

Association of Indian Women, Derby

[Redacted]

Our reference :

Date..04/11/1990,.....

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Working conditions of HOMEWORKER and WOMEN IN LOW PAID EMPLOYMENT.

A conference on 'Women and Employment' organised by the Association of Indian Women, was held on 7th October 1990, at the Indian Community Centre in Derby. It was attended by 200 homeworkers and women in low paid employment. The conference discussed the working conditions of the above groups of women workers.

The conference came to the conclusion that the Equal Wage Act and the Health and Safety Act have failed to serve homeworkers and the workers in small industries. Too few inspectors are employed to carry out the health and safety inspections.

The homeworkers often work with dangerous materials which are health hazardous to them and their children. Although their employers have legal duty to provide safe environment for their employees, they neglect the homeworkers; with the full knowledge of not to be prosecuted.

The homeworkers who are predominantly women are not always covered by the wage councils and hence are paid less than they are legally entitled to. They are forced to work long hours as they are under constant pressure to meet the target given by their employers.

The homeworkers are deprived of information about their legal rights and do not always pay National Insurance Contributions; the result of which is that they lose their entitlements to Maternity Benefits, Statutory Sick Pay, Holiday Pay, Unemployment Benefits and Retirement Pensions.

The National Insurance deductions are frequently pocketed by the employers of homeworkers and those who work in small industries, and since these workers are denied a wage slip, that is the only proof they could have to file a case against their employer.

Women have the sole responsibility for the care of children, and lack of child care facilities force them to take employment like home work so that they can fulfill their caring role.

Due to sex discrimination women are deprived of equal opportunities for education and training, They therefore are only able to take up the low status jobs.

Taking the above into consideration the Conference passed a resolution which has been enclosed with this letter.

case against their employers.

She ended her speech with encouraging women to join the union that can help them in various ways; to achieve our rights we must unite, she added.

Manjit Tara, works for Leicester Home Workers Campaign Unit, was the next speaker. She began her speech by reading experiences of two homeworkers, giving details of their working conditions, long hours and how it deteriorates their health. One homemaker explained that she starts her day at six o'clock in the morning and completes it at two o'clock the next morning. By the time she goes to bed her whole body aches to such an extent that she is unable to go to sleep.

Manjit said that due to lack of information women often are not aware of their rights and their employers continue to ignore their legal duties. The profits are reaching sky high when homeworkers are denied a decent wage, health and safety provisions and expected to deal with materials that are health hazardous. Legally any employer not providing decent working environment can be prosecuted but there are not enough inspectors to carry out health and safety inspections and because of perceived costs for prosecutions, local authorities turn a blind eye on homeworkers and workers in small industries particularly the clothing industries. As long as the interests of the upper classes are being served, the homeworkers and women in low paid employment will continue to be ignored. It, therefore, is important for us to be united and fight against the inequalities, for decent working conditions and for equal wage for work of equal value.

Christine Wood, the Secretary of East Midland Regional T.U.C, put emphasis on discrimination faced by women workers. They are focused in part-time work, homework and in so called women's jobs.

Since their work is classed as inferior to that of men's work, they are not paid a decent wage. Proving the equal value of work is a long and frustrating task which women have to go through and they frequently give up. A majority of women in low paid work particularly those in clothing industry are not covered by the wage councils and do not have security of work. Their employers take advantages of the situation and continue to exploit them as they wish. She said the unions are fighting to achieve equal wage for work of equal value. They are also working towards achieving employees rights for homeworkers.

When speaking on European Union in 1992, she said the Trade Union has launched a charter of rights which unfortunately is opposed by the British Government. Continuing on this issue she said that Britain is the only country that has the Race Relations Act. Absence of such Act in other countries will have a major impact on free movement for black people. They will be further discriminated and their socio-economic situation will be demoralised. We, therefore, must work together for similar Acts in other European Countries too, so that black people's interests are also served by the European Community.

Prem Pardesi, National Secretary of the Indian Workers Association, discussed the class concept of discrimination and inequalities. He declares that we have a common enemy which is the capitalist system. Our struggle is one struggle and the aim of which is to get rid of the system and replace it with socialism and to build a classless society where profits will reach those who work for it. Our fight is not between men and women but is against the system

THE RESOLUTION PASSED BY THE CONFERENCE, 'WOMEN AND EMPLOYMENT!'

It is estimated that there are over a million homeworkers in Britain, however the true figures are not known,

The majority of homeworkers are women, earning as little as 12p an hour. The working conditions are very poor, and often hazardous to health. These workers do not have job security and are not regarded as employees.

A majority of homeworkers are not protected by minimum wage conditions, thus their employers can set the level of wages without any obligation to Low Pay Legislation as the legislative loop holes allow them to do so.

The Health And Safety Act, 1974, placed a duty on employers not to endanger their employees including homeworkers. However this Act has no meaning for homeworkers as the necessary number of inspectors needed to carry out health and safety inspections, are not employed.

Homeworkers do not receive a wage slip, training, sick pay, holiday pay, unemployment benefits or maternity benefit. Homeworking can create a potentially hazardous situation with young children around. This is due to the inadequate working conditions and inadequate storage of materials.

Despite the legislation that gives women the right to equal wage for the work of equal value, in Britain today, women are earning only 66% of the wages that men earn compared to the period prior to present Government when it was 77%.

THIS CONFERENCE DEMANDS THAT:-

- 1) The wage councils which have been abolished by the present Government should be re-instated across Britain, and should be easily accessible to homeworkers.
- 2) The employers should be obliged under the legislation to provide a safe working environment for their employees.
- 3) The home workers must have legal right as employees, to influence their working conditions.

4) An adequate number of inspectors should be employed to carry out Health and Safety inspections.

5) Free child care facilities must be provided, preferably at the places of work.