

WOMEN AND THE LABOR FORCE

The following article was written by Janice Hollender, statistical technician for the Research and Analysis Section of the Alaska Department of Labor. The information was derived from publications of the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Alaska Equal Employment Opportunity Office as well as various magazine and newspaper articles.

At the close of International Women's Year it seems appropriate to review the impact of women on the labor force in the United States as well as in Alaska. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, the number of women employed in paid positions outside their homes has continued to rise over the past twelve years and with more women working year-round at full-time jobs, their attachment to the labor force is growing stronger. Mid 1975 figures reveal nearly 37 million women in the country's labor force, which represents about 40 percent of the female population in the United States and 46 percent of all women 16 years of age and over. A growth of 10 million workers has occurred in the number of employed women between 1962 and 1974 while the proportion of women in the labor force over the same period of time has risen from 34 percent to 40 percent. However, this increase in numbers has been accompanied by a decrease in earning power. According to U.S. Department of Commerce information, in 1956 the median earnings of full-time, year-round women workers was \$2,828, 63 percent of that for similarly defined men. In 1964 this decreased to 59 percent of men's \$6,282 median and in 1974 fell even further to 57 percent of the men's \$12,152 median figure. This is not only due to the different types of jobs women most often hold but also to discrimination in pay for similar types of employment.

Despite recent equal rights legislation and increasing pressure from women demanding the opportunity to prove their capabilities in more responsible and traditionally male-dominated positions, the vast majority of women remain in jobs on the bottom rungs of the economic ladder. The largest employment gains in the 1962 to 1974 period have occurred in occupations in which women have historically been more likely to be employed. The clerical field has registered the largest gain of 4.8 million women, their percentage jumping from 70 percent of total employees in this occupation in 1962 to almost 80 percent in 1974. A substantial portion

of the overall increase in the number of women in the labor force can be attributed to the rapid rate of growth of women's employment in the clerical field. Though they hold an overwhelming majority of these positions, the average weekly earnings of full time women clerical workers is 65 percent of the average weekly earnings of men in full time clerical positions. In Alaska, women represent 38 percent of the total state employees but provide 93 percent of state office and clerical workers. Minority women, handicapped by fewer educational and training opportunities as well as being faced with double discrimination comprise 5 percent of total state employees but represent a disproportionate 12 percent of state office and clerical workers.

During the 1962 to 1974 period, professional workers and service workers, exclusive of private household workers, also registered large gains nationally in the employment of women. These two occupations grew by more than 70 percent with an increase of 4.6 million women. In Alaska, 38 percent of all employed women and 43 percent of all employed minority women are involved in these two occupations. Of all employed minority women 32 percent are in the service occupations, excluding private household workers. Yet national figures show that women's earnings are 64 percent of men's as service workers and 73 percent of men's as professional workers.

In Alaska where women represent 39 percent of the labor force and 38 percent of the total state employees they provide only 13 percent of state officials and administrators. Minority women representing 6 percent of the labor force and 5 percent of total state employees provide only 0.2 percent of state officials and administrators. This percentage of women decreases to 5 percent as the wage rates increase to the above \$40,000 a year level.

Although women workers continue to be concentrated in teaching, secretarial and sales clerking

fields the passage of equal employment legislation in the mid 1960's has contributed nationally to increase their proportional share in a number of occupations in which few have worked in the past. From 1962 to 1974 women in the professional occupations have increased from 36 percent to 40 percent; physicians and surgeons have gone from 6 percent to 10 percent and lawyers and judges have risen from 3 percent to 7 percent of the total. In part this has been the result of increased enrollment of women in professional schools as women begin to recognize their own capabilities and see themselves in nontraditional roles. In a similar vein women's participation has risen on the national scene from 19 percent to 24 percent in accounting; from 27 percent to 35 percent in personnel and labor relations work; from 19 percent to 31 percent in college and university teaching; from 4 percent to 8 percent in drafting and from 12 percent to 37 percent in bus driving.

Women involved in the Alaska pipeline construction activity are an obvious example of women stepping out of traditional roles to assume positions once considered man's domain. A small number of them can be observed working in duties running the full gamut of tasks including operating construction equipment.

According to a recent article in the Wall Street Journal, companies are increasingly discovering that quit rates, turnover and absenteeism among women are dropping in comparisons with levels in prior years as well as when measured against levels for male employees. This is primarily in response to changing attitudes of companies towards women, whether these changes occur under legal pressure from women employees no longer willing to take the back seat to men or through the companies from their own enlightenment. In part, this has led to the recognition that unreliability and job-hopping among workers is related more to job satisfaction, salary, occupational level and age than to sex.

Women are assuming an increasingly important role in the labor force and are demanding equality in wage distribution as well as the opportunity for higher salaried and more challenging positions. Their contributions have had and will continue to have a beneficial effect on the economy and structure of this nation as a whole.

ALASKA'S LABOR MARKET AREA FOR OCTOBER

Employment — Unemployment: Seasonal declines in most industries followed the normal pattern for October as employment dropped by 4,600 from September. Unemployment increased by 1,200 resulting in a civilian labor force of 182,900. Over the year, all industries showed increases with the exception of manufacturing.

Mining: The production of petroleum products held steady over the month with the small drop of 100 attributable to declines in metal mining and sand and gravel pit activity typical for this time of year.

Construction: Heavy construction, dominated this year by the Trans-Alaska Pipeline project, showed little change over the month. Building construction and special trade contractors registered most of the month-to-month drop of 1,500 as sub-freezing temperatures and early snowfalls curtailed some outside activity. As of October 27, the pipeline was 48.7 percent completed, the pump stations were 20.3 percent completed, and the terminal at Valdez was 21.2 percent completed. Alyeska Pipeline Service Company officials indicated that work was progressing on schedule, in spite of the ice blockade at Prudhoe Bay which prevented a number of supply barges from reaching their destination. High priority cargo was rerouted by overland transportation and massive airlifts.

Manufacturing: With every other industry in the State showing growth over the year, manufacturing's decline reflected the dismal salmon fishing season and soft market for lumber and wood products. Processing of king crab was holding up well with the October 1975 catch up thirty percent over last October. Pulp employment returned to its normal level after some short term layoffs in September.

Transportation, Communication and Utilities: Employment held steady over the month with gains and losses nearly balancing out. A net drop of 100 was registered with air transportation gaining 100 and other transportation and utilities declining 200.

Trade: Total employment remained at the same level as last month with some internal variations occurring. Eating and drinking places continued the downward