

# Protocol of a Meeting during which Hitler, Bormann, and Others Rejected Equal Pay for Women (April 25, 1944)

## Abstract

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The outbreak of war dramatically exacerbated the labor shortage that had already existed since the mid-thirties. Still, it was only in January of 1943 that German women were called upon to mobilize in support of the wartime economy. To the despair of many armaments functionaries, however, the recruitment of female workers proceeded tentatively and unevenly even then. In late April 1944, Hitler held a meeting attended by Martin Bormann, Dr. Robert Ley, and Fritz Sauckel, among others. The following protocol of April 25, 1944 (authored by Chief of the Reich Chancellery Hans-Heinrich Lammers) suggests that even at this critical juncture, Hitler was unwilling to let go of key ideological principles in favor of military-strategic considerations. Although women were needed in production, they were not to threaten the supremacy of men.

## Source

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[...]

Dr. Ley reported to the Führer as follows: In order to increase the work performance of women and thereby to enhance overall efficiency, i.e., to mobilize all labor reserves, it is necessary to equalize the wages of women with those of men on the principle of equal pay for equal work and equal results. The problem of the “social wage,” i.e., measuring the wage only according to *pure work performance*, but at the same time taking account of the worker’s position in the national community as a national comrade and state citizen (husband, father)—a problem which inevitably leads to the granting of different wages to men and women—must be ignored during the war in the interests of a massive increase in efficiency.

The Führer responded to the issue raised by Dr. Ley with the following fundamental statements:

“Wages in the national socialist state have two tasks to fulfill:

- a) To reward basic work performance.
- b) Wages have social tasks to fulfill, namely, their level must take into account the position of the employee within the national community. For this reason, the man whom the state requires to marry and start a family must be paid a higher wage than the man who is not married and than women. It is not acceptable to assess wages simply on the basis of work performance. For, if one did that, then one would have to pay a younger man, whose work performance is undoubtedly better than that of an older man, a higher wage than an older one. There can be no doubt, for example, that a young 25-year-old worker will achieve a considerably better work performance than a 50 to 60-year-old man. But, at the same time, as a father and in the light of his other contributions to the state, the latter must be given a higher wage than the former. Thus, if one operates on the basis of granting wages simply on the basis of work performance, one must reach the false conclusion that with increasing age wages must decrease.

To take the line, on the question of the relationship between male and female wages, that there should be “equal pay for equal work” is wrong. For, during the war, there is no basis of comparison for stating that the work performance of women is the same as that of men. The work performance of a woman cannot now be tested in relationship to a healthy man of average age working in peacetime, but only in relationship to the men currently working with women, namely, older men who are no longer fully

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capable and younger men whose performance is also less since they are not yet fit for combat. If one was to equate the wages of women with men then this would be in total contradiction to the national socialist principle of the maintenance of the national community. Men and, in particular, older men who are married and fathers, must be paid more than women in the interests of the national community for social reasons because they must make more sacrifices for the national community; in the main women simply have to look after themselves, whereas men have to care for their families and the national community. It is the national socialist ideal, which must be realized in peacetime, that only men should be the earners and that even the most humble worker should have a three-room flat for himself and his family. Women must then work at home in order to look after their families and their flats. If the work performance of family men is rated higher than that of women for social reasons, this does not represent a negative comment on women's work. Now, during the war, it is true that we have to get women to work, but in peacetime hopefully women in general can be removed from plants so that they can devote themselves to their families. Thus, even during the war, this national socialist ideal should only be breached as far as is absolutely necessary. One cannot anticipate a significant improvement in performance by equalizing the pay of men and women. Money is not worth as much as it used to be because there is a dearth of consumer goods which can be bought. An increase in women's wages would in practice simply mean strengthening the black market. If one wants to achieve a general improvement in performance, this can only be done by improving food supplies and the supply of the most important commodities. Unfortunately, this is impossible at the moment. There may indeed be cases in which justice requires that a woman should receive the same income as a man if she is engaged in typical men's work, e.g., that of a heavy or very heavy worker and if, in addition, she has to provide for children in place of a husband. But then, one should achieve equality not by increasing the basic wage, but through child allowances or, even better, through an appropriate reduction in taxes. For such a woman is contributing to the maintenance of the national community in the same way as a family man."

[...]

Finally, the Führer commented more or less as follows: "The principles I have outlined must be adhered to even during the war. Otherwise, we would pre-empt the implementation of our peacetime plans along national socialist lines; indeed, we would run into difficulties even during the war. For a complete equalization of female with male wages would inevitably result in the tendency for an increase in male wages to occur. Thus, we must stick to the existing regulation which does not exclude the possibility *in particular, exceptional cases* for a female wage to be equalized with a male wage. A complete equalization of female wages with male wages would ignore male contributions to the national community, which I wish to avoid at all costs."

In addition, the following may be noted:

In the course of the meeting mention was made of the fact that in a number of plants, e.g., in high precision engineering, men and women carry out the same relatively light and clean work side by side. Dr. Ley remarked that in such cases unequal pay seemed unjust. The Führer commented that in such plants where typical women's work was carried out only women should be employed, since then not only would there be no inequality in wages but the men who had been working there hitherto could be transferred to work which was more appropriate for them. The Führer added that one must start thinking whether, when peace comes, certain occupations should be banned for men, e.g., the occupation of waiter, which could just as easily be carried out by women, or this was even more the case with women's hairdressing, for it was a thoroughly undignified occupation for a man to be a women's hairdresser. Above all, one could employ female teachers to teach children up to a certain age.

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