

Rosemary Archdeacon-Davies left school on her fourteenth birthday, during the Great Depression of the 1930s. She was the eldest of eight children, and had to go to work to help support her family. She worked for five years in very poor conditions in 'women's jobs' in the clothing industry.

One day, soon after the Second World War started, Rosemary saw an advertisement for women and girls to repair aeroplanes with a big aircraft company at Sydney airport. Most of the men who did this work had gone to war. Rosemary and a friend applied and got jobs.

As the war continued Rosemary and other women became very skilled at fitting, cutting and riveting aircraft for war service.

Rosemary joined the Sheet Metal Workers Union. She thought that women should be paid the same, or almost the same, rate as men. In **1942** the Commonwealth Government set up a Women's Employment Board (WEB) to set wage rates for women in wartime occupations. In **1943** women sheet metal workers received a wage increase – 90% of the male rate.

But the employer refused to pay the higher rate. So Rosemary organised a stop work meeting (a short strike) of the women workers. They asked the WEB to order the employer to pay the wage increase. The next pay day the women received the increase.

For Rosemary and many other women, the war offered the chance to escape from 'women's work' and to earn almost equal pay.



Rosemary rivets (attaches) a large sheet of metal onto a war plane.

Adaptation of text and illustration from Archdeacon-Davies, Rosemary and the Union of Australian Women 1982, *Women and Wages in the War Years, 1940–1945: Sheetmetal Workers' Union*, courtesy of Union of Australian Women