

# Employment Tribunal on Equal Pay

Thousands of low paid council workers took a step closer to equal pay yesterday thanks to a landmark decision of the Employment Appeal Tribunal.

While many manual workers, such as cleaners, cooks and carers, have already received compensation, previous decisions of the EAT removed the right to compensation from thousands of administrators, clerical workers, learning assistants and library staff. In the absence of a proper explanation for the pay differences between women and men, local authorities developed a technical argument that women and men only deserved equal pay if they were based at the same premises, or had the same pay and conditions – this argument has now failed. UNISON General Secretary, Dave Prentis, said:—“I am delighted that UNISON has opened up this route to justice for so many of our members. There is now no place for employers to run or hide. UNISON’s equal pay campaign has defeated every contrived defence their lawyers have hidden behind.

This charade has gone on too long. We want full compensation for all our members and that money must be paid now.” One of UNISON’s largest group of winners from the decision are classroom assistants, many of whom earn as little as £10,000 a year. Elaine North, a UNISON claimant from Dumfries, said: “I was devastated when the court said I wasn’t entitled to equal pay. My colleagues do one-to-one education work with learning-disabled kids and while we love them it is such hard work. “No harm to refuse collectors and gardeners, but fair pay is long overdue for us. We’ve worked hard for this.” Jackie Gilchrist, who chairs the UNISON campaign for Fair Pay, said: “This is a magnificent decision for us. Our pay has been formally investigated by the EOC and still the employers refuse to recognise the value of our jobs. “We have gathered so much

evidence about the demands of learning support work, but the courts have refused to look at it until now. They've got some reading to catch up on, I can tell you. "There's only one conclusion to reach at the end – our wages are going up." UNISON estimates that this Edinburgh decision will affect up to 70,000 workers across the UK and, while claim values will vary from person to person, some will exceed £30,000