

WASC 2111

Women Transport

Workers Bonus

Claim

ca. 1917

CLAIM BY WOMEN TRANSPORT WORKERS FOR THE  
SAME WAGES AND THE SAME WAR BONUSES AS MEN.  
SIMILAR CLAIM BY WOMEN IN MUNITION INDUSTRIES.

To The Minister.

1. In connection with the Memorandum submitted by the Minister of Labour as to the wages of women Transport Workers, I think that the War Cabinet should know that the claim made on behalf of those women has also been made by the women in munition industries. The claim so far as the munition industries are concerned involves consequences so serious that I must emphasise the necessity of exercising the greatest care in arriving at a decision on the case of the women Transport Workers so as not to prejudice the full consideration of the much wider problem of women on munitions work. Whatever decision be arrived at with regard to women transport workers, the considerations hereafter set out indicate that the application to munition works of the principle of the same rates and the same war bonuses for women and men may have disastrous consequences.

The Trade Unions representing women employed on munitions work applied to the Ministry of Munitions in April last for an order that women on mens work should be paid the same rates and the same war bonuses as men. This claim was inconsistent with the existing orders of the Ministry, both in respect of rates (except in the case of skilled men's work) and war bonuses, and was refused. It has since been submitted to the Ministry of Labour with a request for Arbitration, both by the Womens Trade Unions on behalf of women on all mens work and by the Skilled Mens Unions in respect of women on skilled mens work. The Minister of Labour is obtaining the opinion of the Law Officers on the question whether there is any right to Arbitration on a matter determined by statutory Orders.

The agitation for the present increase is a men's rather than a women's agitation. It has for its real object, so to increase the cost of women's employment both now and after the war that employers will neither engage nor ~~release~~ them.

(a) From the womens point of view the agitation is unjustified because the wages they now enjoy are extremely high. The average wages of women on munitions work are now not less than 300% in excess of the wages earned by women of the same class prior to the war.

Women employed on skilled men's work are, under the orders of the Ministry, paid the same wages as men, subject to a deduction if they do part only of the men's work, this being the condition on which the skilled Unions assented to dilution. The mens war bonuses given to meet the increased cost of living are now claimed in addition for the women, on the plea that the payment to the women of the womens war bonuses instead of the mens war bonuses is a breach of the spirit of the condition, in that it enables employers to get the mens work done more cheaply by women. As, however, the expense of the war bonuses given to meet the cost of living are borne by the State and not by the Employer there is no justification for

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(6) this plea. The claim of the skilled men is ~~not~~ <sup>to recover the same</sup> contrary to the understanding that the men's rates are not to be raised during the war, to the terms of the <sup>the joint</sup> ~~agreement~~ <sup>agreement</sup> with the skilled men as to women's wages, and to the terms of the Committee on Production awards relating to men's war bonuses. If it were acceded to the result must be to extend to all women on munitions work the full war bonuses given to men. The women on skilled men's work receive higher wages than any other women; they have consequently less claim on the merits than any other women to an increased war bonus, and if they receive the men's war bonuses on theoretical grounds the claims of other women for at least as good treatment would be irresistible, because in general women employed on men's work are incapable of performing the same work as the men and it would only be the rare exception that would be justified in claiming equal pay on the ground of equal work.

The consequences in munition industries of accepting the principle that women on men's work must receive the same rates and the same war bonuses as men would be as follows:-

- (a) The application to all women on munitions work of the greater part of the increase involved in the concession of the above principle to women on men's work. What is men's work in one Establishment or district is often women's work in another Establishment or district, and it would therefore be impracticable to distinguish between the war bonuses paid to women employed on men's work and women's work respectively. In addition to the payment of the same war bonuses, it would be necessary to maintain the present relation between the wages of women on men's work and women on women's work and if the wages of the former were raised to the same figure as the men's, a consequential rise would have to be made in the latter also. <sup>(6)</sup> The men already resent the high wages earned by women on certain classes of work. This further increase would inevitably lead to a further demand by the men.
- (b) Approximately one million women are employed on Ministry of Munitions contracts. The increases would vary, but the average increase would amount on a rough estimate to 15/- per week <sup>at least</sup>.
- (c) This increase or the greater part of it, would inevitably extend to the large numbers of women employed on private work in Establishments only partly engaged on munitions work. Few, if any, of these Establishments could bear this charge unless the State were to adopt the principle of subsidising private industry. As employers could not pay similar increases to women on private work either <sup>the company</sup> would be a little short of a scandal <sup>and</sup> employers with mixed contracts would have to throw up their munitions work.
- (d) A similar increase would spread to the many women employed on war work which is not immediately within the scope of the Ministry of Munitions; for instance, the Woollen, Leather and Cotton trades.

(f). A grave loss in output of munitions due to lost time and diminished effort by women who would be guaranteed earnings greatly in excess of their actual needs.

(g). A refusal by employers to retain or engage women on such terms which would in fact put a complete stop to dilution already seriously prejudiced by the wages now obtaining. This must lead to a grave position as regards man power both for munitions and the Army.

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