

Women's Wages

Official criticism of widely prevalent low-wage scales for working women was emphatically voiced last week by Miss Mary Anderson, chief of the Women's Bureau of the Federal Department of Labor, in her annual report to Secretary Frances Perkins.

It was based on an intensive study of women's working conditions made by Miss Anderson's bureau during 1936. Consultations with State labor authorities were carried on throughout the year. Field investigation of wages and hours of women's employment in the states of Arkansas, Tennessee, Delaware, West Virginia and Texas, where labor legislation is archaic. Distressing facts not only in regard to pay but actual physical working conditions were found in these States.

Miss Anderson's report made the serious charge that the substitution of lower-paid women for male workers "strikes a real blow at men's wages" by forcing all wages down.



Mary Anderson Would Help Women

For this reason, the report continued, "investigation of the wages paid to working women is of primary importance, and it must be continued so that eventually we may eliminate for all time the tendency to employ our women workers in sweatshops instead of in factories with good standards of wages, hours and working conditions."

To ameliorate conditions, Miss Anderson contemplates a threefold attack: (1) education of both men and women workers to the viewpoint that low standards for women are necessarily harmful to workers as a whole; (2) co-operation with employers to determine better technical set-ups for female employment; and (3) informing the public of discouraging and undesirable working conditions within various States and communities. Eventually it is hoped that such efforts will extend minimum wage legislation affecting women far beyond the 17 States in which it now prevails.

Miss Anderson is no stranger to the feminine employment problem. She came to the mid-western United States in the late '80's as a 16-year-old Swedish immigrant girl. Working variously as a household servant, garment seamstress and Chicago shoe factory employee, she fought her way up to prominence as a labor union representative. From that vantage, she stepped up to a job as organizer for the National Women's Trade Union League and traveled thousands of miles over every part of the United States.

When war broke out, Mary Anderson had all but lost the last trace of her Swedish accent and was a well-known, respected figure in women's industrial affairs. In 1918 she became assistant director of the Federal Women in Industry service. In 1919 she became a full director, and a year later became the head of the newly founded Women's Bureau. White-haired and 64, she has been re-appointed by every President since Wilson.