**Gender pay gap still exists and gets worse in better paid jobs**

More than 40 years after the Dagenham strikes and the Equal Pay Act, women’s earnings are still considerably lower than men’s – with the “gender pay gap” sitting at 14.2% for full-time workers.

This means that women effectively work for free from November 9th (Equal Pay Day) until January.

Analysis by the TUC published on Equal Pay Day reveals that the gap in annual salaries between top-earning women and top-earning men has hit 54.9%.

Each year, Equal Pay Day marks the point at which women working full-time effectively stop earning as they are paid on average 14.2% less an hour than men working full-time.

TUC analysis of official statistics reveals that while some progress has been made in securing an increase in the number of women members on company boards, the salary gap for top earners is still very high.

Looking at the top 10% of earners, the gap in annual salaries between full-time men and women rises steadily through each percentile, hitting 45.9% for the top 5% of earners, and reaching 54.9% for the top 2%. The top 2% male earners bring in more than £117,352 a year, while women get £75,745, more than £40,000 a year less.

In July the Prime Minister pledged to end the gender pay gap within a generation by forcing large companies to publish information about the difference between average male and female earnings. The TUC believes the government must go further: employers should have to publish more detailed information about gender pay differences in their workplace – including the distribution of men and women – alongside action plans to close the pay gap in their workplace. And companies who fail to comply with the law should be fined.

There are always those who dismiss our concern with the gender pay gap, saying it doesn’t compare like with like. Men and women do different kinds of jobs and women have different motivations, tending to ‘choose’ lower paid vocations over well paid professions, so the criticism goes. The only policy intervention they suggest, if any, is that girls should be given better careers advice and encouragement to enter higher paid, traditionally male-dominated jobs – is that the best that can be done!

However, our look at some of the best paid occupations shows that even in well paid professions that women have entered in increasing numbers, women still earn considerably less than their male colleagues.

For women working full-time in their twenties, equal pay day comes in the middle of the festive season. But there is little to celebrate if we know that these women are going to experience the same pay penalties associated with motherhood and part time work as their predecessors once they hit their thirties and forties.

To help make every day an equal pay day, flexible working rights need to be strengthened for parents and carers, opening up better quality job opportunities for those seeking reduced hours and fathers need greater incentives to take time out of paid work to care for their children, such as better paid leave which is available to them on a ‘use it or lose it’ basis.

As the voice of ordinary workers – both women and men – trade unions have a critical role to play in facilitating this kind of culture change.

Beth Farhat

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