power within the family and by virtue of this role they are available as a low paid and casual workforce should they be required in the labour market.[3] According to the analysis of patriarchy women work within the family not primarily for capital but for men. Under the marriage contract women work without remuneration, for their keep alone. Since the material basis of their existence in a patriarchal society is unpaid work within the family, marriage and family work (or the prospect of it) dominate women's lives, even when they perform paid work outside the home.[4]

The Second World War was clearly a time when women were needed in the labour market. The analysis of women's place in capitalism would lead one to expect that alternative arrangements would be made for domestic work so that women's entry into paid work could be facilitated, at least temporarily. The analysis of patriarchy, on the other hand, suggests that any arrangement which threatened the performance by women of unpaid work within the family and their dependence upon marriage, such as collective child care, or alternatives to shopping and cooking, or equality of hours, pay and opportunities at work,

would be intolerable to men and would therefore be resisted. What follows is an interpretation of the history of women in the Second World War not just as the story of an interplay between the need to mobilise women and conventional expectations about their roles, but also as a moment of conflict between two modes of production, capitalist and patriarchal, which created considerable tension within the state since it represented not one side or the other, but both.

The research on which this book is based is of course limited in various ways. In particular, though concerned with the mobilisation of women for war, I do not deal with their recruitment for, and work in, voluntary organisations (e.g. the Women's Voluntary Service), nor the women's military services (the Auxiliary Territorial Service, the Women's Auxiliary Air Force and the Women's Royal Naval Service), nor the Women's Land Army, but I concentrate on women in industrial work. Research into all these areas is important for developing a complete picture of women in the Second World War and is, I hope, in progress.

A second limitation relates to sources of women's own reactions to and perceptions of war and the policies associated with it. Women's responses were vital to the development of policy and for this reason were investigated, interpreted and used by many of the different groups involved in, or trying to influence, policy-making. The evidence of women's own feelings which is used here belongs in the main 'within policy' since most of it comes from these official or semi-official observers of the wartime lives of women, who all had their own particular reasons for collecting and interpreting evidence in the way they did. This was particularly so of the various government ministries concerned, but also applies to bodies surveying public opinion and behaviour, such as the Wartime Social Survey[5] and Mass-Observation[6] and a motley of individual commentators. There is still great scope for constructing a history of women in the Second World War from women's own accounts of their wartime experiences, using both oral history and the wealth of wartime diaries and letters in the Mass-Observation Archive.[7] Such research would also provide insights into the mythologising of the war and women's part in it which has taken place since 1945.

Finally, official policy provides only one angle of vision on continuity and change in attitudes to women during the Second World War. Other possible sites of study include the labour movement, the feminist movement and the mass media. Some of these have been developed in other contexts, for instance by Gail Braybon in her

important research into the attitudes to working women of members of the organised labour and feminist movements in the First World War,[8] and by Leila Rupp in her work on propaganda to women in the US and Germany in the Second World War.[9] Research in each of these areas in the British context in the Second World War needs to be undertaken. I hope that the concentration here on the government as a nerve centre in which the wartime pressure to maximise productivity and the restraining influence of patriarchal expectations about women's place met, clashed and had to be reconciled will form a useful context for such future research.

Notes

1. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1965); Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1975), pp. 227–31.

2. Arthur Marwick, *Britain in the Century of Total War: War, Peace and Social Change, 1900–1967* (Macmillan, London, 1968), pp. 291–3; *War and Social Change in the Twentieth Century: A Comparative Study of Britain, France, Germany, Russia and the US* (Macmillan, London, 1974), pp. 159–61; 'Women's Fightback on the Home Front', *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 10 September 1982.

3. *Inter alia*, Wally Secombe, 'The Housewife and Her Labour under Capitalism', *New Left Review*, 83, 1974; Jean Gardiner, 'Women's Domestic Labour', *New Left Review*, 89, 1975; M. Coulson, B. Magas and H. Wainwright, 'The Housewife and Her Labour under Capitalism: A Critique', *New Left Review*, 89, 1975; P. Smith, 'Domestic Labour and Marx's Theory of Value' in A. Kuhn and A.M. Wolpe, *Feminism and Materialism* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1978).

4. Christine Delphy, 'The Main Enemy: A Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression', *Explorations in Feminism*, 3 (WRRC, 1977); for the debate on patriarchy see, *inter alia*, articles by Z.R. Eisenstein and H. Hartmann in Z.R. Eisenstein (ed.), *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* (Monthly Review Press, New York, 1979); V. Beechey, 'On Patriarchy', *Feminist Review*, 3, 1979; S. Walby, 'Women's Unemployment, Patriarchy and Capitalism', *Socialist Economic Review*, 1983.

5. The Wartime Social Survey was part of the Central Office of Information, a government department. It responded to requests from different departments to report in depth, on the basis of population samples, on social matters vital to policy-making during the war. Three reports, duplicated for internal circulation but never published, were particularly concerned with women during the war: 'An Investigation of the Attitudes of Women, the General Public and ATS Personnel to the Auxiliary Territorial Service', New Series No. 5, October 1941; 'Women's Registration and Call Up', New Series No. 15, March–April 1942; G. Thomas, 'Women at Work: The Attitudes of Working Women Toward Postwar Employment and Some Related Problems. An Inquiry Made for the Office of the Minister of Reconstruction', New Series Regional 1.3, June 1944.

6. Mass-Observation was an organisation set up in 1937 by Tom Harrisson, an anthropologist, and Charles Madge, a sociologist. Its purpose was to observe

and investigate public behaviour and opinion. It is a major source in the following chapters, since it was extremely active during the war, both as an observer (in its own right as well as for individuals or organisations who commissioned it) and as a campaigner in 'the war to win the war', i.e. the struggle against suspected inefficiency (or at worst defeatism) in government or industry, in pursuit of full mobilisation and production for war. In this, a major concern was with the use of womanpower, hence the prominence given to women in M-O's publications such as *People in Production* (1942) and the abundance of material on women in the file reports, diaries, observations and replies to directives held in the archive.

7. M-O's diaries are beginning to be published. See, for example, R. Broad and S. Fleming (eds.), *Nella Last's War: A Mother's Diary 1939–45* (Falling Wall Press, Bristol, 1981). References in this book are to the originals in the M-O Archive.

8. G. Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War: The British Experience* (Croom Helm, London, 1981).

9. L.J. Rupp, *Mobilizing Women for War, German and American Propaganda 1939-1945* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1978).

2 PRE-WAR

The pre-war history of women's paid employment and domestic work forms the setting in which the mobilisation of women for war took place and therefore has a vital place in this account of women in the Second World War. Some of the changes occurring in women's employment patterns between the wars, notably women's expanding proportions in industries like engineering and metals, presaged much more rapid developments on the same lines during the war, while other features, such as the dominance of textiles and domestic service, were reversed. Clarification of the interwar employment trends is important for discussion of the transfer of women to wartime jobs and their fortunes within them. Equally, the characteristics of domestic life and work for women, the ways it was touched by official policy before the war and the effects upon women of combining paid work with domestic labour constitute the background to the complex process of recruiting women from unpaid work in the home and official attempts to make provision for the domestic sphere during the war.

Employment Trends

The 1931 Census reported that a slightly higher proportion of women was in paid employment in 1931 than in 1921, 34.2 per cent compared with 33.7 per cent, representing a total of 6,265,000 women. Domestic service still dominated the picture, absorbing over one-third of women in paid work in 1931. Probably because of high levels of unemployment in some industries in the 1920s the number of domestic servants rose from 1.8 million in 1921 to 2.1 million in 1931,[1] in spite of middle-class complaints about the servant shortage and a strong current of dissatisfaction among working women.[2] The work was low paid, commanding only 5s to 10s a week for school leavers and 15s to £1 for women over 18, accommodation was often poor, hours were long and social life was severely restricted.[3] Most servants were single and two-thirds were under the age of 35. Wherever they could, women sought alternatives, though in doing so they often confronted prejudice. For example women made redundant by munitions firms at the end of the First World War who rejected offers of domestic placements

because they wanted to stay in engineering were threatened with refusal of unemployment benefit and lambasted in the press.[4] Domestic service was seen as a 'natural' sphere of employment for women and it was repeatedly recommended, in and out of Parliament, as a solution to women's unemployment between the wars.[5]

In some areas domestic service was the only employment opportunity for women, but even in places where there was other work it remained important as a fall-back when preferred jobs failed, as the case of a young Londoner, Edith Hall, illustrates. Between the ages of 14 and 17 she worked in sequence as a production line worker in an electric lamp factory, maid of all work, daily maid, driller at His Master's Voice, shopgirl, maid of all work, maid in a large household, production line worker in a sweet factory and tea-trolley girl in another factory.[6] As this suggests, the industrial work available for young women often required no training and did not lead to permanent employment. This was less true of the minority of industries in which women were numerically dominant or formed a large proportion of the workforce, such as clothing, textiles, boots and shoes and pottery work. Here, training, acquired through the family, and relatively regular employment at least until marriage were the norm.[7]

However, textiles was a contracting industry in the 1920s and 1930s, and expansion was occurring in the so-called new industries such as commercial services, food, drink and tobacco, distribution, chemicals, vehicles, transport, engineering and metals. Not only did the numbers of women employed in these industries grow, but the proportion also rose, notably in those industries in which very small numbers of women had traditionally been employed, such as engineering, metals, gas, water and electricity and transport, implying that women were making greater gains than men from their expansion. For example, in engineering the proportion of women rose from 6.5 per cent to 10.3 per cent between 1923 and 1939. Analysing these trends the economist C.E.V. Leser wrote that they meant 'not so much that women took men's jobs as that women-employing sections of the industries concerned gained at the expense of men-employing sections'.[8]

Contemporary evidence supports this suggestion of the expansion of women's employment within a sex-segregated pattern. An official inquiry into the distribution of women in industry undertaken in 1929 gives details of the rising number of women in the light metal trades, pottery, bread and biscuits, tobacco, electrical fittings and scientific apparatus. The explanation offered, and frequently repeated elsewhere, was that women were inherently suited to the new, simplified processes