

Rosa, the fruit-packer

Rosa was 20 years of age in 1912. She lived in Renmark, South Australia, with her parents and her brother Mark, who was 18. She worked in a packing shed, packing apricots into cartons for fruit markets. She worked quickly and neatly. Her cartons were often placed in fruit-shop windows to attract customers.

Rosa was hoping for a wage increase. The fruit-growers and the trade union that represented farm workers were arguing about the wages of fruit-pickers and fruit-packers.

Judge Higgins of the Commonwealth Arbitration Court had to decide on fair wages. He heard evidence from employers and the union.

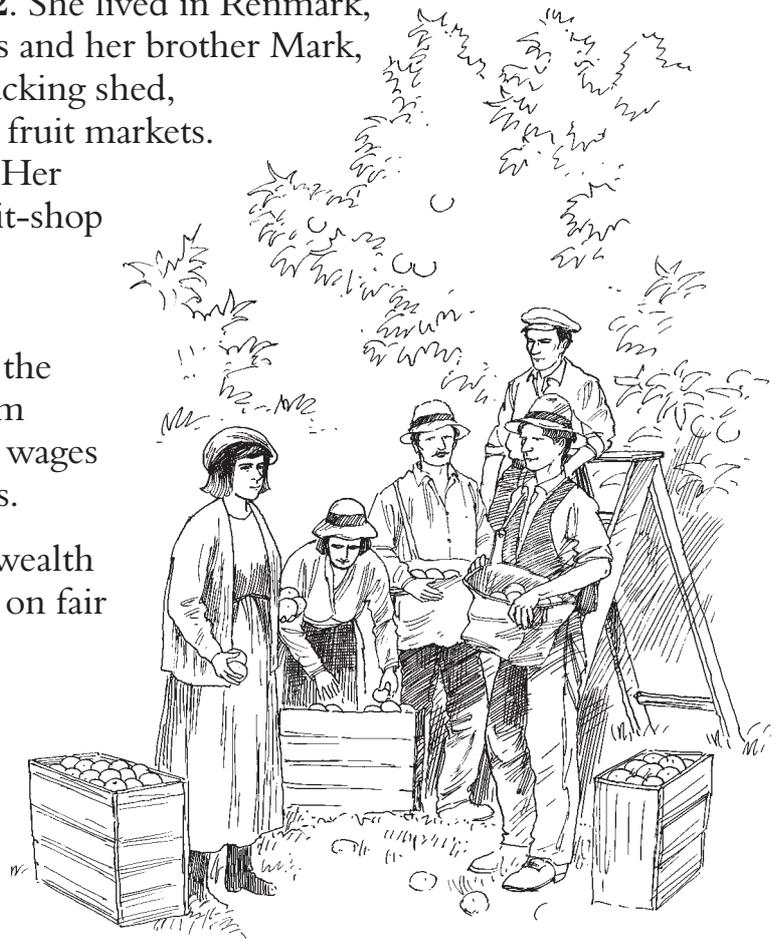
The employers said that men should be paid more than women. The Rural Workers' trade union said that there should be 'equal pay for equal work'. All men and women over 17 years of age should be paid the same.

The judge decided that as most fruit-pickers were men and boys, they should be paid enough to support a family – a man, his wife and three children. But as most fruit-packers were women and girls, the judge said they only had to support themselves.

The judge set the wage for fruit-pickers at eight shillings a day, and the wage for fruit-packers at six shillings a day.

So Rosa got six shillings, while Mark, who was a fruit-picker, earned two shillings more each day.

Judge Higgins said that Rosa's job was 'women's work', and because women did not usually have to support a family, they did not need to be paid as much as men. In many cases, women's wages were as little as half a man's wage.



In 1912, male and female workers did the same work but received different wages.