

Sisters under the apron—Yesterday's war worker becomes today's housewife.

What's Become of Rosie the Riveter?

Her numbers reduced by millions since July, she is involved in a tremendous reshuffling.

By FRIEDA S. MILLER,

Director, Women's Bureau, United States Department of Labor

WHEN a character captures the imagination of the American public, his ups and downs are followed with an interest that sometimes surpasses avidity. Thus it is with Rosie the Riveter, who symbolized to America the effort of all women workers toward winning the war.

Today, there is little doubt that Rosie and her industrial sisters are fading from the scene of heavy manufacturing. Since V-E Day, about a million women production workers have left the nation's aircraft plants, shipyards, ammunition factories and other industries that produced so prodigiously for war. The sharpest decline, of course, followed victory over Japan, but the trend had started even before V-E Day in the shipyards and aircraft plants, large wartime employers of women among the durable goods industries.

As a result of this exodus of women factory workers, the public is asking: Where have Rosie and the rest of the heroines of the war production front gone? What are they planning to do now that the men are taking over? Is it true that these women, despite their gallant war service, are finding factory doors to heavy industry closed to them?

Positive answers to all of these questions are not easy in a period of readjustment. Rosie and her sisters, like millions of men and women, have become involved in the most tremendous reshuffling of

human resources, both occupationally and geographically, that the country ever has known. Some answers, however, have emerged with a certain clarity, and one of these is the whereabouts of Rosie the Riveter and the women for whom she became a wartime symbol.

Some of the former riveters and other industrial workers, wearied by the long grind of forty-eight hours and more per week and the exacting task of producing for war, are taking well-earned rests before putting out feelers about post-war jobs. Still others, particularly a number of the young women whose husbands have been demobilized from the armed services, have no definite plans. At the moment, they are waiting to see how their veteran husbands fare in the readjustments to civilian life.

IF the ex-GI can bring home enough pay in his weekly envelope to support a wife and establish a home, the former Rosies will at least have the chance to devote their entire time to homemaking—and some of them are sure to take it. On the other hand, if the husband wishes to

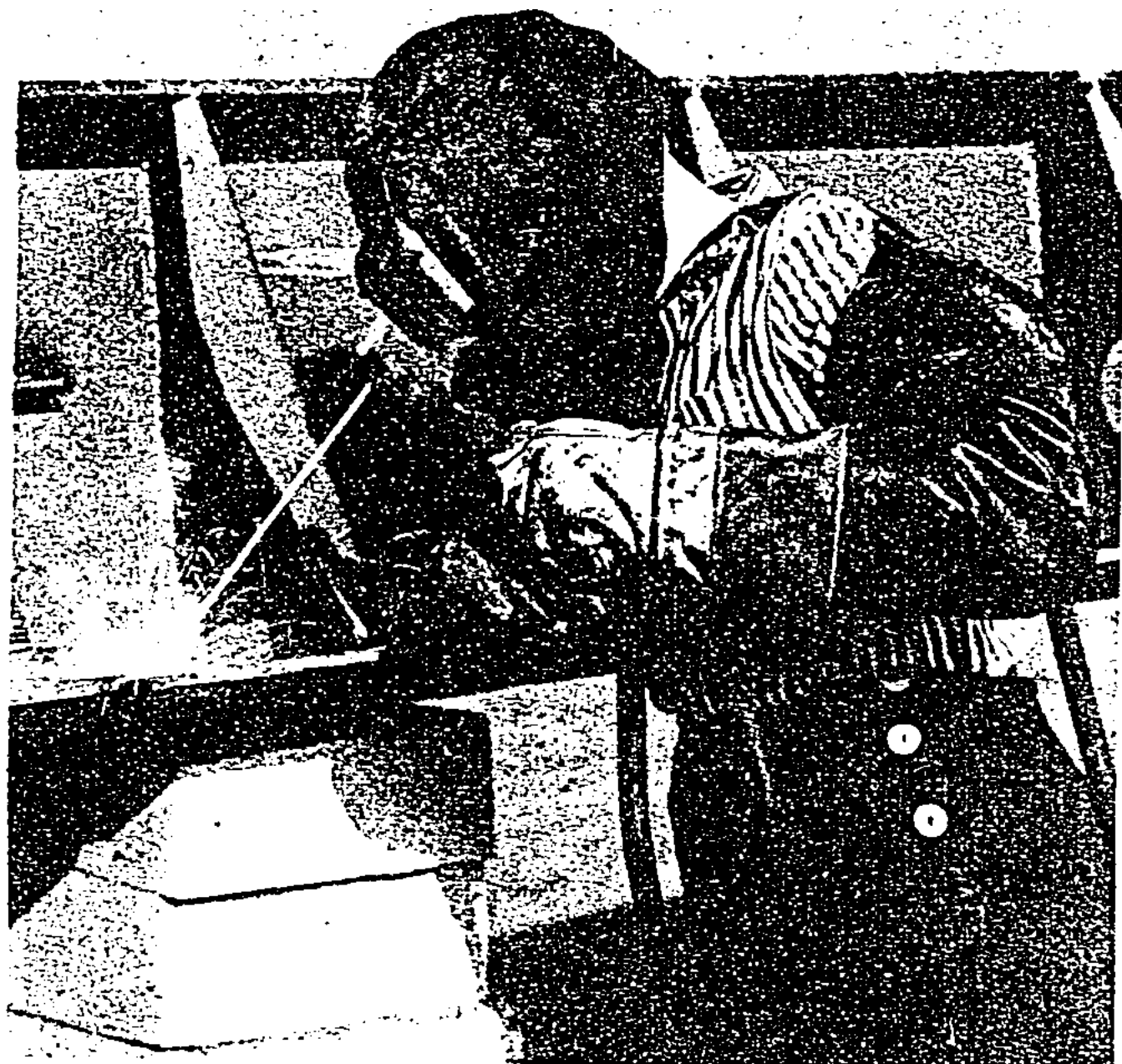
continue his education, start in business for himself, or for some reason or another does not immediately resume his bread-winning role, the wife may find her pay check badly needed. In that event, she probably will seek another job, though the job in all likelihood will not be similar to her wartime occupation, as disappointing as that fact will be—and has been to other displaced women war workers.

SOME of the wartime factory workers, of course, already have new jobs—in consumer-goods plants, laundries, stores, restaurants, hotels, beauty shops and other civilian services. From records of employment, however, this number is not large, for the employment of women in all types of work has decreased by more than 4 million since last July, or dropped from about 19½ million to around 15½ million. In view of this large decline, the number of women looking for work—about half a million, according to the latest estimate—is surprisingly small, only 40,000 more than last July.

In the light of the long-time trend of women's increasing participation in the

work life of the nation, this appears to be accounted for not by the fact that women as workers are showing a tendency to withdraw from paid employment but by certain characteristics of the present transitional period. Important among these are: (1) The reabsorption of returning service men; (2) the indecision of some workers, both men and women, concerning their future plans; (3) the lack of job opportunities commensurate with the skills and wages of displaced women; (4) the desire of some displaced workers to take a rest before looking for jobs; and (5) the expected voluntary withdrawal of large numbers of women who were duration workers. Other factors contributing to the decline in the number of women workers during the period from last July to the present were the withdrawal of seasonal workers and teenagers.

MUCH has been written and said about the fact that reconverted heavy industries are closing their doors, for the most part, to the very women they depended on during the war. This frequently has been referred to as marking "the end of industry's courtship of women workers." Undoubtedly, heavy industry no longer is courting the riveters, the welders and machine operators who helped to make victory possible, and in this fact may be reflected some of the prejudice that always has (Continued on Page 47)



When Winnie the Welder was helping to win the war.

Where's Rosie the Riveter?

(Continued from Page 21)

been leveled at women by certain sections of industry. The inference, however, that prejudice alone accounts for the trek of women from the war plants is both unfair and unsound.

PRIOR to the war, women were less than 1 per cent of the wage-earners in the shipbuilding industry. Women riveters, welders or crane operators would have been considered by some employers as fanciful as a tale from the "Arabian Nights." Yet, during the war, women production workers in commercial and Navy yards reached a peak of about 150,000. In the aircraft industry, which had only 4,000 women factory workers the week before the Pearl Harbor attack, the number rose to over 360,000, and women became more than a third of all workers producing such giants of the air as Liberators, B-29's, and the swift fighters that helped to spell victory.

Today, with peace at hand, our nation no longer needs these ships of war or the vast army of men and women who produced them. Women, relatively speaking, were newcomers to the shipyards and aircraft plants and, as such, were the first to feel the impact of cutbacks. Additionally, there were scores of factories that owed their very existence to war. Foremost among these were the ammunition plants, in which women formed more than 41 per cent of all workers. Obviously, many of these factories have no peacetime future.

WOMEN workers themselves, for the most part, are cognizant of the workings of the seniority system under which American industry operates. Since they generally were

the last to come, it came as no surprise to them that they were the first to go. Most of them, however, liked the new and shining factories of which they became a part. They liked the up-to-date equipment, the comfortable dressing rooms, the music that came to them through the loudspeaker system.

But more than the refinements, they liked the regular and higher pay that came in their weekly envelopes. It is in the pay that is being offered them with the current openings that they are most disappointed. This interest in the pay check is not peculiar to their sex. It is, as one woman riveter put it, "just the plain American desire to get ahead."

WOMEN workers do not want to get ahead at the expense of veterans. In fact, they never have regarded their work as a substitute for that of men. Their own record of achievement over a long period of years obviates that need or desire. Even before the war, they were a fourth of all the nation's employed persons, and a half or more of those engaged in domestic service, medical and other health services, educational services, telephone services, hotels and lodging places, limited price variety stores, general merchandise stores, and in the manufacture of apparel and accessories, tobacco, knit goods and miscellaneous products made from textiles.

Contrary to the opinion held by many persons, even during the height of our spectacular war production, the bulk of the nation's employed women were hard at work on the kinds of jobs women always had performed. Unsung and unheralded, millions of women did their part for victory by

(Continued on Following Page)

Where's Rosie the Riveter?

(Continued from Preceding Page)
staffing the stores, laundries, restaurants, consumer-goods plants and other establishments and industries that gave necessary underpinnings to war production. The needs of these women, as well as those of the displaced war workers, must be taken into account in the various plans that are made for women.

ROSIE THE RIVETER and her industrial coworkers, as it was pointed out at a recent Women's Bureau conference on the post-war employment problems of women, upgraded themselves during the war. They would like to retain some, if not all, of the gains. Because expanding opportunities for women appear to be in the extension of established services and in the development of new services that post-war America will want and need rather than in the old-line industries in which men have predominated, the industrial workers' gains may not be measured in terms of retaining their war-acquired skills. If America accepts the challenge, they can be measured in other terms: Wages that permit them to maintain the standards of living they already have achieved, hours of work that are conducive to health and decency standards, and working environments that are a far cry from those of some pre-war establishments.

CLOSELY related to the question of wages is the matter of equal pay, or objective rates based on the content of the job rather than on the sex of the worker. As Senator Wayne Morse, co-author of the pending Federal equal-pay legislation, has pointed out, the principle of equal pay goes far beyond being a matter of plain justice to women. Because it rests on a sound economic basis, such a practice promotes the general welfare of the community and the nation by promoting wage levels and sustaining the purchasing power of all concerned. Women's awareness of this fact is one of the reasons why they feel that we cannot afford the threat that unequal pay to them involves. They have a deep, natural interest in the welfare of their families and realize that every time a working man's income is reduced through the competition of workers who can be hired

at lower rates than those prevailing, the family of the man inevitably suffers a lower standard of living.

These needs of women workers have long existed, and for just as many years they have been recognized by individuals and agencies interested in the welfare of the wage-earning woman. Through concerted action notable gains have been made in minimum-wage legislation, in State equal-pay laws, and through other measures sponsored by unions and progressive employers. A great deal, however, remains to be done before Rosie the Riveter, Winnie the Welder, and other women of the war sorority of industrial workers will be content to return to the woman-employing fields that are characterized by substandard wages and unreasonably long hours.

These changes are needed not only for the sake of Rosie and other returning war workers but for the benefit of the thousands of women who stuck to their jobs in the service industries throughout the war. The plight of Rosie and her highly praised war companions may serve, however, to focus public attention on the issue. Club women, unions and other champions of women already have made considerable progress in this direction, and a few individual communities — though not nearly enough—are including women in their programs for post-war workers.

SECRETARY OF LABOR Schwellenbach, in an address before key representatives of more than 70 organizations who attended a recent Women's Bureau conference on the employment problems of women, summed up the needs of women workers and issued a challenge to post-war America when he said:

"Certain artificial restrictions that belong to a past age should not be allowed to handicap the contribution women can make . . . for instance, no bars should be erected against the employment of women, married or single, in work they can do under physically healthful conditions * * * no pay scales should discriminate against them. As members of a free society, women should be enabled to choose the way of life that permits them to make their fullest contribution to the world's upbuilding."