

national assembly of women equality at work

The NAW aims to educate, inform and mobilise support for greater equality at work.

We believe that equality involves:

- eliminating discriminatory practices
- removing barriers to effective labour market participation and
- promoting the right to fair participation at work

The NAW believes that the law has a fundamental part to play in securing such equality. We also believe that the law alone is not enough. Laws need to operate within a framework that accepts and promotes trade unions and collective rights at work. Without such a framework, we believe that equality will remain a theory rather than a practice.

Women now make up more than half of the working population. The Equal Pay legislation is now over 30 years old. We have had anti-discrimination legislation on the statute book since the early 1970s. Yet despite these advances, women still remain under-represented, under-valued and discriminated against at work.

There is no doubt that for women, the most fundamental inequality at work is unequal pay. The NAW recognises that blatant discrimination in pay continues, even after the Equal Pay Act of 1976 and Sex Discrimination legislation

Women working full-time earn around 80 pence for every one pound earned by male full-time workers. Part-time women workers can only expect to earn 60 pence for every pound earned by a man working full-time.

The NAW recognises the three main factors contributing to the gender pay gap as outlined in the Equal Pay Task Force report *Just Pay* published early in 2001, occupational segregation, family commitments and of course discrimination in pay

Not only does this gap cause personal poverty for women and children but stops women building up adequate occupational pensions and prevents

them from building up their state pension creating more poverty in retirement.

We recognise that social and economic policy measures have failed to keep pace with women's changing role at work. To try to correct this we aim to raise awareness wherever we can, within government, within trade unions, within the business arena and anywhere where pressure can be brought to bring about change.

Our campaigning work within will include regular articles in our journal *Sisters* containing updates on legislation and actual ongoing equal pay claims, to enable women everywhere to move forward in the workplace. To provide, whenever possible, speakers at events such as weekend schools and conferences and promote a twin track strategy along with our equality for women in access to and entitlement to pensions in order to improve their lives in later years.

To do this we will work to raise awareness and develop a common understanding of what the pay gap means.

Since 1997 the Labour government has had at the heart of its policy the promotion of family-friendly policies. A raft of new or improved rights has been introduced in an attempt to balance the work/life agenda.

We have seen the implementation of:

- The Working Time Directive
- The Part-time work Directive
- The Parental Leave Directive
- The Minimum Wage Regulations
- The Working Family Tax Credit

Keenly awaited are:

- The Fixed-term work Directive
- The Agency Work Directive

All these initiatives attempt to promote a family-friendly culture as well as provide a framework of employment standards below which no worker should be allowed to fall. Many of the policies were required by European law. Most were introduced into the UK

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in a reluctant and minimalist way. Nevertheless, the process of re-regulating the employment relationship around an agenda that recognises that workers have rights and responsibilities beyond the workplace can only be seen as positive.

The NAW will continue to press for improvements in existing legislation at the same time as promoting awareness of the new rights.

But the law should not only be used to build a framework of individual rights – however welcome those rights might be. The right to work no more than 48 hours a week is completely undermined by the provision that workers can “voluntarily” agree to work more; the provision of paternity leave that is unpaid reduces the number of fathers likely to assert this right; the right for a mother to seek flexible

working patterns following maternity leave would have more impact if compulsion was used against those employers who refuse to accept the flexibility required by working parents.

The impact of employment rights would be greatly improved if they applied without qualifying periods and were universal in their coverage. So rights from day one for all workers rather than those defined, as employees would protect the most vulnerable in our society.

Promoting collective bargaining, re-introducing a fair wages strategy and a requirement on employers to conduct pay audits, would assist in securing fair employment practices, in promoting equality at work and in delivering the kind of family-friendly flexibility that many aspire to but few yet enjoy.

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Our organisation would like to affiliate to the NAW. Enclosed is: £10 (NAW Branch or local group), £25 (regional), £35 (national) affiliation fee.

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