

Women and work: redefining the rules of the game



Featuring

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Frances O'Grady • Meg Munn • Fiona Mactaggart

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Welcome to the fifth issue of Fabiana!

Ivana Bartoletti
Editor



Our magazine is growing from strength to strength, and so is the Fabian Women's Network. My heartfelt thanks go to Suki Ferguson, Felicity Slater and Sarah Hutchinson for playing a key role in putting this issue together and to the fantastic team of Fabian women, whose relentless work has put FWN at the forefront of feminism in Britain.

This issue continues the debate on how One Nation Labour can work for women. The coalition government perseveres with their reckless plans to foment a divided Britain. Not only have their austerity policies failed, as the International Monetary Fund recently remarked whilst encouraging Osborne to prepare a plan B, but these policies are undermining our social cohesion, pitting old against young, those who are in work against those who aren't, British against migrants. And they are succeeding in widening the gap between men and women too.

As Seema Malhotra MP writes in our magazine, 'this government has a deep prejudice against women - a prejudice so deep that it has seen women hit hardest every time.' Seema explains how 'long term unemployment has increased by over 100,000 since the election, but with a shocking 89% of that increase to be found among women. Two-thirds of those affected overall by the 1% benefit and tax credit freeze are women, and new mothers are losing a shocking total of £1,300 during pregnancy and the baby's first year due to cuts to maternity pay, pregnancy support and tax credits.'

Families are struggling to make ends meet. Costs of childcare are spiralling. In the UK, we have the second-most expensive childcare costs in Europe, just after Switzerland. This, coupled with the gender pay gap, explains why women, when facing the stark choice of returning to work or putting their career on hold,

too often opt for the latter. It is not just unfair to them but is also a great loss for our country and its ability to recover from a long recession.

Affordable childcare and better paid jobs for women are key to get the economy going. It was a great pleasure to discuss these issues at length with Frances O'Grady. The TUC leader speaks in Fabiana about how we need more women in the economy to grow the economy itself. Shadow Chancellor Ed Balls, in a wide-ranging interview with Felicity Slater, makes a similar point, stressing how a One Nation economy will only work if 'you use the talents of all.'

Other writers explore further themes which underpin a One Nation economy: Fiona Mactaggart MP discusses the 'sandwich generation' and the contribution it can make to our society. Now that life is much longer and the welfare state so lean, older women are often squeezed between looking after their nieces and nephews as well as their older parents. Joe Dromey analyses how the culture of workplaces needs to change too, to tackle presenteeism, introduce more flexibility and encourage employees to achieve a better work-life balance.

How women can grow the economy and in the economy is what we will be focusing on in the months ahead. And to do so, we will keep up our close work with Your Britain and the policy review team. Our work will encompass other issues too. Just a few weeks ago, we hosted Diane Abbott's keynote speech on hyper-sexualisation of our society and the pressure it places on children. Once again, addressing this issue is not about being moralistic. It is about asserting that as a society we need to embrace women's self-determination, choice and freedom as the healthy values underpinning our relationships; as the tenets holding together our communi-

ties and creating our shared values. A few days later, Tory MP Richard Graham suggested that high heels and a mini skirts are not the best way for women to protect themselves from rape - as if violence is a consequence of a choice of clothing, rather than a man's brutal behaviour. There is still so much to be done in this area, and I would like to highlight the many fantastic organisations working with both women and men to put women's dignity and freedoms at the heart of the policy agenda.

Austere times mean that women's rights are at risk of being pushed back thirty years. This is happening not just in Britain but everywhere across Europe. Zita Gurmai, MEP for Hungary and President of the Party of European Socialists' Women's organisation, discusses in Fabiana how the policies of austerity are impacting women, who often rely on the essential services now under threat. We have had another taste of what this means: in his recent speech on Europe, designed to appease his vociferous euro-sceptics, rather than standing up for Britain's best interest, David Cameron said he wants to repatriate powers from Brussels. As women in Britain, we know what he is alluding to: the set of employment and social rights which protect our maternity rights and champion equal pay.

The reality is that just when you think it could not get any worse with the Tories, it does. If it is true, as the polls show, that women are turning their backs to them, then we need to make sure we capitalise on this. And not just in terms of votes, but also as an opportunity to propose a radical plan which people can trust, rooted in women's everyday lives, opportunities and choices. □

I hope you enjoy this issue of Fabiana and, as always, please do get in touch with ideas and if you wish to contribute. See you soon at the next FWN event!

The working strategy

Neither Labour nor the country can afford to leave women behind

Just when you think it couldn't get worse with the Tory-led coalition government, it does. Yet again, this government has hit women hardest with its benefits changes, as ordinary people pay the price for ministers' economic failure. Long term unemployment has increased by over 100,000 since the election - but a shocking 89% of that increase is among women. A recent article in the Guardian showed that 98% of those hit by Child Benefit changes from 7 January 2013 were also women - including women on low pay, or at home with small children with partners earning more than £50,000 a year.

'Not having a strategy for women and work is clearly carrying a heavy price tag for the country.'

In addition, two-thirds of those affected overall by the 1% benefit and tax credit freeze are women. This is because around 90% of lone parents are female, which according to the Impact Assessment is the family type most likely to be affected. House of Commons Library figures also reveal that 4.6 million women who receive child tax credit directly will be affected by Benefits Up-rating Bill. This is often referred to as the 'Strivers Tax,' as 68% of households affected by the government's measures are in work.

The 1% up-rating also affects Maternity Pay, and adds around £4 per week in 'Mummy Tax' for 340,000 new mothers. Because of the coalition's actions, new mothers are losing a shocking total of £1,300 during pregnancy and the baby's first year due to cuts to maternity pay, pregnancy support and tax credits.

However, this government's deep prejudice against women - which has seen women hit hardest every time - also manifests itself in other ways. Last year I met a woman in my constituency who had lost her job and had decided to set up her own business. Having got through the set up stage, she was struggling to make it grow and had no idea where to go to seek advice and support.

Looking further at recent data on new women-led businesses suggests also a gender gap in entrepreneurship. Results for the New Enterprise Allowance Scheme, which was created to help young unemployed people start their own business show just 17% of those benefiting from the scheme in 2011 were female. Recent analysis suggests this now stands at 28%, but it is still much too low.

In the Evening Standard I recently called for a new strategy for women's entrepreneurship. The response since the article was published has been incredible, with women from Hounslow, Ealing, Harrow, Lambeth and Hackney emailing to support the call and share their own stories. There is a huge gulf between their lives and Whitehall, and not helped by the demise of Business Link. Women often have less developed personal networks which are so vital for getting informal support, and seem to struggle to access finance. A further issue appears to be access to quality business support that meets their needs.

Women often set up community businesses as a lifestyle choice, which also enables an alternative balancing between work and personal life, particularly when combined with caring responsibilities. This can also be in addition to being employed - and an additional income route. A report by the Women's Enterprise Task Force which ran from 2006-2009 found that businesses run by women contribute £130 billion annually

Seema Malhotra is the Labour Co-operative MP for Feltham and Heston and the Director of the Fabian Women's Network.



By Seema Malhotra

to the UK economy - incredible especially when women are only half as likely as men to set up a business to begin with. Home Office research also suggests that £42 billion would be added to the UK economy if we had the same level of female entrepreneurship as in the US, and if women started businesses at the same rate as men there could be an additional 150,000 extra start-ups each year in the UK.

'Women often have less developed personal networks which are so vital for getting informal support, and seem to struggle to access finance. A further issue appears to be access to quality business support that meets their needs'

The collective impact of the relationship between women and the economy is clear. Not having a strategy for women and work is clearly carrying a heavy price tag for the country. And as women leave the workplace, it becomes harder to keep skills up to date and step back into alternative work. The loss of economic power can impact independence, morale and well being. Supporting women's economic contribution in a way that works for them is key for women's progress, for families and is also vital for Britain's economic recovery. □

One Nation Labour: working for women?

Shadow Chancellor Ed Balls MP answers FWN questions,
by Felicity Slater

What would a one nation economy look like?

We need big change in the way the economy works. Unless it is growing, getting fairer and stronger in the long term, then we're not going to be able to deliver higher living standards, create more opportunity and also get the deficit down.

I think one nation is quite a good way to think about that. It's about reform, enabling the talents of all and, quite distinctly from David Cameron and George Osborne's policies, understanding that government has a role to play. That means banking reform, a university system which is expanding opportunities for students of all backgrounds; and having a business investment bank.

Many women are finding it difficult to get into the workplace. How can they contribute to a one nation economy, and how will it enable women to grow? What do we do to improve the representation of women in science, for example?

You have to start early in primary schools with active efforts to make sure that girls and boys know that they are equally as good at maths and science. And that has to continue through secondary school. Our economy is weaker, our society poorer and less fair if we allow current misconceptions to continue.

What about women on boards? Would you support a quota?

The culture of our business decision-making is impoverished and held back by having too few women in senior executive positions. I'm not sure if it's for government to set the rules, but I think any progressive organisation has to set its objectives and challenge its culture and I don't think you can do that without targets and transparency.

How does this fit with our narrative as a party? Ed Miliband argues that Labour and feminism belong together. What is crucial to attracting women's votes?

You have to start by having authentic women's voices at all levels of the party, from the leadership and shadow cabinet right down to our marginal and safe seat candidates. We've made massive progress on that in the last decade.



Shadow Chancellor Ed Balls MP

Secondly, it's about understanding people's concerns and speaking to them. Prices are going up faster than wages; families are struggling to make ends meet. People look at the contrast between the top rate tax cuts and the cuts to tax credits and think 'that's not fair.'

Thirdly, mums, dads and grandparents are all worried about their kids; about the next generation. We have to be the people who respond to that and give long-term hope.

How do we make sure we have provisions in place for universal childcare in our manifesto for 2015? How do we make sure we have a smart welfare state which really empowers people?

It is about children getting the best start in life: their learning, language development and socialisation; getting a catch-up or sometimes a head-start. Sure Start provides childcare but also plays a really important active outreach role.

Not only the closures, what really worries me at the moment is that Sure Start's concept and aims are being shrunk back into a those of a drop-in centre. That isn't enough. Let's not lose that bigger vision.

Parents today are concerned about the cost and affordability of childcare – but not at the expense of quality. The government has a view that the way to support working parents is just to make it cheaper, and we'll just do that by getting rid of the Ofsted inspections regime – thinking that it would be popular. My experience is that it's not; childminders say that quality is so important for their business and parents want to know about their kids' learning and their progress. It's about cost and quality together.

We do need to think radically about this. Although we don't have the money for a Swedish style system, the vision of quality, universally available childcare is very important. We do need to talk about how to make this affordable and how it can support parents going into work rather than becoming an obstacle for them. Around 32,000 women have given up work in the last year because of childcare costs. It's pretty worrying. That's partly about tax credits being cut."

Is work not paying enough an issue?

Yes. But making work pay can't simply be done through the National Minimum Wage or living wage. If you take a single parent with three kids, in full time work on the NMW, the working tax credit lifts them to an hourly rate which is way, way above what the NMW or living wage can deliver. That's really good: it's getting someone into work and their kids are growing up on a higher income.

So, although I want to campaign on the living wage and enforcing the NMW, I'm also going to campaign to defend child and working tax credits emphatically. It's so important that we don't lose that very important part of our welfare reform of the last 50 years. □

Fullfilment after fifty

We owe it to our older women to create a society in which they can thrive

"At a time when life should be easier, children grown up, finances easier, you find that life is harder and finances are used to help children."

This was one comment made at an event with older women I held in my Slough constituency this summer. The disappointment was shared by others who came. Insecurity was not a thing these women had anticipated facing in the second half of their lives. But the reality is that making ends meet is a struggle for this group, with many feeling that they have worked hard all their lives and are still experiencing pressure that doesn't let up.

This situation concerns me deeply. And the problems are complex. Older women are being squeezed on many fronts – workplace, family, caring, finances, pensions, services and transport all present specific issues to older women. Yet too often older women just disappear – in the media, in public life and in government policy. This is a time when women become overlooked.

"First in the queue for redundancy, last in the queue for interview" sums up the experience of the older women in the workplace. And with unemployment of women over 50 increasing at record levels - up 39% in the last two years compared to an increase of 5% in the general population according to House of Commons Library analysis - this is not a surprise. Many older women are justifiably worried that they will be squeezed out of the labour market as times get tougher, facing an increasing challenge from age discrimination which labels many older men as 'distinguished' whilst older women are 'past it.'

The difference between work for men and women is clearly demonstrated by the continuing pay gap. This year's Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) shows that 30 years on from the Equal Pay Act, the pay gap for full time

employees median earnings may be declining but is still 9.6%. But for older full time employees, those over 50, the gap between the earnings of men and women is 23%. The ASHE data shows women's pay peaking in their 30s compared with men's pay which peaks in their 40s and drops only slightly in their 50s. Older women get less pay.

'Many older women are worried that they will be squeezed out of the labour market as times get tougher, facing an increasing challenge from age discrimination which labels many older men as 'distinguished' whilst older women are 'past it.'

But work for the older woman is a continuing reality, despite falling pay. Faced by the changing pension landscape, working beyond pension age is increasingly a fact of life for older women. In the third quarter of 2011, 61% of those working beyond the state pension age were women, compared to 39% for men. But two thirds of men working beyond retirement in 2011 were in roles classified as higher skilled, and two thirds of women were in lower skilled jobs. Older women clearly need access to fairly paid, good jobs which reflect their skills and experience.

Fiona Mactaggart was elected MP for Slough in 1997 and founded the All-Parliamentary Group on Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade, and is joint secretary of the All-Parliamentary Group on Human Trafficking.



By Fiona Mactaggart MP

At home, older women are today's 'sandwich generation.' They find themselves stretched between dual caring obligations to both their children and grandchildren and their ageing parents. This group of women are characterised by the grandmother who has had to reduce her own working hours to look after her grandchildren because her daughter's tax credits have been cut, forcing her to cut back on nursery provision. But that grandmother then becomes worried about the care that her own elderly parents are receiving. So she finds herself making time for caring for her family's elderly as well as younger generation.

This complex set of issues facing older women in Britain today is the rationale behind the establishment of the Labour Party's Older Women's Commission. In the course of the next year, the Commission will draw on expert opinions, and take evidence from support organisations and older women themselves, in order to build a rounded picture of the challenges older women are facing and the policy response required to improve their lives. We are grateful that Miriam O'Reilly, a victim of age discrimination by the BBC, has agreed to play a leading part in this work.

Many women who are 50 today will live to be 100 – a 50 year lifespan to come and a second half very different from the first. But we owe them. This is the generation that kick started feminism, took the pill, campaigned for equal pay, smashed through glass ceilings and made progress possible for their daughters and granddaughters. They deserve a later life of fulfilment not a poor reflection of passed youth. □

If Fabiana readers would like to contribute to this work do get in touch with me at fiona.mactaggart.mp@parliament.uk

Let's stop the 'back to the kitchen sink' policy

TUC leader talks to Ivana Bartoletti about hope and how we need to fight apathy

The biggest enemy today is apathy, says Francis O'Grady: "people are blaming each other rather than sticking together." I feel this is what she is up against, most of all. She mulls over the recent months, the policies of austerity with no grip on growth, and the divided country the Tories have managed to create. "We need hope", she reflects, and sighs: "people in Britain really need a message of hope."

'[It is time] to tackle the root causes of the crash'

When O'Grady spoke to the Labour Women's conference last September, Labour activists from across the country felt a strong empathy with this passionate woman, a single mum of two who brought up her kids and worked her way through the TUC right up to the top. Her words reach out to the hearts of many ordinary women, who struggle to juggle jobs and childcare responsibilities, in these hard times of austerity. Having her as the leader of the TUC, 'the biggest democratic organisation in the country', is another stepping stone for the feminist movement: amazing women are trail-blazing in politics, and she is certainly amongst them. In the trade union movement, Bernadette Segol leads the ETUC in Brussels and Susanna Camusso heads up the Italian largest trade union, CGIL. This is particularly significant, in a Europe where working people are bearing the brunt of the austerity policies and women are being hit the hardest. "We need to stop this back to the kitchen-sink policy," Frances says. "There is still a very big pay gap between men and women...to balance the family books, women's incomes are still too often perceived as more disposable."

By the way she talks, you can feel a real outcry for a change in direction. "We need to do three things. First, we need

a serious policy for jobs and growth: our economy must be more balanced to work for ordinary working people. It is also time to create decent green jobs. Second, we need to invest in wages and living standards: wages have stagnated since 2003."



Frances O'Grady is the General Secretary of the TUC

She speaks strongly in favour of the living wage, and about how collective bargaining is crucial to better workers' conditions and pay. Third, she says, "we need to tackle the root causes of the crash." She reflects on how inequality is growing in Britain and on how, to challenge this, we really need a radical change in the way we work, starting with the banking and financial system. "And we need a state investment bank," she adds, as it is crucial to instilling "a culture of diversity" throughout the system. Diversity also means giving employees a much bigger role, she argues: "power needs to be shared more fairly." She alludes to workers' representation on company boardrooms, with the same rights of every other board member. But, more generally, she reflects on the role of the unions. Pondering how the governments of austerity throughout Europe are attacking the unions and their role in society, the leader of the TUC calls for a much greater role for civic society in tackling

vested interests and for the unions in calling power into account when it comes to decision making. And this is what she wants to do with the TUC, to present an alternative and demonstrate the unions have a much bigger role to play.

During the conversation, O'Grady reflects on how she thinks workers feel today, with their wages engaged in a race to the bottom while cuts slash the welfare state. She suggests the feeling of an ordinary worker could be "well, nobody ever asked me," and explains how important it is for workers to play a greater role in what happens in the workplace and in society. This is particularly true for the younger generation: "Young workers have their prospects stripped down, juggle unpaid internships and have fewer chances than the generation before." The key thing, she says, is restoring confidence: people do know who needs to be held responsible for this situation and she concedes that Ed Miliband is doing really well in presenting a much more far-reaching and radical vision of how we can profoundly change our society.

"The thing is" she continues "that we have to challenge the whole premise around costs: if you accept the premise that is short term, you have lost the argument." She mentions childcare and asserts how all evidence demonstrates it is "an investment which will pay for itself." Women need to be able to go to work, and to do so, they need "decent jobs and affordable childcare."

Long-termism and radicalism are recurrent words in the conversation, and it is clear O'Grady envisages both as the underpinning principles of a new economic policy and the welfare state. And so, when I ask her how she sees the welfare state in today's society, she responds: "It has to make it more sense to make it collectively than individually." For women, for workers, I think this is what the challenge is all about, and she is ready to lead on it. □

Reshaping business norms

Labour still has a long way to go to work for women

Let me share one story of a woman I have been working with after her husband asked me for help. An experienced senior manager in retail with MS, she was ecstatic to learn that she was pregnant after she had given up hope. She went to her employer on a Thursday with the news; the following Monday she was put on notice of redundancy. It being clear she would be the one to be made redundant she moved in to a grievance procedure.

‘Women at all pay levels need support in both understanding their current rights and how to fight for them, especially when pregnant’

In the meeting, whilst cramping with pain, she was told if she left then the grievance would be over. Finally she left for maternity leave 1 ½ months early with the redundancy delayed till her return, hospitalised for stress related problems with her pregnancy.

Another woman, a board member of a large corporation, was encouraged to change role whilst on maternity leave – only to discover that the role was then made redundant and her with it. These are everyday experiences for women in the workplace, and during this recession the situation has become worse.

A few weeks ago the Institute of Management launched research showing the gender pay gap has increased since 2010. Only one in four females make

it into top roles, despite them making up 57% of the executive workforce and women are more likely to be made redundant. European research also shows that, across the EU, once redundant women take longer to get back into work.

We know this is not just about fairness. If we fully used the skills and qualifications of women currently out of work, figures tell us it could deliver economic benefits of between £15 and £21 billion every year. If women set up businesses at the same rate as men, there would be an extra 150,000 start-ups in the UK each year, business our economy needs. Equality and economics make sense.

As a party though, we still have a fair bit to do. In 2010 The Fawcett Society surveyed election candidates on their commitment to action on women's inequality. Tories were particularly poor at 2%, Labour was at 23% and the Liberals at 20%. Being better than the Tories is not a great rallying cry; we need real answers to the problems women face at home, in society and in the workplace.

Women at all pay levels need support in both understanding their current rights and how to fight for them, especially when pregnant. Unions play an impressive part in organisations where they exist, but for many working in the private sector a union isn't currently in the picture. In government we could help incentivise business to think more creatively about flexibility in hours, working from home and how that can actually help cut business costs. But for women to be freed to reach the top we also need to enable men to share parenting from the beginning.

The new flexible parental leave is an excellent step forward. We aren't ahead of the field in this area, which means we can learn from the successful policies of others ahead of us across Europe. Sweden, for example, introduced shared parental

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By Karen Landles

leave in 1973 but take-up increased in the 90s after further reforms.

Legislation and policy will deliver results. We can see that from the experiences of other countries who have gone ahead of us. Practicalities are not the only barrier to women being freed to work by men sharing the caring.

‘For women to be freed to reach the top we also need men to share parenting from the beginning’

An OECD report into ‘the unpaid economy’ last year showed that out-of-work fathers in Britain spend on average just 63 minutes caring for their children compared with 81 minutes spent by working mums or 105 minutes for an unemployed Australian man. We need to address the cultural perceptions around women as sole primary carers, perceptions held by fathers and perceptions held by businesses.

The journey starts with us in the Labour Party ensuring that women's equality is a priority for us in our next manifesto and in government. How will we measure our success? For me our measures are threefold: in the number of women we have standing for Parliament to represent our gender; clear policies around women's rights along with a clear narrative about what that will look like to women in their daily lives not in the abstract; and a majority at least of our Labour candidates should show they understand the importance of our stand in the pre-election Fawcett survey. □

Book review: *On the Edge: The Contested Cultures of English Suburbia*

By Rupa Huq, *Lawrence & Wishart, 2013* Review by Felicity Slater

Felicity Slater is Outreach and Membership Officer at Progress



On the Edge is a compelling account of England's evolving suburbs. Detailed and incisive, it comes as a welcome addition to relatively scant research into the environs and cultures of the majority of the population.

The riots of summer 2011 form the starting point for Rupa Huq's study. Notoriously having flared up in deprived inner cities and well-to-do leafy suburbs alike, the violence and looting jolted a nation out of its popular yet outdated ideas of sleepy suburbia. Exploring this shift, crystallised by the riots, is the central theme

of *On the Edge*: from a 1950s cliché, our suburbs have gradually evolved and their inhabitants diversified.

Huq sets about demonstrating that there is "no such thing as a typical suburbanite". Indeed, as 80 per cent of us are suburb dwellers any perception of homogeneity – cultural or otherwise – is inescapably incomplete. Using qualitative data gathered in a wealth of interviews, Huq addresses the issues of politics, citizenship, faith, consumerism, extremism and insecurity in suburban England, neutralising and, at times, entirely deconstructing myriad popularly held myths.

Nonetheless, given macro issues such as globalisation and the financial crash, our suburbanites, diverse though they are, are overwhelmingly faced with similar challenges. Although the cultural prisms through

which they view these issues necessarily vary, their reactions are often less divergent. Regardless of region, ethnicity or religion, suburban inhabitants are feeling the pinch; their confidence in ever-improving living standards collapsing. The final theme of insecurity, fed by economic uncertainty, is therefore highly fitting, giving the book so acute a resonance today.

On the Edge is essential reading for those seeking to understand the shifting patchwork of contemporary England's suburbs and, ultimately, how Labour might shape its policy and craft a political narrative that resonates with them. For although they lie on the edge of our towns and cities they are, by sheer size alone, the heart of our country. A Labour party that underestimates the importance of this fact does so at its peril. □



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Striking a good work life balance

Responsible employers and the government can work together to achieve better workplaces

The rising number of women in the workplace over the last fifty years has been little short of a revolution. But the revolution is incomplete. The employment rate for women remains 10% lower than for men. Whereas 84% of mothers in Denmark are in work, in Britain just 67% are. Although narrowing, the pay gap remains. The higher you get in an orga-

'Equal opportunity and flexible working can't be just a response to a legal imperative. We need more than a grudging compliance with regulation if we are to achieve true fairness and equality.'

tion, the more male it is; at any point there have never been more than five women chief executives in the FTSE100. The glass ceiling has been chipped, but it remains in place.

It is still the norm for women who do work to bear the brunt of the childcare. Our ageing population means many women are also caring for elderly relatives; creating what has been called the 'sandwich generation'.

Employers have an important role to play here; both in removing obstacles to women's participation and in helping them achieve a good work-life balance. Doing this is not rocket science. Flexible working – whether it be job-sharing, compressed hours, flexitime, or part-

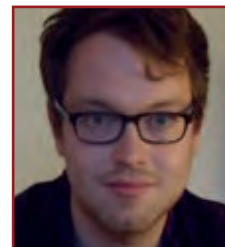
time working – can help. Flexible working has become more common in recent years though access remains patchy; private sector workers and those with management responsibilities find it more difficult to return on a part-time or flexible basis.

A further increase in opportunities for flexible working could help remove the remaining barriers to women's participation in the labour market. The government's plans to give all employees the right to request flexible working is a step in the right direction.

But this alone is not sufficient. Equal opportunity and flexible working can't be just a response to a legal imperative. We need more than a grudging compliance with regulation if we are to achieve true fairness and equality. Part of this is about convincing employers of the benefits of working flexibly. There is ample evidence here. Employees in companies where flexible working is the norm have higher levels of engagement and wellbeing; they are more loyal and committed; they are more productive. Research by DWP showed that six in ten SMEs who introduced flexible working saw an increase in productivity and seven in ten employers noticed an improvement in employee relations. This is not just touchy-feely stuff. It matters to the bottom line.

The lack of flexible work is by no means the only obstacle to women's participation in the workplace. Culture matters too. Employers need to provide a working environment that is open and inclusive for women. We need to break open the closed boys-club culture still prevalent in so many organisations. Significant decisions shouldn't be made in the pub after work and promotions mustn't be denied to women who've taken time out or work part time to look after kids. Having more women at the top will help deliver this culture change.

Joe Dromey is the Head of Policy and Research at the Involvement and Participation Association (IPA).



By Joe Dromey

This is not and should not be about women alone. If we focus only on increasing women's access to flexible working, we risk reinforcing the view that they should be primarily responsible for childcare. The recent progress in terms of paternity leave is a welcome step towards a more equitable division of caring responsibilities. A colleague of mine has just gone on four months of paternity leave following the birth of his first child. It seems to me that encouraging and allowing more men both to take up paternity leave and flexible working must be part of the solution.

'The glass ceiling has been chipped but remains in place.'

Although employers can do more, there remains an important role for the government. Aside from the extension of the right to request flexible working, the Coalition has not helped women manage the work-life balance.

The cost of childcare in Britain is amongst the highest in the world yet the government have done nothing. IPPR make a compelling case for universal childcare and their proposals would be a welcome addition to Labour's manifesto in 2015. Perhaps the most regressive move in terms of women in work has been the Coalition's cuts to tax credits. By reducing the support available to working parents, they are making it more difficult to strike that work-life balance, pushing many women to give up their jobs and forcing an extra 100,000 children into poverty.

It is clear that this government either doesn't understand, or doesn't care about the pressures on hard-working women. As part of our One Nation approach, we can make a powerful case for change with responsible employers and the government working together to help women strike that work life balance. □

Childcare is a matter of choice

Affordable childcare plays a key role in our future economic prosperity.

Just three weeks after his inauguration Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act into law. The act pumped \$800m into the US economy and ultimately stopped them sliding into a double dip recession. The headlines were infrastructure, jobs and growth. But the act also set aside tens of billions for childcare and for working families with children.

'If we're really to crack childcare and ensure families aren't locked out of the workplace, then we need a much bigger push'

Back on this side of the Atlantic it's difficult to see how things could get worse for working parents or those that want to but can't.

The UK has the second highest childcare costs in the OECD. Just two thirds of mothers with children under the age of 15 work. Childcare costs are eating up an ever higher proportion of income. And yet the coalition is making childcare more and more unaffordable.

Cuts to tax credits and budgets for childcare provision mean that the options for parents are diminishing. This will get worse when universal credit is introduced from next April.

Too many UK parents face a stark choice of returning to work for little financial benefit or putting their career on hold. Women are still the main carers in the UK and are still the main losers when childcare is unaffordable. The picture is even starker for single parents.

Provision of childcare and our attitude to it is a choice. The changes to the tax credits - reducing the percentage of childcare that is covered from 80% to 70% - save a little over £300m per year. This is a lot of money. But in the context of deficit reduction and what parents could be contributing through tax revenue it is small and short-sighted.

But this is the choice the coalition has made.

In Camden we have made different choices. We have a long history of investing in high quality childcare. We were a pioneer of Sure Start and the last Labour Government's and have invested in the wrap around care - breakfast and after school clubs - that allow parents to work or study full time.

The coalition inflicted deep, upfront cuts on local government. Hitting poorer areas like Camden harder than more affluent areas. We faced a budget gap of £83m over three years. We anticipate we'll face a further £50m from the spending review expected at the end of next year.

But through our cuts programme we've sought to protect as much childcare as possible.

While childcare costs are spiralling across the UK the problem is particularly acute in central London. Families, on seemingly good salaries, are often faced with the stark reality that re-entering the workplace simply doesn't pay. This can have a long term impact on the caring parent's career prospects. In turn this can have a long term impact on the child. When work doesn't pay, it doesn't help families out of poverty.

In Camden we tried means testing some of our discretionary provision for three and four year olds, but just a couple of months in it's not working, it's forcing parents from work and the

Cllr Sarah Hayward is the Leader of Camden Council



By Cllr Sarah Hayward

benefits changes from next April will exacerbate the problem. So now we're finding the money to reinstate 25 hours of free care for all three and four year olds. We've worked with the voluntary sector to continue to provide some after school and holiday activities that put most other councils to shame.

'Through our cuts programme we've sought to protect as much childcare as possible.'

But there are limits to what we can achieve alone. The budget pressures on councils are immense. The coalition are committed to more cuts, costs of statutory services like adult social care is rising with no additional funds. We've already had to cut discretionary services. And there will be more pressure on these budgets as more cuts are made and more spending commitments are mandated without the resources to deliver them.

In Camden we're taking a longer term look at public services through our Equalities Taskforce. Families and Children in poverty is a key area of work and so the costs and availability of childcare will, I'm sure, come under close scrutiny. Key to this taskforce is having all the sectors round the table.

Because if we're really to crack childcare and ensure families aren't locked out of the workplace, then we need a much bigger push. We need to work with employers, the voluntary sector, with national government and with families to help provide, safe, high quality and enriching care and to ensure that all parents can play a key role in our future economic prosperity. □

How is gender inequality being challenged in the EU?

An interview with Zita Gurmai MEP, by Felicity Slater

What impact has EU membership had on women's lives in member states? What have been the key advances for women?

Undoubtedly, EU membership has had a positive impact on women's lives. Gender equality and respect of women's rights are a prerequisite to join the Union and is enshrined in the EU treaties. Furthermore, since the Union was founded, there has been a shift from economic principles to human rights, anti-discrimination and justice values.

The founding treaty of the EU in 1957 included an article on equal pay. With the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, we moved from a purely economic union towards a union of values. In it, the principles of non-discrimination and equality are reiterated. Moreover, the Lisbon Treaty gives legal recognition to the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which clearly states that any discrimination is prohibited and that equality between women and men must be ensured in all areas. Nevertheless, this legislation is not always effectively implemented.

How is austerity affecting women across Europe? What are the key shared experiences and divergences from one state to another?

The crisis is having a 'trompe l'oeil' effect on women's employment across Europe. First, it hit the construction, automobile and financial sectors, which are traditionally male-dominated. Men have thus been more affected by jobs destruction than women.

However, after the first wave, many (largely right wing) European governments adopted austerity-only measures to tackle the crisis, in the public sector. This is having a disproportionate impact on women: not only are they mostly employed in the public sector, but it is they who benefit most from public services.

Finally, although unemployment rates vary from one member state to another, in the countries hit the hardest by the crisis, such as Greece and Spain, it tends to be higher amongst women than men.



Zita Gurmai MEP is the President of PES Women.

What is the Party of European Socialists (PES) doing now to reinforce and further women's rights and equality in the crisis?

PESWomen has been highlighting this 'trompe l'oeil' we are urging European leaders and national governments to always include a gender perspective in their policies to address the crisis and push for growth and jobs, such as in the European Youth Guarantee.

One of PESWomen's priorities for 2013 is to tackle poverty and the gender pay gap through robust socio-economic policies for women. In the EU, 17% of all women live in poverty, while the gender pay gap is still 16.4%! The crisis should not be used as an excuse for not bridging the gender pay gap. Member states should commit to reducing it by 2% a year, until wage equality has been reached.

What do you think about the current situation in Europe? What kind of narrative can we develop in every member state for 2014, in particular with regard to women?

Today, there is a backlash against women's rights and gender equality in Europe. Their sexual and reproductive health and rights are being disputed in several member states: the very conservative Hungarian government has enshrined the right to life from conception in its new 'constitution'; Poland is currently discussing a bill which would limit a women's right to choose even more than its extremely restrictive abortion law already allows; and abortion is still illegal in Malta and in Ireland, where a young woman died last year because she was denied an abortion which could have saved her life.

In many member states, women's rights NGOs, including those providing services for women victims of gender-based violence, no longer have sufficient resources due to budget cuts.

As for women's participation in decision-making, the situation is still unequal: only 24% of members of national parliaments are women and only 8% of those in the highest decision-making bodies of Europe's 300 largest publicly listed firms are women.

So, for the 2014 European elections, it is crucial that we, as progressives, send a clear and strong message to European women and men: there is a clear difference between having a right- or left-wing government, especially when it comes to women's rights and gender equality! We want to take women's rights forward and not backwards. We want equal participation of women and men right across society. We want to give women their own voices and choices and not be told what to do nor sent back home. We will therefore have a strong women's strategy for 2014 to get women on board, because we will not win these elections without women's votes. □

Advancing human rights

Past European Court of Human rights rulings have set good precedents for UK justice

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has been in the headlines of late following its ruling that the UK government should rethink its blanket ban on allowing prisoners to vote. This has naturally been followed by the predictable calls from the right for the UK to withdraw from the Court's jurisdiction, together with claims that the Court is costly and bureaucratic, and that it seeks to impose a European notion of human rights that is far removed from our British understanding of civil liberties. Whilst it may be true that the Court could adopt a speedier and more cost-effective approach to the resolution of alleged human rights abuses, withdrawal must be opposed by Labour if we are to retain our credibility as the party of equality and fairness.

International courts are easy to criticise – you only need to look at the huge sums of money that have been spent on the International Criminal Court has cost in the last 15 years and compare this to the lack of tangible outcomes it has achieved to see how easy it is to criticise these clunky mechanisms for enacting international justice. But that's where the ECHR is noticeably different. Yes, it is still costly, slow and bureaucratic, but it has also done more to further the advancement of human rights in Europe than any other system. The power of the Court lies in the fact that the member states, by and large, feel obliged to implement its judgments, since the chief problem with international courts is that they have no enforcement mechanisms. This means that member states of the Council of Europe (the body which oversees the ECHR) often feel compelled to behave in a way that they consider unpalatable and contrary to their national identity, but it has meant that Europe is a fairer, safer place to live as a result. To demonstrate this, let's look at just a couple of examples from the UK.

One of the earliest ECHR cases was when Ireland brought a case against the UK government in order to raise its concerns about the use of the 'five techniques' against suspected members of the IRA. These techniques included subjecting prisoners to continuous noise and depriving them of sleep and were used to aid interrogations. The Court found that they amounted to inhuman and degrading treatment and were thus prohibited under the European Convention on Human Rights. That didn't stop the British judge in the case from asserting that "to many people,

'Yes, it is still costly, slow and bureaucratic, but the ECHR has also done more to further the advancement of human rights in Europe than any other system'

several of the techniques would not cause 'suffering' properly so called at all, and certainly not 'intense' suffering." Nevertheless, the Court ruled by an overwhelming majority that there had been a violation of Convention rights and the UK has never condoned the use of such interrogation techniques since then. It would have been easy for the UK to withdraw from the Court's jurisdiction following this judgment and claim that it represented an unjustifiable intrusion on to UK sovereignty (especially since we were dealing with people accused of involvement in terrorism). Yet in following the Court's judgment the then government enabled the UK to become a safer and fairer country.

Maeve McCormack is Policy and Briefings manager at the Catholic Education Service in England and Wales



By Maeve McCormack

In the 1993 case of *Tyrer v United Kingdom* the Court found that the UK government had breached the Convention by allowing the use of corporal punishment in the form of 'birching' as a punishment for assault. Following the Court's ruling the UK government altered its approach and no British court has sanctioned corporal punishment since then. Again, it would be hard to argue now that this ruling didn't help to make the UK a better place to live.

These are but two examples but they demonstrate the extent to which ECHR judgments can alter national policy for the better. Labour can be proud of its human rights record as the party that ratified the Convention in 1951 and, with the introduction of the Human Rights Act in 1998, actively brought the principles underpinning European human rights law into our domestic law. The ECHR is a rare international court in that its judgments can create political change, but if its member states begin to flout its rulings or threaten to remove themselves from its jurisdiction then its authority will be undermined. The UK doesn't always get things right when it comes to human rights and we need an international body to intervene at times. Equally, if the UK were to leave the Council of Europe we would lose the moral authority to condemn other countries' rights records.

The ECHR has intervened in countless cases from across Europe where violence against women has been tolerated by the state, and in doing so has undoubtedly saved lives. It has refused to tolerate domestic violence in Slovakia, Bulgaria and Croatia, and has intervened in cases of rape brought against the Netherlands, Turkey and Russia, to name but a few examples of its protection of women's basic rights. Even if we don't agree with every one of its decisions, it has, in general been a force for good in Europe, and Labour must defend its human rights record by continuing to support the UK's membership of this important institution. □

Where are our female scientists?

They are out there - but we must back them

Many businesses report that they struggle to recruit qualified staff in the science, technology and engineering sectors – the very areas that we need to develop and grow if the UK is to remain one of the world's top economies. To make the situation worse, we have over 70% of female graduates of these very subjects not working in these fields. This situation threatens the UK's chance of keeping pace with the rapidly growing leading-edge economies of the world.

'The role models for young women considering [SET] careers are scarce'

With a minority of qualified women actually going on to work as scientists, technologists or engineers, the role models for young women considering these careers are scarce. The Institute of Engineering and Technology's 2012 skill survey found only 6% of professional engineers are women, and shockingly only 2% of engineering apprentices are female.

But we do not just want good women as role models - many women in engineering were inspired by engineering fathers. So while women role models are important, men who tell girls they can do these jobs and show them how are also important.

To help publicise this state of affairs I edited *Unlocking Potential: perspectives on women in Science, Engineering & Technology*; a collection of essays exploring what is holding girls and women back and what can be done. It was clear that from an early age girls and boys learn what are considered appropriate careers for their gender, and with few women working as engineers

it's no surprise that few girls decide to tread this ground. Once a young person has set on a particular educational path it can be hard to change and complete a new set of subjects.

In Sheffield we are lucky to have a role model who is simply inspiring. Ruth Amos is running her own company; she is just 23 years old. She designed a product called the StairSteady as part of her GCSE Resistant Materials Course, to help people who have difficulty using the stairs but do not have the space or the money for a stair lift. It really took off when Ruth competed against thousands of applicants to win the Young Engineer for Britain 2006.

But encouraging girls and young women into these areas is not enough if the culture in the workplace doesn't change. It's hard to appreciate the scale of sexist remarks and outright bullying that some women experience at work. Sexist remarks aimed at young women that remain unchallenged by colleagues and managers can result in misery and the woman leaving.

We also need to tackle the work-life balance that can hold women back. Cathy Travers, the most senior female engineer at Mott McDonalds in Sheffield, told me that when her children were young she was able to work during term time only, thus managing her family responsibilities while continuing her career. By being adaptable, Mott McDonalds were rewarded with loyalty, allowing them to retain a talented and experienced female employee.

But isolated examples of good practice will not achieve the change we need. As a Sheffield MP, I am well aware of our region's proud engineering and manufacturing heritage. We boast world-class universities and have a new University Technical College due to accept its first intake of students in 2013. We are in a good position to tackle the issue.

Meg Munn is the Labour and Co-operative MP for Sheffield Heeley.



By Meg Munn MP

Over the past year I have met education and business leaders across the region with the aim of making South Yorkshire the first choice for female scientists, engineers and technologists. I've met many inspirational and highly motivated women and men who are working hard, leading innovative companies and exporting products around the world. We've discussed how we might work together to train and support girls and women.

'Many of the business leaders I've met are willing to support measures to make [change] happen'

Sheffield University's engineering department has already acted by appointing a professor working 50% of her time on this issue. The University of Sheffield and Boeing's Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre is focusing on recruiting more female apprentices led by engineer and training director Alison Bettac. The new University Technology College is working hard to fulfil its aim of 50% female admissions in its first year. Sheffield Hallam University's Women in Science Engineering and Technology team is providing advice and support on how to make this ambition a reality.

Many of the business leaders I've met are willing to support measures to make it happen. We know that bucking the trend won't happen overnight, but the benefits of achieving change would be substantial for our region. Crucially it would begin to harness the skills and talent of girls and women who currently would never dream of taking up a career in science, engineering and technology. □

The four stages of disillusionment

SET jobs can be tough on women

Women's under-representation in science, engineering and technology (SET) is not a new problem but, despite some slow progress in recent years, it remains pervasive. Women accounted for little more than one in ten of all employees in SET occupations, compared with one in two women in the workforce overall. Women are even less well represented in some SET occupations, notably among engineering professionals and skilled tradespeople. Furthermore, the 'leaky pipeline' ensures that a higher as a proportion of women than men either never use their academic qualification in a SET role or leave for other occupational pastures.

As a union representing 14,000 women who work in these areas, Prospect is well placed to contribute, and there's no better starting point than listening to the views of our own members.

Last year we surveyed women working in science and engineering across the public and private sectors. 35% of our 2,000 respondents said that they had been inspired by a teacher or educational opportunity, and 25% cited their main motivation as interest and enjoyment of their subject.

Less positively, our survey also confirmed that women leave science due to:

UNCERTAINTY OVER FUNDING OR CONTRACT RENEWAL –

Currently threats of redundancy and outsourcing are having a significant impact in the public sector, though concerns over short-term contracts are particularly marked in higher education.

THE PROFESSIONAL IMPACT OF HAVING A FAMILY OR PART-TIME WORKING –

There is still something of a presumption against part-time working, especially

at more senior levels, and many women identified this as a barrier to progression or promotion. Legislation to prevent discrimination against part-time workers has not resolved this problem. Our respondents also revealed a deficit between the formulation of family-friendly policies and their implementation.

UNHAPPINESS WITH MALE-DOMINATED WORKGROUPS AND CULTURE –

A majority still work in teams and for employers where women are in the minority. This is particularly marked in the private sector.

We have identified four phases in women's STEM careers:

OPTIMISM –

'As the engineering population demographic in [my industry] is highly skewed, with many due to retire in the next few years, there are real opportunities for those with time left to progress.'

UNCERTAINTY –

'The only reason I would leave...would be for redundancy.'

GLASS CEILING –

'I think I have reached the highest level I can in the organisation, there are less women higher up and I think I'd feel even more isolated.'

RESIGNATION –

'My male counterparts, who I was recruited with, have all progressed to [a higher] level and have been there for a good few years. I have taken a year off on maternity leave so should be a bit behind, but maybe not this far.'

No doubt these perspectives reflect a combination of factors including pressures on public finances, career stage, scarcity of specialist career paths, em-

Sue Ferns is the Head of Research and Specialist Services at Prospect trade union



By Sue Ferns

ployment sector and quality of management. Some views will have resonance beyond science and engineering, but there is no doubting the particular challenges that emanate from working in highly skilled and highly competitive environments where women are so significantly under-represented. Our members' experiences confirm that more still needs to be done to deal with endemic problems, for example relating to work-life balance, the glass ceiling and the culture of SET workplaces.

Equally it is clear that there is no single agency that can resolve the range of economic, institutional, organisational and cultural challenges that exist. But politicians, educators, business leaders and individuals all need to play a part. Prospect will continue to negotiate for better practices at work and to campaign for better and longer-term funding and against policy-driven cuts and closures as well as supporting our members individually.

We welcome the opportunity to build on our work with the Fabian Women's Network, which stems from an event they held in Parliament last summer that explored what the UK has to benefit by boosting women's presence in science and innovation, and how this can be brought about. There is huge potential through this agenda to contribute to the high quality employment and economic growth that the UK so desperately needs.

A true test of success will lie in our ability, working together, to transform this member's experience: "I am becoming more frustrated with what feels like fighting every day. An under 30 female science graduate is not an easy thing to be in my place of work" into another member's optimism: "I am inspired by blue sky thinking. I believe anything can be reality if you try hard enough." □

Budding female potential in STEM

Making careers in science more accessible to women is good for them – and the economy

Bernadette, Amy and Alex from the popular TV programme *Big Bang Theory* are probably the most accessible women scientists role models today. Even though the programme is a US sitcom, it does strike a chord with many in the wider scientific community and devoted viewers this side of the Atlantic. American TV at least attempts to portray women in scientific scenarios; they regularly feature in crime or medical dramas like *CSI* and *House*. Here in the UK we don't appear to have followed the trend – women scientists are hardly portrayed at all. Most of our scientific programmes are in documentary format, and at most there have been recent attempts by the BBC to find the female equivalent of David Attenborough in Alice Roberts and Kate Humble. Generally though, science does not feature highly in UK popular culture; most original programming is either costume drama or reality-based, and these are anything but centred around the scientific community. Media has a very central role in the way society thinks of and portrays women and addressing this single issue would have quite a substantial impact on this problem.

Much discussion has centred around attracting more women into Science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) areas of research and teaching in higher education institutes. The most frequently cited problems appear to be the very traditional attitudes towards science subjects being more masculine and encouraging women towards other more feminine subjects and professions. Excellent articles in previous editions of *Fabiana* written by Barbara Govan, Laura Nelson and Athene Donald have tackled this subject area in depth. Plenty of the blame for imposing subliminal gender biases onto girls and women is ascribed to schools and parents. However, in my experience

as a science tutor I have found that this is not necessarily the case. These days, potential earnings have become a key factor affecting the uptake of scientific subjects. Students are very aware of the economic landscape of our times and have become very attuned to the requirements of survival today, with a lot of their choices driven by economic reasons rather than talent or passion for a subject as they once were. The fact remains that science jobs do not pay highly, and so most scientists have to apply for grants for funding every 3-5 years. This does add a level of uncertainty into the equation.

‘Many [women] disappear out of the research field, taking with them valuable know-how and experience’

Bernadette and Amy, like myself, work within the discipline of life sciences. Life sciences don't appear to have problems in attracting and recruiting women to their undergraduate and graduate programmes, but keeping them there appears to be a battle we are losing. Many disappear out of the research field, taking with them valuable know-how and experience. The reasons for this are down to child-raising career breaks (thanks to the prohibitive cost of childcare), and the lack of funding or positions within a department to continue with research projects. At more senior positions we do see women excelling, but the genders are far from balanced.

To fully appreciate the obstacles to women remaining in STEM disciplines, one must superimpose the radical

Dr Aysha Raza is a Neuroscientist at UCL and activist with particular interest in health and women's issues



By Dr Aysha Raza

restructuring that forces a shift from the traditionally evolved system of departments and faculties to the specialised postgraduate research institutes. The most worrying issue in the UK has been the divorcing of teaching and research. In the rush to rebrand and repackage universities and higher education institutes, the whole ethos of the purpose of centres of learning and excellence has been lost. The departmental structure is systematically being dismantled into the more US favoured research institute model. Teaching is centralised and farmed out to the cheapest options, which does not necessarily mean the best one wins. And amidst all this restructuring the big losers are often the students who are paying higher fees and getting poorer quality teaching than ever before. It will only be a matter of time before the student body wises up to this and decides to spend its money elsewhere. Had the great reformer Jeremy Bentham been buried and not placed as an auto-icon in our university, he would most definitely be turning in his grave.

I am a great believer in British brain power. The UK has a great track record for innovation and enterprise born from our education system, and it is this that Labour needs to nurture and harness to make our way back to a healthy economy and brighter future. Women have a very active and positive role to play in the STEM areas of excellence, they just need the right conditions to thrive there and it is up to us to provide them. Positive strategies such as the Prospect charter for women in STEM, which encourages measures to prevent the flow of talent from science and engineering, are to be applauded. Many similar schemes now need to be implemented.

So Bernie is a microbiologist, Amy a neurobiologist and Alex a physics graduate/lab assistant. These scientists deserve a series of their own instead of playing window dressing to their scientist men. □

Standing together: partners in peace

The concerns of women should not be pushed aside in peace processes

The Labour party has more women MPs, more women in leadership positions, and more women in senior policy making roles than any other party. Labour can be rightly proud of its feminist heritage, and the affirmative action that has ensured that women are shaping decisions at all levels of the party.

It is this heritage, and the strong analysis and activism of Labour women, which must inform the policy review, and Labour's manifesto for the 2015 general election. One Nation Britain must have equality at its heart, but we must not stop within the borders of this nation. Britain's diplomatic, development and defence policies impact the lives of millions of people around the world, so women's rights and gender equality must be at the front and centre.

'Women and men have different experiences of conflict, and therefore different aspirations and views on a peace that meets the needs of the whole community.'

In autumn last year, Womankind Worldwide and ActionAid launched *From The Ground Up*, new research examining the work of women building peace at local levels in conflict-affected countries. Speaking to over 550 women and men in Afghanistan, Liberia, Nepal, Pakistan and Sierra Leone, the research team from the Institute of Development Studies found overwhelming evidence that no matter what the nature of the

conflict, women were actively leading peace building efforts in their local communities. From rebuilding schools, to managing food-growing co-operatives, to taking leadership roles in local decision-making bodies, women were working together to move their communities towards peaceful, sustainable futures.

Yet still, when it comes to formal peace processes, particularly at national and international levels, women are excluded, and their concerns overlooked. Not only is this a fundamental denial of women's rights to be represented in decision-making, it also overlooks women as vital partners in peace.

Women and men have different experiences of conflict, and therefore different aspirations and views on a peace that meets the needs of the whole community. During the research, men were most likely to focus on government infrastructure and the absence of armed conflict as indicators of peace. Women's understanding of peace was broader, and encompassed freedom of movement, food security and access to health and education. Crucially, in all the countries researched, women connected prevalence of domestic violence with an absence of peace. Bandana Rana, founder of Saathi, a women's rights organisation in Nepal, says: "women need security in the home, they need to sleep well in their beds, knowing they are safe from violence. Violence can come from husbands, from neighbours, or from family members. Domestic violence is a particular problem."

The concerns of local women in conflict zones may seem a long way from a policy review taking place amongst Labour members and allies in the UK. And at a time when women in the UK are bearing the brunt of the current economic crisis, it can be difficult to focus our attention on the needs of women

Lee Webster is a women's rights activist. She is Policy and Advocacy Manager for Womankind Worldwide, leading on women, peace and security.



By Lee Webster

living in conflict. Yet we must stand in solidarity with women peacebuilders from around the world, hear their voices, and make sure that Labour's foreign policy puts women squarely at its heart.

'The Labour party should fund training for women mediators... and build links between women peacebuilders'

Thankfully, there are some concrete ways to make this happen. Any future Labour government, and Labour in opposition, can send a strong message on the need for women's meaningful participation in peace processes. The coalition government has rejected Womankind's calls to direct 15% of its peacebuilding funds towards supporting women's rights and participation in peacebuilding processes. This is a commitment that the Labour Party can and should make. The 15% commitment – representing around £40 million of the current Conflict Pool – is the minimum standard recommended by the United Nations for all peacebuilding funds. This commitment could fund training for women mediators, build links between women peacebuilders across regions and internationally, and support women's rights organisations working at grass-roots level, who are at the forefront of building peace in their communities.

When women are at the heart of peace processes, we know that peace is more likely to be long-lasting. Let the Labour party stand by women peacebuilders, and commit to supporting their participation and leadership. □

Abortion and the law

Nine facts to know when you engage in the debate

In October the new Secretary of State for Health, Jeremy Hunt, said that he would like the current abortion limit to be dropped from 24 weeks to 12 weeks.

Because of the impact abortion legislation can have on women's bodies, minds, careers and autonomy, this debate needs to be on our radars.

Lauren Milden is Secretary of the Young Fabians Health Network and works as a Senior Account Executive at Political Lobbying and Media Relations (PLMR) in London.



By Lauren Milden

As such, you may well find the following nine facts about abortion and the law useful to have in your debate toolbox.

In 1966, Liberal MP David Steel's private members' bill led to the Abortion Act 1967, which has since been amended by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990. The amended 1967 Act now governs abortion in England, Scotland and Wales. The Act provides a legal defence for those who carry out abortions when - "[...] a pregnancy is terminated by a registered medical practitioner if two registered medical practitioners are of the opinion, formed in good faith" and is followed by four situations.

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The first situation arises when "the pregnancy has not exceeded its twenty-fourth week and that the continuance of the pregnancy would involve risk, greater than if the pregnancy were terminated, of injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman or any existing children of her family." Because childbirth is dangerous - WHO data reveals it still kills at least one woman each minute - women in the first trimester will meet this criterion.

The fourth situation listed is where "there is a substantial risk that if the child were born it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped." The Act leaves the definition of 'substantial risk' and 'serious handicap' to doctors, and the judiciary is not keen to interfere with this. However, in *Crown v Smith* (1974), a doctor was convicted for lack of good faith when supporting an abortion. In the case of *Jepson v The Chief Constable of West Mercia, Police Constabulary*, a Reverend sought a police investigation into doctors who had approved the abortion for a bilateral cleft lip and palate of a 28 week old fetus. In 2003, the High Court allowed the judicial review of the decision not to prosecute to proceed.

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Only one doctor needs to consent to the procedure if “[...] the termination is immediately necessary to save the life or to prevent grave permanent injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman.”

The 1967 Act set the limit at 28 weeks because of the assumption of ‘viability’ found in the Infant Life Preservation Act of 1929. When the act was updated by the Human Embryology and Human Fertilisation Act 1990, links with the Infant Life Preservation Act were cut and the limit, following advances in medicine, was lowered to 24 weeks. On 2 November 2012, the British Medical Association issued a press release clearly stating that they “believe [...] there is no scientific justification to reduce the limit from 24 to 20 weeks.” This was in response to a Westminster Hall debate during which Conservative MP Nadine Dorries argued for a reduction in the abortion time limits and misrepresented BMA policy.

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Northern Ireland does not have an abortion act. The Offences Against the Person Act 1861 criminalises “procure[ing] a miscarriage...unlawfully”. The 1945 Criminal Justice Act, which brought the Infant Life (preservation) Act to Northern Ireland, is used to interpret the term ‘lawfully’. Cases such as A (1994), confirm that “The doctor’s act is lawful where the continuance of the pregnancy would adversely affect the mental or physical health of the mother...The adverse effect must...be a real and serious one.” The government has yet to publish revised guidelines on abortions.

On 20 May 2008, MPs had a free vote on whether to lower the limit to 12, 16, 20 or 22 weeks. MPs rejected these.

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The conscientious objection clause of the 1967 Act allows doctors to refuse to partake in abortions if the woman’s life is not jeopardised.

Lord Howe, during question time in the House of Lords, stated “The government has no plans to review the 1967 Abortion Act. It is Parliamentary practice that any proposals to change the abortion laws come from backbench members and decisions are made on the basis of free votes.”

9.

Workplace sexism and sexual harassment

It's time to listen up and act to eliminate sexism at work

When the recent Jimmy Savile scandal broke, bringing with it waves of allegations of workplace sexual harassment and assault dating back over a period of thirty years, there was an immediate reaction from some quarters of 'it's terrible, but at least this doesn't go on any more.' Thanks to the 12,000 women who have added their experiences to the Everyday Sexism Project over the past eight months, we were able, categorically, to contradict this assumption.

What the Savile scandal highlighted, understandably, was a lack of awareness of the sheer scale of the problem of workplace sexism, particularly amongst those who don't experience it themselves. What it also flagged up, rather less understandably, was a stubborn reluctance on the part of some to accept it. As I write this article, a new Everyday Sexism Project entry pops up on my desktop. It reads:

"I'm the only girl in an all male office. They have a poll going to see who can get me into bed after our xmas party."

There can be no doubt that sexism and sexual harassment in the workplace are alive and well.

The entries we have received suggest that the problem manifests itself in a variety of different ways. Firstly, there is a tendency for female staff to be belittled or professionally overlooked. One woman wrote:

"International visitors from company's head office came for a meeting at which I, the only female in management, had to report. I walked in with my report and they asked for coffee, white with two sugars."

Reports suggested that the simple fact of being a woman was frequently used as a means of dismissal in the professional environment:

"Last week at work, my boss said this: 'I don't know what you are saying, I don't do woman-speak.'"

Women working in careers with a less even gender split seem to report particularly high levels of sexism, particularly in perceptions of their ability to do their job well. One computer technician gave this example:

"The severity of many of the reports we have received goes far beyond sexism into outright illegal discrimination"

"Men checking with other men in case my computer tech knowledge is wrong. 25 years of studying and fixing computers...Often checking with men who cheerfully admit to knowing nothing about computers."

Sadly the severity of many of the reports we have received goes far beyond sexism into outright illegal discrimination. One woman explained:

"Male professor at a uni I used to work at doesn't hire 'attractive women' to work in the laboratory as it would 'distract the men from their work.'"

Another wrote:

"I'm 21 and being asked at job interviews if I'm getting married, or pregnant. Pretty sure this is illegal."

One woman even reported a boss who gave her a gift of a box of condoms in front of her colleagues before her wedding "so I didn't go on maternity leave".

Laura Bates runs the Everyday Sexism Project, which can be found on Twitter under @EverydaySexism, and writes for the Independent



By Laura Bates

And these do not seem to be isolated incidents. The reports go on and on; from businesswomen being asked to sit on the boss's lap if they want their Christmas bonus to female lawyers reporting senior male colleagues in their workplace openly ranking female job applicants by attractiveness.

Another major theme that has arisen from the project entries is the prevalence of sexual harassment and assault. We have received hundreds of reports of women being groped, pinched, touched, slapped, kissed and even raped in workplace settings. These stories have come from women working across all sectors, from retail to business to the service industry. One sales assistant reported:

"The manager...told me..."you KNOW why I hired you" and looked down at my chest... Everytime I went up a ladder in the stockroom to retrieve a game, he'd smack my rear end. I needed the job, so I didn't say anything for a very long time."

Meanwhile, an office worker wrote:

"An arm round my shoulders with the hand resting on my breast... I had a senior manager who frequently used to try and do this to all the female staff necessitating a side-step movement to get away. A complaint was made but nothing changed."

Perhaps most worrying of all is the repeated refrain that complaints and reports are brushed aside or swept under the carpet.

"Went to HR about sexist and flirty CEO. Told to put up with it as I'm 'young and pretty and they're men, what do you expect?'"

Even today, women are still suffering behind a Savile era-esque veil of normalisation and silence. It is time to start listening to their stories. □

Want your voice to be heard?

Get organised to tackle society's pervasive sexism

A few weeks ago, an old friend and I began the seemingly unavoidable (following a bottle of wine or two) early hours 'putting the world to rights' conversation. Unsurprisingly, talk soon turned to the challenges women faced in society. Cue an impassioned monologue from me, covering topics as wide as the chaperone requirement in Iran to the lack of female judges in the UK. My friend - a left leaning (although he probably wouldn't admit it), business loving, 'I believe in equality but aren't feminists a bit scary' kind of guy - interrupted me.

"I do get all this, but what is it, day to day, that makes your life difficult because you're a woman? You've got a degree, you've got a job, and it's not like you live in a country where you have to cover yourself head to toe before you leave the house."

It actually took some thinking about. He was right: through hard work but mainly due to a huge amount of luck and accident of birth, I am British, have the vote, have been to university, and have had two good jobs since graduating. I am probably too young - and certainly lucky with my employers - to have directly experienced the discrimination millions of British women face in the workplace, and have not had to balance the expectation of being a primary care giver with my career. While the daily bombardment from the media came to mind, I chose to tell my friend about so called 'low-level' harassment I (and millions of other women) experience on a day to day basis. For those who doubt this is true, just run a quick eye over the fantastic - but at the same time anger-inducing - Everyday Sexism project.

I became involved in the Movement for Change work in Lambeth a year ago, after attending a training workshop. Movement for Change is the home of community organising in the Labour movement: it is a grassroots organisation which trains people to win political change on issues that matter to them in their community.

The first campaign leaders were drawn from across Brixton, and came together out of frustration at the lack of political attention paid to women's safety by the traditional political Establishment. The idea was to build power, recruit more young activists to the group, and then take action to change their community for the better.

Our group all had direct experience of intimidation, harassment or violence in one form or another. So did many of the women we spoke with during our listening campaign. We felt deeply that these all too commonplace experiences needed to be acted on. So in May 2012, we worked in alliance with school students, local youth groups and charities to stage a large community meeting in our area. We invited two MPs, Kate Green and Stella Creasy, along to support the campaign, and all together we drew up a 'Women's Safety Charter' to make practical demands of local nightclubs. Next we met with them to negotiate endorsement of our Charter.

A local campaign with national significance is now growing. After a further listening campaign with councillors, local police and others, we've focused on three strands:

1. The Women's Safety Charter: We produced a list of practical steps Brixton nightclubs can take to make women safer, including using approved Suzy Lamplugh training tips for their front of house staff, and prominently displaying posters which show 'zero tolerance' for sexual harassment. The Charter was launched last September with our first nightclub partner in Brixton. Two other venues signed up on the night, and though there are venues that have been less forthcoming, we will meet resistance by negotiating for change.

2. Review of licensing: We negotiated with Lambeth Council for our activists to give evidence before its Licensing Review Board. This Board decides what condi-

Kate Talbot is a community organiser at Movement for Change.



By Kate Talbot

tions should be applied to local nightclubs who want to get a license to operate. Our ask is simple: if a nightclub owner does not demonstrate a firm commitment to making the venue safer for women, s/he should be denied a license to sell alcohol.

3. Regulating the national industry:

The Security Industry Association (SIA) is the body which accredits door staff and regulates their training. Currently, there is no requirement for door staff to undergo any specialist training in women's safety. At present, the SIA is undergoing a process of reform. We plan to inform the training provision for door staff, so that the SIA can make a lasting difference to women's safety in the night-time economy.

I found the community organising approach so effective that, since becoming involved I left my job in commercial management to work full time for M4C. It is worth saying that I still believe canvassing and voter ID is important, and I do this with my CLP: organising is a complementary approach, rather than a replacement. But it has connected me to people both inside and outside the Labour Party who are passionate about their communities and want to take action, but hadn't thought about organising before. They have largely been people who aren't interested in delivering leaflets, and certainly didn't read them when they fell on the mat.

While M4C is not a policy organisation, there is no doubt in my mind that the best policy ideas come from those who live and breathe the issue. Most of all, I've had an important belief reaffirmed: if Labour are to win the next election, we need to work with people on issues that matter to them, rather than presenting people with a pre-determined campaign issue. Across the country Labour activists have been doing this for years, but it needs to be nationwide and it needs to be consistent. We need to get organised. □

Making a lasting difference

The End Violence Against Women Coalition are galvanized for change. Why not join us?

This year had barely started when we had the publication of both new government statistics on sexual offences and the Met's report on Jimmy Savile's prolific sexual offending. More recently, attendees of a Fabian Women's Network event saw Diane Abbott MP speak out against the harm that hypersexualised culture and new technology are doing to our young people.

Alongside the exposure of the nature and scale of sexual abuse of girls by older men in Rochdale, and ongoing similar prosecutions in other towns around the country, we are in a watershed moment for changing public perception and understanding of sexual violence and what needs to be done to stop it. And as Diane demonstrates, Labour women have already taken a critical lead on this.

The report from the Home Office, Ministry of Justice and the Office of National Statistics is the first ever compilation of all sexual offences statistics in one place and shows that around 473,000 people are victims of sexual offending each year. These include sexual assaults, indecent exposure, unwanted touching, and approximately 85,000 rapes. These are well-known figures, but staggering nonetheless. The figures on police reporting and conviction rates are alarmingly low. When these facts are considered we mustn't forget that proper funding is needed to support women and girls who experience sexual violence, whether or not they report to the police, and that this

enables health and other services get better at responding to the problem.

'Making sex and relationship education compulsory is key and Labour has set a lead which the other parties must follow'

The Met's report on Jimmy Savile's sexually violent behaviour towards hundreds of people, mostly women and girls, and spanning decades, lifted the lid on the large number of adults who are living with the legacies of past sexual abuse. They were badly let down by public services in the past, and the government must now ensure that there are adequately resourced services to support them. His fame and subsequent access to victims meant that he was not of course the 'usual' kind of sex offender – most are personally known to those they attack, and we must maintain public awareness of this to ensure that testimonies against friends and family are not ignored.

We have to look seriously at prevention of abuse in the first place. The statistics also show that sex offenders are often repeat offenders and we must

Holly Dustin is the Director of the End Violence Against Women Coalition.



By Holly Dustin

begin a conversation about how we change cultures and attitudes that condone abuse of women and girls, and allow the small minority of men who commit these crimes to believe that they will likely get away with it. Working with young people in our schools is key to this.

Yvette Cooper's pledge at Labour Party conference last autumn to make sex and relationship education compulsory is key and has set a lead which the other parties must follow if they are serious about preventing abuse. If we can ensure that all young people at school discuss consent and are confident of reporting abuse we will go a long way to making potential perpetrators think twice before they calculate their chances of escaping justice. We also need good teacher training in spotting the signs of abuse and in responding once a young person reports it.

This is a turning point. Labour is already leading. Our members will continue to campaign on these issues as an urgent priority this year. You can keep up with us by signing up for our monthly bulletin, and watch out for our Parliamentary and party conference events. Another report last year compared social change in different countries and found that feminist campaigning was the most significant force in bringing about change on these matters. Together we will make a lasting difference. □

Visit us at www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk | Follow us on Twitter at @EVAWhd | Sign up for our monthly bulletin <http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/get-our-bulletin>

**END
VIOLENCE
AGAINST
WOMEN**

Farewell, Greta Karpin (1932-2012)

Inspiration, friend and mentor to countless Labour women



It was a testament to her style of friendship that, once accepted into the circle, then everyone was equal. No matter how long you had been a member, you were accorded the time and respect of the longest-serving.

Greta Karpin was a lifelong socialist, trade unionist, a passionate campaigner for peace and social justice and against discrimination and racism. She was also of that generation of Labour Party pioneers that came out of the great depression only to find themselves in a world at war. Nevertheless, they helped deliver the welfare state. It would have been so easy to give up – but that generation didn't.

The excellent obituary printed in the Guardian, written by her friend and comrade Luke Akehurst, gives an insight into her key role as 'de facto chief of staff' to the late Clive Jenkins, General Secretary of the former trade union ASTMS. As he relates, she was also 'politically, organizationally and socially, the life and soul of the Party in Hackney. Greta operated at every political level, forming friendships with union general secretaries, Labour leaders and representatives, cabinet ministers, and she understood that grassroots organisation was essential.'

The writer Maya Angelou once said of her own struggles "The issue is not to survive - but to thrive, with passion, compassion, humour and style."

Greta did all of that and more. There were so many aspects to her life – the Labour Party and politics in general remained a core part of her, but she was also a bit of a foodie, a stylish dresser, a gardener, a pet lover and theater aficionado. She enjoyed travelling, was fond of a good read, and liked to gossip; she had a prolific memory and a thousand stories of life, the universe and just about anything.

'The writer Maya Angelou once said of her own struggles "The issue is not to survive - but to thrive, with passion, compassion, humour and style." Greta did all of that and more.'

She was inquisitive - some might say plain nosy. Several of her conversations would move, sooner or later, into cyberspace so that she could track down echoes of her past. Whether it was the listing of all Billy Fury's hits from the 1950s, or finding pictures of people she and her beloved husband, Bert, had met over the years; or researching recipes for gefiltefish from the 19th century, Greta had a joy for finding things out and, as often as not, being proved right.

Her thirst for knowledge was always unquenched and her joy in finding out new things was unbounded. Greta was always someone you wanted to spend time with, the conversation was always fresh and challenging; the scale of the people

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By Jennette Arnold

she knew and wanted to be known by her was enormous; and there was always a new inspiring story.

You always got the feeling in talking to this fabulous woman, that her life had been so full, with her tireless work for her Labour Party, her travels with her beloved Bert, her commitment and unending support to those she liked, her work, pets and acquaintances that she would need a second lifetime to describe it all.

The picture shows Greta around the age of 25 addressing the Labour Party conference – look closely and you can just make out Harold Wilson looking over her shoulder – clearly listening and learning, as we have all done over the years! I spoke with her just the day before she died, and she demonstrated as ever her interest in events ('didn't Boris Johnson outdo Cameron at the Olympics? How are you celebrating your wedding anniversary? What's the name of that chef from the Great British Menu? Glad to hear your constituents are supporting your new campaign! How's your lovely husband and granddaughter?') It was typically butterfly-like, revealed her compassion for her friends, and was all washed down with great chunks of gossip.

When Greta celebrated her eightieth birthday with a meal in May last year, the menu card she designed with her dear friend Steve Arnold included a quote by the American writer, John Burroughs: "I still find each day too short for all the thoughts I want to think, all the walks I want to take, all the books I want to read and all the friends I want to see" It summed her up for me entirely.

Farewell my friend and one of the finest Labour women there have been in our Party. □

Bert died in 2012; her nieces and great-nieces survive Greta.

The Fabian Women's Network is a network of over 1500 women, working to support and encourage women's engagement in policy and politics.

We take a lead in promoting policy that has the needs of women at its heart.

We bring women from across the country, from politics, industry, education and the media together to share knowledge, skills and opportunities.

Our activities:

Fabiana magazine

Events and seminars

Political education and mentoring programme

Networking

All women members of the Fabian Society are automatically members of the Fabian Women's Network. Others can join for as little as **£1.50 per month**.

To find out more, visit **www.fabianwomen.co.uk**

Or sign up to our **newsletter** by emailing fabianwomen@fabians.org.uk



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