*A British Model during the Great War : Beatrice Webb on the Equality of Wages***,**

Corinne M. Belliard, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS, aris) [c.m.belliard@wanadoo.fr](mailto:c.m.belliard@wanadoo.fr)

**Abstract:** During this First Conference of the European Labour Network, I would like to focus on a feminine reflection on the equality of men and women’s wages put forward by Beatrice Webb (1858-1943). If we know her as one of the founding mothers of the British Labour Party, a Fabian of international reputation taking position on collectivism, cooperatism and syndicalism, her stand and viewpoint on equal pay is less known. Beatrice Webb, who always rejoiced in having considerable influence in society, only became interested in men and women’s wages when Europe flamed up between 1914 and 1918. Her first activist drives were on the sweating-system which meant that social classes were above gender in her list of priorities. Just as capable of being lucid as blind over the handling of the working classes, Beatrice Webb came to wonder late on in life if women would be paid men’s wages when they did men’s work during the Great War? In this particular context, she was one of the earliest bearers of equal pay in Europe. As a member of the Committee of Women in Industry set up to check on the government’s policy wage, she drafted a report. Then, she went on to consider the general case for equal pay. All of her thoughts are bound in a book published by the Fabian Society in 1919 and entitled *The Wages of men and Women*: *should they be equal*. As the title shows, Beatrice Webb stressed both a sine qua non and a reserved condition backed by a “should”. These inconsistencies, with on one hand her sense of fairness and on the other hand her conservative and patriarchal spirit, are worth analysing. Since Beatrice Webb definitely stands in the history of work and labour, my intervention in the conference could be part of the axis “Reform movements and welfare” or eventually “The male breadwinner family model”.