The 6th Interzonal Trade Union Conference: Position of Women in the Economy, the Restructuring of Social Security (October 21–23, 1947)

Abstract

In the postwar period, just under half of all those employed in Germany were women. This was a new reality with which German unions had to come to terms. Previously, fears of labor market competition had prevented unions from showing unreserved support for women's participation in the workforce. This changed in 1947, when the 6th Interzonal Conference of German Trade Unions came out in favor of women's right to work. The conference also supported corresponding educational and advancement opportunities for women, special worker protections for women, and equal pay for men and women.

Source

The 6th Interzonal Trade Union Conference

Position of Women in the Economy, the Restructuring of Social Security

Bad Pyrmont, October 21-23, 1947

[…]

The 6th Interzonal Conference of German Trade Unions in Bad Pyrmont dealt in detail with the position of women in the economy and the unions. The Nazi regime and the war fundamentally altered the position of women in public life and the economy. Today, nearly 50% of all gainfully employed individuals are women. Their contribution to the rebuilding of the German economy and the German state is indispensable. It follows from this that the unions represent the interests of working women to a greater degree. Building on decades of work by German unions on behalf of working women, the Interzonal Conference, in the name of German unions, makes the following demands of lawmakers and the public:

1.) Ensuring women's right to work.

Promoting the vocational training and retraining of women and providing the requisite apprenticeships.

Creation of equal opportunities for advancement in factories and administrations.

Opening up new vocations for women in accordance with their physical abilities.

2.) Expanding work safety provisions for women.

Banning women from all jobs that are injurious to health or especially dangerous for women, exclusion of women from workplaces that are unsuitable for them without any job-related or material discrimination. Suitable work oversight by the labor offices. Stronger participation of women in work-safety committees upon the recommendation of the unions, expansion of and adherence to all work safety regulations, especially for mothers, pregnant women, and women in childbed.

Creation and improvement of workplace and social institutions that serve to ease the burden of housework on working women and mothers, including, among other things, a paid "household chores

day," creation of a law for domestic helpers, regulation of their wage and working conditions.

3.) Equal pay for men and women.

Elimination of all special women's wage groups in wage agreements. Fair assignment of women to the applicable semi-skilled or skilled worker wage group in accordance with their job. Elimination of all wages below an adequate subsistence level.

After the conclusion of [the discussion of] the items on the agenda, the bureau of the conference decided to permit the female delegates further participation in the meeting. This, however, does not set a precedent.

[…]

5.) Decision on social security.

For the rebuilding of German social security, the conference unanimously adopts the following resolution:

The 6th Interzonal Conference of German Trade Unions, meeting in Bad Pyrmont from October 21–23, 1947, as the relevant and responsible representatives of the insured and their family members, appeals once again to the Control Council to immediately pass the prospective law on the reconstruction of German social security. It refers once again to the resolution unanimously adopted by all German unions at the 3rd Interzonal Conference in Berlin and to the principles established there. It expects that the demand for a uniform regulation for all of Germany will be met. In particular, the circle of the insured must be expanded to include all workers, as well as all self-employed persons and entrepreneurs, and their family members, and the new regulation of the benefits of the entire social security [system] must conform to social needs while fundamentally maintaining the benefit levels to date. To secure these benefits, the necessary funds must be raised through contributions as well as subsidies by the states.

[…]

Source: SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/22977; reprinted in Udo Wengst, *Geschichte der Sozialpolitik in Deutschland.* Bd. 2/2: *1945–1949: Die Zeit der Besatzungszonen. Sozialpolitik zwischen Kriegsende und der Gründung zweier deutscher Staaten. Dokumente*. Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2001, pp. 405–07.

Translation: Thomas Dunlap

Recommended Citation: The 6th Interzonal Trade Union Conference: Position of Women in the Economy, the Restructuring of Social Security (October 21–23, 1947), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/occupation-and-the-emergence-of-two-states-1945-1961/ghdi:document-4509> [November 18, 2026].