

Clothing Workers.

The 600-strong Laundry and Dry Cleaning Workers' Association in the Transvaal has accepted a male wage determination which is even lower than that recommended by the Central Bantu Labour Board. The reason for doing so, says Agnes Molefe, the Union's secretary, is to prevent the widening of the wage gap between male and female workers in the industry.

In August, employers in the clothing industry, the registered trade unions and the Laundry and Dry Cleaning Workers Association accepted an interim wage increase of 15% which brought the new minimum rate for women to R12.54 a week and that for men to R13.57. But because the Central Bantu Labour Board adheres to a minimum wage of R14 a week for males, it rejected this new minimum rate. However, the Board's policy also allows the minimum wages for women to be 20% lower than those for men. This meant that if the Union accepted R14 for men, it might only get R11.20 for women. The union therefore decided to accept the lower wage, R13.57 for men and R12.54 for women, whose members are increasing in the industry.

Both the Labour Minister, Marais Viljoen and Radio Bantu emphasized the fact that the Labour Board recommended a higher minimum wage than that accepted by the African Union. But they completely ignored the issue of women's wages.

The African Union strongly opposes wage discrimination on the grounds of sex and this, it claims, was the reason behind its accepting a lower minimum wage for men. However, some observers believe that the Union should have seized this opportunity to attempt to abolish the wage gap between male and female workers - while not accepting a lower wage than that adhered to by the Labour Board.

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