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'Is It To Be Back to the Kitchen?'

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There is a good deal of talk just now about what they are going to do after the war with the women: Must they be made to return to the home? Are they going to take them out of the factory, the office, off the land?

To me, this sort of discussion is very disquieting. It makes me think we've already forgotten the reasons why we're fighting this war. Aren't we fighting for liberty, for democracy and to eradicate fascism and Nazism in every form? Surely we don't mean liberty and democracy for men only? Indeed, I hope women will enjoy the liberty which they have helped to win and be permitted to choose what they want to do. Do you remember that one of the first things the Nazis did when they came to power was to put women out of the professions, out of the factories? They barred the doors of the universities to all but a few women and they severely limited women's opportunities for any kind of higher education; by these methods the Nazis forced women back to the home – back to the kitchen. I can't help thinking that if any attempt is made here after the war to force women back to the home, it will be proof that facism still has strong roots in Australia.

Women should not be forced to return to the home, but they should be free to return there if they wish to. I don't like what's implied in the suggestion that women will have to be forced back into the home – that's a slight not only on home life, but also on the work of bearing and rearing children, don't you agree? The greatest happiness for many women is to care for a home and to raise a family. The trouble in the past has been that society has failed to make it possible for all the women who wanted to have homes and raise families to do so.

And while we're on the subject of women in the home, I think that this life could be made attractive to many more women by developing amenities and customs that render home life less of a prison than it is to many women with young families. Just think of the prospects of family life, as lived under present conditions, to a clever, energetic, bright young girl. Soon after marriage there will be a baby, and from then on she cannot move unencumbered. The more babies, the harder she has to work and the greater her restrictions. If we want more women to choose home life, we must make home life less hard. But how can we do this? Well, we can have crèches and kindergartens and supervised playgrounds where children can be left in safe surroundings. Then we must change many of our conventions. Why should a woman do all the work in the home? Why can't we, for example, have community kitchens and laundries? If a woman wants to work outside the home, why shouldn't she? Let her be free to choose. There's just as much and more reason to believe that the best interests of her family and of society will be served by giving a woman a free choice than by expecting her to adhere to a lot of worn-out conventions.

Anyway, the contribution that women can make to public life through the professions or in industry is important. Women in the past have been very much hampered by their inexperience in these spheres. They haven't had the opportunity to qualify for representative positions or positions of control and direction. In other words, because of the lack of

opportunity to gain experience they're denied the opportunity of exerting any influence in framing policies or directing public affairs.

I am pretty sure that many women will remain in industry after the war, for we shall be in need of more skilled hands rather than less. Remember, we couldn't exert a full war effort until women were absorbed into industry; therefore, how can we exert a full peace program without making use of their services? Everyone knows how short we are of houses and hospitals and offices, of furniture, of bathroom and kitchen fittings, of curtains, wallpaper, clothing, foodstuffs, in fact, hundreds of commodities. Can you imagine the tremendous amount of work that will be required? Not only have we to make up the deficiency of the war years, but we must provide all these amenities on a much larger scale after the war. There were large numbers of people before the war who had no homes, not even enough to eat; hospital accommodation was inadequate, and so on. Although all these could have been provided for a few million pounds, we believed we could not afford to better these conditions. It took a total war to show us what we could do with our own resources. If we can raise money for war we can raise it for peace, surely. It would be inexcusable in the future to condemn people to live under the conditions so many endured before the war.

Why is there so much opposition to women remaining in industry? The secret isn't far to seek. It's simply that they got paid less – they are cheap labour, certainly not, as so many have alleged, because they're weaker or less efficient. Unfortunately, because their labour is cheaper, women not only threaten the wage standards of men workers, but they also threaten the standard of living of all workers. The obvious and just way to avoid this is to give equal pay to men and women.

To put this in a nutshell, I believe that in a democratic, free society women should be at liberty to choose whether they will take up home life or work outside the home; that men and women should receive equal pay and equal opportunity; that home life should be made less of a tie and the burden of raising a family be lightened. If we can face these peacetime problems with the spirit of determination and conciliation with which we're facing our war problems, we may hope to solve them.