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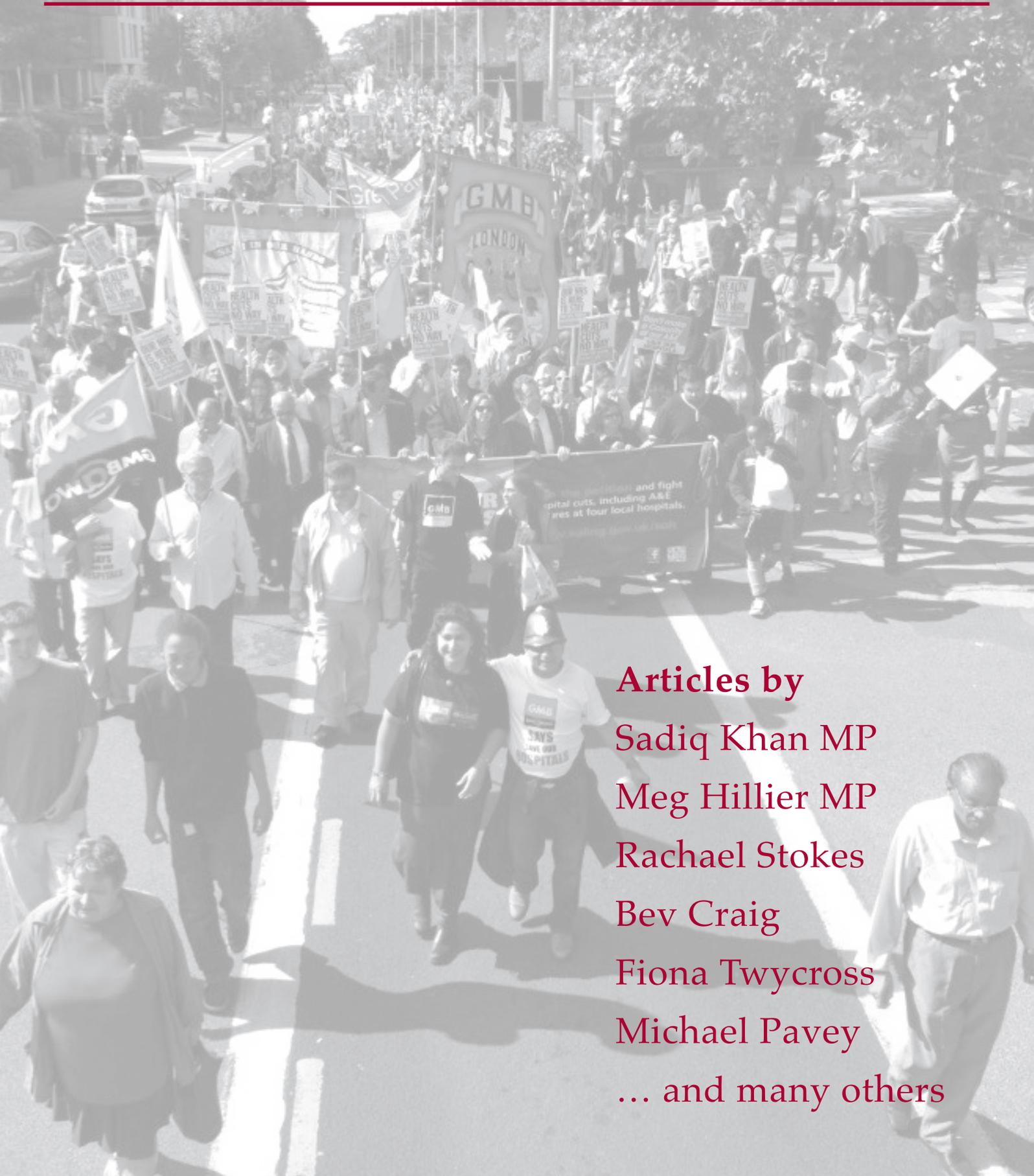
# FABIANA

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The Fabian Women's Network Magazine

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**Articles by**

Sadiq Khan MP

Meg Hillier MP

Rachael Stokes

Bev Craig

Fiona Twycross

Michael Pavey

... and many others

Fabiana is the magazine of the Fabian Women's Network (FWN). The articles represent the views of the writers only and not the collective view of FWN.

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Editorial	3
<i>Sarah Hutchinson</i>	
More Talk. More Action	4
<i>Bev Craig</i>	
Time For A Revolution In British Childcare	5
<i>Meg Hillier MP</i>	
Gender Equality Must Be The Goal	6
<i>Rachael Stokes</i>	
London Should Be A Zero-Hunger City	7
<i>Fiona Twycross</i>	
Glass Ceiling Is Still Thick	8
<i>Samantha Jury-Dada</i>	
Is Policy Ruining Our Criminal Justice System?	9
<i>Harj Dhesi</i>	
Local Government And Murder	11
<i>Dawn Reeves</i>	
Defending Labour's' Sure Start Legacy	12
<i>Michael Pavey</i>	
The Great British Fairy-Tale	13
<i>Michelle Lawrence</i>	
Reopening A Closed Down Library	14
<i>Reema Patel</i>	
Sexism In The Capital City	15
<i>Sadiq Khan MP</i>	
Women In Wales: Fighting Back	16
<i>Angela Elniff-Larsen</i>	
Women & The Economy	17
<i>Catherine West</i>	
On The Edge	18
<i>Sara Hyde</i>	
One Nation In Retirement	19-20
<i>Louise Deegan</i>	

# Welcome to the sixth issue of Fabiana!

## Editors

Sarah Hutchinson  
and Ivana Bartolletti



There is growing evidence that women are losing more as a result of the Coalition's ideological assault on the welfare state, and Britain's public institutions, in the name of deficit reduction. The Fawcett society set this out clearly in their 2012 review of the effects of austerity on women. The pay gap, and women's greater likelihood of taking time out of work, or working part time to provide childcare or care for sick or disabled family members, their concentration in low pay sectors of the economy such as care, retail and admin, mean they have fewer economic resources. The fact they live longer and rely more on the state pension and health and social care, and their interaction with schools, hospitals, children's centres, means that they depend more on public services, but also notice first when these are eroded.

The welfare state provides the support women need to keep their families going, their children fed and educated. Through support for childcare it helps get women into work, and insulates them against the worst excesses of bottom-line capitalism. Women are being hit hardest, because they have the most to lose. Osborne's Comprehensive Spending Review did nothing to reverse the situation he had created whereby women were provid-

ing 70% of the £18.9 billion of cuts benefits, pay and pensions introduced in 2010 and 2011. Instead it continued to chip away at the support services used by women.

We wanted to find out more about what this means for women across the country, and how the Coalition's austerity policies - undermining public services while failing to grow the economy - were affecting communities and women and we wanted know how women's talents and skills could be used to grow the economy. As a network of women spread across the UK, we realised we had the opportunity to find out what the cuts mean to women, and asked our members to tell us: this issue sets out their experiences and concerns. From the impact of mental health service cuts to women in the criminal justice system. From Sure Start to pensions - the contributions in this issue show that women are being affected in multiple ways by the government's failure to get the economy moving, and their zealous dismantling of our safety nets. London Assembly member Fiona Twycross highlights the devastating growth of hunger in the capital, while Reema Patel explores the significance of cuts to library services on our communities.

The articles in this issue don't just present women as passive victims of austerity. As well as demonstrating women's resolve to fight against changes that harm

them, their families and their neighbourhoods, several pieces also argue that national and local government are wasting women's talents, and must do more to open out opportunities to women if we want economic growth. Catherine West, recently selected as PPC for Hornsey and Wood Green provides practical examples of how local government can ensure women can best contribute to local economies, while Meg Hillier argues for better childcare to support working women. And shadow Minister for London Sadiq Khan argues that Labour must ensure that women in London are not left behind. We also have an important piece on why women's rights must be at the centre international policy, while write Dawn Reeves takes an unusual look at public sector workers.

In the next two years if it is to win the general election, Labour has to show that it understands women's lives, that it is listening to them, and that it can lead with women for women. The issues set out in this issue of Fabiana are not side issues, or distractions - they shine light onto the daily lives of women - and families - across Britain, and highlight how our economy will only get stronger when women are given the support they need to make a full contribution. ■

# More Talk. More Action.

**Lack of support for women with mental health problems is creating personal crises and a drain on the economy**

We need to talk. We all have experience in one way or another with mental health issues. It could be personally, or a partner, family member or friend. Surprisingly though it is often absent from political debates and the policy narratives, especially when real-terms spending is cut and local authorities' budgets squeezed.

Seeing my partner battle not just her illness, but the system that is supposed to support her, has both enlightened and inspired me, and has made me a better Councillor. I'm not an expert but I'm involved in local campaigns and act as a governor for a mental health trust. Too often we leave it to mental health practitioners as the clinical 'experts' rather than debate politically what a holistic social and medical approach should look like.

Mental health problems cost the economy £105 billion per year (Department of Health, 2012), and receive a fraction of the research funding given to other major diseases. To tackle this problem effectively we need more funding, better access and improved understanding of the wider interdependent policy issues such as education, housing, benefits and employment. The Coalition made the commitment that mental health would receive parity with other health issues in the NHS. However in March 2013 data was released showing that spending on mental health had fallen for the second consecutive year, and staff cuts are biting. I see this in local services in Greater Manchester, when social workers are prevented from taking more cases on due to budget pressures. Cuts in a small budget allocation can severely affect someone's life chances.

It is not just the decline in real-terms spending in the NHS that is proving problematic, but as NHS staff cuts hit, and local authorities' budgets are squeezed, a perfect storm is brewing as local services are hollowed out at a time of increased demand.

## A Woman's Issue?

Headline figures often shy away from the specific mental health impact on women and high risk groups of women, including older women, BAME women and gay women (NIME, 2007). While men are

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## 'In the UK one in four women will require treatment for depression at some time, compared to one in ten men'

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three times more likely to commit suicide, women are more likely to have been treated for a mental health problem than men (ONS, 2003). Depression is predicted to be the second leading cause of global disability burden by 2020, and is at least twice as common in women (WHO, 2012). In the UK one in four women will require treatment for depression at some time, compared to one in ten men. Women are twice as likely to experience anxiety as men. Of people with phobias or OCD, about sixty percent are female (ONS, 2001). Women are more likely to suffer from PTSD, often attributed to sexual violence, especially as at least one in five suffers rape or attempted rape in their lifetime (Home Office, 2013). The UK has one of the highest rates of self-harm in Europe (Self-poisoning and self-injury in adults, Clinical Medicine, 2012) and more young girls than boys self-harm.

The lack of widely accessible women's specific services is therefore alarming. Many mental health units do not have enough single sex beds, and accessing a woman psychiatrist is often difficult if not impossible. For a woman experiencing mental health issues as the result of sexual violence, surely this is not an unreasonable expectation? There are many steps that organisations and health providers could take to ensure that their services fit the

Bev Craig is a Councillor on Manchester City Council and Lead Member of LGBT Women's Issues. She is a governor of Manchester Mental Health Trust, a Board Member of Southway Housing Trust and a school governor.



By Bev Craig

needs of the demographic of their users. It is not without cost, but in the same way the public health agenda has shifted the debate to prevention rather than reaction, the same can be done for many mental health conditions, and so catch symptoms early on.

I have been pleased by promising references in Labour's 'whole person care,' advocated by Andy Burnham MP, to a new holistic vision for mental health, but it needs support across the rest of the shadow cabinet to ensure that it is integrated throughout all government departments.

But we cannot just wait until 2015, we must use our own influence in our own spheres to make changes and safeguard the vulnerable. Think about the organisation that you work in or represent. What is your employers' approach? Has your organisation signed up to the Time to Change Campaign? Are you a councillor? How much do you know about mental health spending in your authority? Do you have a mental health champion? If you're a school governor, does your school take it seriously from a young age? How can you support your local voluntary and community sector under the weight of increased usage? These are little steps to tackle an institutional culture of silence around mental health issues, join the growing number of people speaking out to put it on the political policy agenda. ■

Check out [www.time-to-change.org.uk](http://www.time-to-change.org.uk)

# Time For A Revolution In British Childcare

Meg Hillier is the Member of Parliament for Hackney South and Shoreditch. She was a minister at the Home Office in the last Labour government.



By Meg Hillier

## Childcare must be prioritised as an investment in Britain's future

Ask any working parent what the toughest part of the job is, and they will tell you the same thing: sorting out childcare. It is a constant logistical and financial challenge. I should know: I am a working Mum with three children including one under five.

The Government is alive to the fact that this is an issue but has made a dog's breakfast of its 'solutions' on childcare and support for parents. We have had the 'pile them high, teach them cheap' approach to increasing ratios of toddlers to carers; cuts in tax credits for lower income families, the shambolic cuts to child benefit for higher earners and now the criticism that nurseries are chaotic.

## 'Let's stop seeing childcare as a cost – it's an investment in Britain's future'

The cash support the Government has promised comes with so many qualifications it takes a flow chart to work out who is eligible: a quarter of childcare costs paid for a child up to five, if both parents work, and only from autumn of 2015. These ministerial pronouncements and half baked policies do nothing to address the needs of real life parents. The work landscape has changed immeasurably in the last couple of decades but childcare has not made the same shift.

Seventy per cent of working parents do not work nine till five, Monday to Friday. In London, and other big cities, with journey-to-work times of over 30 minutes, doing a full day's work is made more difficult by nursery hours. A recent OECD report also found that the UK has some of the most expensive childcare in

the world. I want anyone looking after my children to be paid properly, but costs to parents are too high.

In my constituency in Hackney South and Shoreditch, and across Britain, the cost and quality of childcare is becoming the biggest worry for squeezed

To secure a recovery, firstly we need everyone working as hard as they can. Limited, inflexible nursery hours mean that most parents cannot do a full-time job properly. Britain needs the talents and energy of parents as much as anyone. Secondly, we need women to be economically active (in my

## 'The cash support the Government has promised comes with so many qualifications it takes a flow chart to work out who is eligible'

middle- and lower-income earners. It must become a top priority for politicians and policy makers if we are to fix the problem. Liz Truss, the Coalition children's minister has failed to address the issues of cost, hours, quality and availability, despite much noise about chaos and ratios. She is failing working parents and their children.

I am happy to defend the record of the last Labour Government, in introducing nursery places for four and five year olds and the voucher system. But the lesson for the next Labour government is that piecemeal reform is not enough. Britain needs a childcare revolution.

In Denmark the Day-care Act means that local councils provide 8am-5pm childcare for all, with parents making a contribution to the cost alongside government subsidies. Childcare is free to the lowest income families. The subsidy is then tapered upwards depending on family income. Seventy-six per cent of Danish women are working. Across the Scandinavian countries, childcare is a priority, and their economies are weathering the storm as a result.

The austere public spending that Labour will inherit should cause a keen sense of prioritisation. But what can be more important than childcare?

constituency woman's average earnings are higher than men's), and fully equal in the workplace and jobs market.

The evidence shows that children benefit from nursery, equipping them with the skills to prosper at school and beyond - just look at the amazing work being done by Graham Allen in Nottingham and with his Early Intervention Foundation to see the proof of this. On cost the IPPR has shown that a decent, universal system of childcare pays for itself in the long-run. More parents working, paying taxes, and not claiming tax credits and benefits more than pays for the state's investment in caring for children.

Let's stop seeing childcare as a cost – it's an investment in Britain's future.

Labour must listen to the voices of working parents - who want to do the right thing but feel they are being punished - and the evidence that childcare makes economic sense in tough times. We need a vision of what childcare should look like over the next decade. And then we need a Government that is committed to working towards a system of universal childcare to support parents back into work. That vision is not coming from this Government – Labour must build on its previous record but be more radical. The childcare revolution is long overdue. ■

# Gender Equality Must Be The Goal

## Women's rights must be protected in the post-Millennium Development Goals framework

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were established in 2000 and adopted by all member states of the United Nations as part of a global drive to tackle poverty and exclusion. With less than two years away from the target deadline, the debate on what should replace them when they expire in 2015 is now beginning to heat up.

An immediate challenge facing governments charged with negotiating the global agreement is how the post-2015 framework should respond to the new uncertainties and threats that characterise the world in which we now live. Among these are the giant issues of greater economic and financial instability, depleting natural resources and increased vulnerability to climate change. Another, but equally significant, challenge concerns how to address the development problems that remain almost as pervasive as they did when the MDGs were formulated more than a decade ago. None are more illustrative than the persistent inequalities that exist between women and men.

It is true that significant gains have been made in tackling gender inequalities and empowering women since 2000, such as reducing disparities in school enrolment or increasing women's access to paid work. It is also true that the current MDG framework has played a role in bringing about these achievements. However, we equally know that progress has been too slow, too narrow in scope and too uneven. Advances in equality have yet to translate into genuine and sustained improvements in the lives of women, which has been to the detriment not only of women themselves, but of their families, the communities in which they live and societies as a whole. In essence, gender and society is a barrier to development and poverty eradication.

An area of particularly slow progress, and which arguably represents one of the most egregious and persistent

fault lines of gender inequality globally, is the lack of decision-making power that women have compared to men. In societies around the world, women have less access to and influence over decisions that affect their lives than men. Whether you look at the decisions of national parliaments or those made by local village committees and school boards, women are typically in the minority and typically in the margins. Take the issue of parliamentary representation (one of the few areas of political and public life for which we have globally comparable data): only one in five parliamentarians worldwide are women and only one in six occupy cabinet positions. Given the current rate of progress, it is estimated that it will take up to 40 years to reach a global 'parity zone' where neither sex holds more than 60 per cent of parliamentary seats. This is simply not good enough.

The right of women to participate in political and public life is clearly set out in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (Cedaw) and reaffirmed by the Beijing Declaration and Plan of Action - not to mention countless statements from the Commission on the Status of Women. It is therefore very clearly a right in and of itself. However, it is also a means to ensure that decisions better reflect the different needs of men and women. Within the context of international development, giving women more of a say means that those who are most affected by poverty have greater influence over the decisions being made to tackle it.

This is obviously far more than an issue of bums on seats: it about ensuring women in decision-making roles represent the diversity of societies in which we live, that their increased participation translates into increased influence, and

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By Rachael Stokes

ultimately, that they use this influence to address the wider discrimination and injustices that lie at the heart of inequalities between women and men.

So what needs to be done? At the international level the post-2015 framework provides a critical opportunity to galvanise political will, spur investment and encourage action to address this global injustice. First and foremost, we need to build on existing commitments within the current MDG framework by retaining a standalone goal on gender equality. This is a critical pre-condition for tackling the root causes of gender inequality and providing a space to prioritise issues disproportionately affecting women. But this alone is not enough. It must be accompanied by targets that look beyond national parliaments and indicators that look beyond numbers. Progress needs to be measured not only in terms of women's formal representation in decision-making institutions, but also in terms of proactive support for women's participation and leadership, whether it concerns training and mentoring or investment in women's groups and collective organising. Above all, we must ensure that women from poor and marginalised communities are actively involved in shaping the content and process for implementing the post-2015 framework. Global surveys already indicate greater influence in decision-making is a priority for women. However, women's groups now have a critical role to play in identifying what changes they want to see and where, what success looks like and what mechanisms will need to be in place so they can hold their governments to account.

Women's lack of decision-making power is a truly global problem requiring a global response. Let us not squander the opportunity that post-2015 provides and ensure instead that women are neither left out nor left behind. ■

# London Should Be A Zero-Hunger City

Research highlights the extent of hunger in the capital

There cannot be much worse for a parent than knowing you cannot feed your child. At Pecan Foodbank in Peckham, I met a mother who had gone without food for two days to make sure her son could eat when her £20-a-week family food budget was diverted to pay an unexpectedly high bill. Only when she was entirely out of food and faced with going to a pay-day lender or the foodbank did she seek help from Pecan. This is the reality for many of the growing number of people using foodbanks across the UK. In April, it was reported that the number of people using foodbanks has trebled in one year with almost 347,000 people fed by Trussell Trust foodbanks.

I recently completed a six month investigation into food poverty in London and the report – which calls for London to become a Zero Hunger City – was published the same day as a Shelter report that said four in ten families were cutting back on food in order to afford to pay their housing costs. Foodbanks are the consequence when families can't cut back any further. Foodbanks are the acute crisis end of the scandal of food poverty in the UK.

A Mumsnet survey from last year found that one in five mothers skip meals behind closed doors to feed their kids. Not all these mothers end up at food banks, some being able to turn to family or friends for help or taking out payday loans to be able to afford a weekly shop. However, it is shameful that in one of the richest countries in the world, anyone needs to skip meals because they can't afford enough food for themselves and their families, let alone have to seek emergency food aid.

Over a third of those fed by foodbanks are children. My investigation focused particularly on how food poverty affects children. Ninety-five per cent of teachers responding to a Londonwide survey said they had children in their

classes who came to school hungry with over half of teachers saying it was because families couldn't afford to buy breakfast for their children.

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**'Ninety-five per cent of teachers responding to a Londonwide survey said they had children in their classes who came to school hungry with over half of teachers saying it was because families couldn't afford to buy breakfast for their children'**

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It is worth remembering that the reported trebling in reliance on food banks came before the latest tranche of cuts and changes. Worryingly, all the emergency food aid organisations I spoke to during the investigation think (not surprisingly) the welfare changes will make the problem worse. With food costs, gas and electricity, transport and housing costs all going up and incomes not keeping pace with ever increasing living costs, it seems inevitable that the number of people using foodbanks will continue to grow.

I identified a number of solutions for addressing hunger in children through school food including protecting

Fiona Twycross was elected to the London Assembly in 2012, and sits on Labour's National Policy Forum.



By Fiona Twycross

and expanding the number of breakfast clubs and identifying ways that we can expand the number of children accessing free school meals. There are many reasons why universal school meals are a positive step. Even setting aside the compelling over-riding argument that all children should have enough decent food, pilots showed that attainment in schools with universal school meals is higher. Removing the stigma of being a 'free school meal pupil' means the attainment of children previously on FSMs goes up disproportionately to other pupils. Removing stigma from children in poverty is a good thing.

Finally, I would argue that we need to remember that food poverty is also a feminist issue because poverty is a feminist issue.

Women are more likely to live in low income households, and both single female pensioners and female lone parents are more likely to be in low-income households than their male equivalent. More women work in public sector jobs and this means that the attack on public sector pay and conditions has affected them disproportionately. This does not mean food poverty is exclusively a feminist issue – any level of hunger affecting any group is unacceptable - but we do need to remember that inequality and poverty do not affect all groups equally.

The hard-won progress in tackling inequalities can easily go backwards and when we are looking for Labour One Nation approaches to how we can rebalance the economy in the future, we should look at it through feminist eyes. When we do this, we need not just to look at glass ceilings that need to be broken through but also at the increasing number of trap doors that people like the woman I met at Pecan foodbank and her son can so easily fall through when safety nets are removed. ■

# Glass Ceiling Is Still Thick

**Progress has been made in Education, but there are blockages in the pipeline**

In the words of former Prime Minister Tony Blair, a core policy for any government must be 'education, education and education'. Why so? It is due to the transformative nature of a good education system which can improve the nation both in terms of its economy and its social stock. The first state education policies were aimed at allowing Britain to compete with the economic powerhouse of Germany (formerly Prussia) which already had a universal, free, and compulsory education system. If education is the key to improving economic conditions, why has this not proven to be the case for women?

Women are over represented in UK Higher Education institutions, with UCAS reporting that 55% of students are women in 2013. New Labour's dedication to widening access to Higher Education is largely responsible for this shift in student demographics. Indeed, a recent report by the Higher Education Funding Council for England found that since the mid-2000s women have been 25% more likely to go to university than their male counterparts.

However, women's success in Higher Education is not reflected in today's job market. Today, women are still more likely to earn less, more likely to be stuck in middle management jobs, and are still underrepresented in boardroom appointments. A recent study showed that there is a 33% gap between the current rate of recruitment of women to the boardroom and the level needed to achieve equality: the glass ceiling has still not broken in business. This trend is repeated across the job market and can be seen (and often heard) in the Houses of Parliament in which only 146 MPs are women, out of a total of 650, making it unrepresentative for more than half of the UK population.

Getting more women into better paid jobs is not an argument purely

based on economic concerns. In addition to the obvious increase of tax revenues gained by HM Revenues and Customs, being in employment also brings social benefits. Unwillingly being out of work can be demoralising

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**'Until the barriers stopping women from matching the earning power of their male counterparts are eradicated, women are robbed of the chance to fulfil their potential in the economic market'**

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and frustrating, as many UK graduates are experiencing at the moment. And being stuck in middle management positions and finding oneself unable to progress through the ranks, prevents people from fulfilling their potential. Until the barriers stopping

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**'a report by the Higher Education Funding Council for England found that since the mid-2000s women have been 25% more likely to go to university than their male counterparts'**

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women from matching the earning power of their male counterparts are eradicated, women are robbed of the chance to fulfil their potential in the economic market.

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*By Samantha Jury-Dada*

What do these figures say for my generation of women, leaving higher education in the midst of the slowest economic recovery in history? It says that although we are more likely to get into university we are less likely

to fulfil our potential in the labour market in comparison to our male counterparts. Access to Higher Education is a big step towards changing the structure of the workforce. However more government direction is needed. If no action is taken, the few women who are CEO's, Cabinet ministers or University directors will be regarded as enough and we deserve better. Just because those women beat the patriarchal system, does not mean all other women can and without more women in government to influence policy, things are unlikely to change.

It appears that greater access to Higher Education has not drastically altered the position of women in society or the job market. I would love to be an optimist and believe that we should wait and see before casting judgement, especially as my generation have not reached that stage in their careers yet. But being somewhat of a realist, I know that equality in the workforce will only occur when the government gives real support to working women so that they are not penalised by rising child care costs, inflexible working hours and unequal pay. ■

# Is Policy Ruining Our Criminal Justice System?



A magistrate argues that reforms constitute a wasted opportunity

By Harj Dhesi

The Magistrate's role is to ensure three things are achieved when sentencing an offender. That retribution is served, justice is restored and rehabilitation is in place. When taking stock over the last couple of years, a steady stream of sentencing guidelines have been published. Although wide consultation has taken place among the justice profession, Sentencing Council and Government policy, those of us implementing this guidance, often experience frustration. Why? We have seen the introduction of new sentencing guidance which has resulted in weaker sentencing powers.

In 2009 our Prime Minister pledged he would increase the sentencing powers of magistrates as part of 'giving power back to the people'. It seems since this commitment, progress has taken a step back. To give an example, the new assault guidelines now need to be strengthened by secondary offences which aggravate the original offence to hold them up against any rigour. Other sentencing guidelines which equally don't measure up anymore include the new burglary and drugs guidelines. The sentencing structure for these offences is now operated on a system of harm and culpability. Often (in my experience through sitting with different Magistrate colleagues) this results in inconsistencies depending on how the new structure is interpreted and implemented.

Previously these same sentencing powers in the old structure (which to a greater degree still exists for offences that infrequently appear before us) would have held their own in terms of robustness and clarity. We simply sentenced on the seriousness of the offence through an open range. This gave Magistrates the option to consider sentencing in a more holistic way. I fear other guidelines may follow this suit. It is interesting then, to see that only the most common offences which come into the Magistrate courts such as assault in its different guises, drugs

and burglary, have been repackaged and confined to the new sentencing structure. Is this because previously these offences carried higher custodial sentences and most certainly in cases where there was aggravation and antecedence?

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**'It has not gone unnoticed by Magistrates that we are playing a part (by default) in Government's policy to keep the prison population down in carrying out the new changes. Is this good reform or bad politics? Where is the balance then to address this?'**

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It has not gone unnoticed by Magistrates that we are playing a part (by default) in the Government's policy to keep the prison population down in carrying out the new changes. Is this good reform or bad politics? Where is the balance then to address this? Whilst in some cases there is simply no escaping a custodial punishment, especially reoffending offenders, there is movement on the bench which is shifting towards more rehabilitative and financial routes. These both have their right places in the overall sentencing landscape, but are we simply making sentencing softer? This also doesn't bode well for the ongoing issue of reoffending.

I will address a system of sentencing that isn't as effective as it could be and this is community sentences, something which the Government hasn't addressed enough to rectify the balance of punishment. Community sentences are not always prescribed based on them not being perceived as tough enough or the lack of confidence that exists on whether they serve as a just punishment. There are also indicators that have led us to believe by the probation service that some offenders are just not suitable for a community order. This is not true, as I found out on visiting a community pay-back scheme. Most, if not all, types of offenders are suitable but what is lacking is the range and number of schemes. If we are to ensure that our justice system reflects both punishment and rehabilitation whilst keeping incarceration down, reform must include investment into community schemes to make them a real alternative for use as a sentencing tool. To have impact there must be more accessible schemes which are still stringent, onerous yet purposeful which offer a suitable form of rehabilitation to reduce reoffending.

At present no follow up management is in place for offenders when they finish their community sentences. If organisations who manage community schemes e.g. like SERCO were linked up with DWP, a proportion of people could start obtaining life and on the job skills leading to employment. This would offer far more value for money in helping to solve the reoffending issue and keeping prison costs down, while also tackling unemployment. Instead, the Government's reforms have demonstrated how short-sighted policy reform is being used to cut costs, but is bound to fail. ■

## Join in the Election of the Fabian Women's Network First Committee

We are electing our first committee so you could play a crucial role in shaping the future of FWN, building on our unique strengths and successes. Elections will be held alongside the Fabian Exec elections, and more details about voting will be sent to full members shortly.

### What are we looking for?

We know that women's lives are really busy so we want our committee members to carve out their role and national profile alongside their professional and personal commitments. We want committee members to lead their own projects whilst being part of a winning team. And we want FWN to be an enriching experience, which can help you move forward in life, whatever your interests are. Four committee meetings will be held each year, with projects being run as part of a team outside of the committee meetings.

### Who we are looking for?

We are looking for women of all generations and backgrounds. You will need to be a member of the Fabian Society to stand. Committee members will be elected for a period of 2 years.

### How to apply

We are asking you to submit a short application form. Please keep it brief, with answers to the following questions in no longer than 100 words per question. Deadline date for the applications is the 16th of August. These applications will then be sent to members as a manifesto.

**Deadline date for the applications is the 15th of August.**

### Questions

1. Why would you like to join the FWN committee?
2. What experience would you bring to the role?
3. What are you committing to achieve on the committee?

Please note this can refer, but not be limited to, projects/areas of work/time/campaigns/policy development / events including networking. Make sure your commitments are achievable and realistic.

Please email your answers here: [Giles.Wright@Fabians.org.uk](mailto:Giles.Wright@Fabians.org.uk)

**Thank you very much for your support in helping make our Network even better.**

# Local Government And Murder

**A writer takes a novel approach to attempt to change the negative narratives about public service**

The way that public services are constantly undermined by government policies and the press infuriates me. When I see stories about failures in services, town hall fat cats and petty bureaucracy, I picture the writers' sneer, rolling eyes and hear the tired refrain... that the public sector is run by people who are incompetent and don't care. That public services are for those who can't afford to buy their own in the private sector. Even when there's a story of the human cost of the cuts, it often comes with a bitter dollop of blame and the inference that the Council has brought this on themselves, "surely they could have managed the situation better."

**'I know local government and thrillers might not go together in many people's minds, but I found that it was a good way of getting beneath the surface of what happens in a town hall'**

As someone who uses public services and has worked in and around local government for years, I see things differently. I see local government being set up to fail; public sector workers – a large proportion of whom are women - trying to do a good job with their hands and feet bound. I meet managers dragged down by shifting sands, their good will buried along with their memories of a positive focus on improvement. I see powerful private interests that used to lurk in the

shadows, sucking out profit, resources, and expertise. The value of the public good and wider debates about what kind

**'I see local government being set up to fail; public sector workers – a large proportion of whom are women - trying to do a good job with their hands and feet bound'**

of society we want to live in, are drowned out. At a time when we need the system to be working at its best, when we lack the capacity and time for quality, caring responses - the dominant narratives remain negative.

So, in a spirit of quiet protest, I decided to write the story from a different perspective: a dark entertainment with murder at its heart. I know local government and thrillers might not go together in many people's minds, but I found that it was a good way of getting beneath the surface of what happens in a town hall. A murder sharpens the focus on decision-making, life suddenly speeds up for everyone in its wake and the most critical aspects of work (for people not in uniform) suddenly crystallise. The political gets personal.

What's different is that my novel, *Hard Change*, has local government officers who are heroes as well as villains. It examines whether they, and their police and public health colleagues, can act collectively to prevent another death. My hope for *Hard Change*, is that it contributes to a new narrative about public life and the public sector. I think it's important to tell stories in different, creative ways that change perceptions and shine new light on our experiences. Story telling helps people make sense of their lives and that's the same for me. It's why I want stories that reflect my life as a feminist and my view that it's possible to make a difference.

Dawn Reeves is a Local Government Director turned thriller writer and facilitator



*By Dawn Reeves*

Having written the novel, I thought about how possible and practical it might be to change the local government story. I developed

a free workshop and have taken it back into Councils to continue the dialogue with communications and policy officers about how to turn around gloomy, cynical or antagonistic narratives. It focuses on how to construct a good story and how to get different messages out in a way that really connects with people.

I've found that using creative techniques also helps to work out what the story we want to tell is. And it's possible to tell stories driven by characters we don't often see – strong women, in the public sector, responding to seriously challenging situations. The workshop encourages participants to have a go at writing their own town hall thriller and it's proved to be thought provoking and empowering. It's provided an alternative way to communicate what people in public services actually do, their motivations and the results of their work, the difference they've made.

I've tested ideas about how to build creative aspects of storytelling into social media formats, and how to have an end to a story about local government when like life, public services go on. I know from *Hard Change* readers that everyone loves / needs a moment when they can say "yesssss!" and stories with (sometimes small) victories for communities, for public services and for organisations like Councils are vital.

What we need is more stories about public services and local government – the more thoughtful, illuminating and the more they get under the skin, in my view, the better. ■

# Defending Labour's Sure Start Legacy

**Labour Friends of Sure Start aims to protect one of Labour's great legacies**

Sure Start is special. In the words of one mum: "Sure Start is a one-stop solution to a million parenting problems."

It is a rare example of integrated services providing a seamless offering to young families. It is also an even rarer example of sustained investment in prevention rather than damage-limitation: tackling cause rather than effect.

Sure Start is also extremely popular. 78% of parents were satisfied with Sure Start according to a new DfE Evaluation. Twenty-two different Sure Start services were analysed and the lowest approval rating was 88%. Some services recorded 100% approval.

Sure Start is now embedded deeply in people's hearts. But its very existence is under threat.

Government cuts have forced 401 Centres to close and hundreds more have seen their services salami-sliced into oblivion. Some Centres have started charging fees, others ration services.

But there is now an even bigger, more pernicious threat.

The Government's new childcare policy shows zero consideration for child development or family welfare. It is solely focused on getting parents into work.

Employability was always crucial to the Sure Start vision. But the Tory childcare policy is little more than a welfare to work initiative. Staff will be able to supervise more children in a calculated attempt to increase the quantity of childcare by driving down its quality. They hope lower quality will mean lower prices. Meanwhile childcare vouchers will only be available where both parents work.

The Tory childcare vision: cash your voucher, drop the kids off at the baby warehouse (sorry, nursery) and be at your desk by 9am.

But young children need more than this. They need to be nurtured in warm and loving families. They need to be introduced to healthy diets. They need to live

in decent quality homes and they need help developing their speech and language. These services are all integral to Sure Start and they are all being hammered by Government cuts. But if the loss of Sure Start services is sad, the loss of the Sure Start ethos is tragic.

## 'The Government's new childcare policy shows zero consideration for child development or family welfare'

A vast archive of hard evidence informed the development of Sure Start. Early Intervention and investment in the Early Years is proven to transform lives. But much of this transformational impact is down to intangible factors.

## 'Sure Start is now embedded deeply in people's hearts. But its very existence is under threat'

Katherine is a single mum of two. She recently contacted Labour Friends of Sure Start to share her story. When her children were born she moved to a new town where she had no family or friends. Initially she struggled. Her kids had health problems and she suffered breakdowns.

"Sure Start gave me someone to talk to. Staff and other mums helped me to offload and gave me advice and support. It gave me a moment to sit down and have a cup of tea and catch my breath. Then I could enjoy engaging with my children instead of sinking into depression."

Michael Pavey  
Director of Labour Friends  
of Sure Start and Council-  
lor in the London Borough  
of Brent.



By Michael Pavey

Sure Start is special because of the range of high quality services it brings together. But it is also special because of the values it embodies in doing so: lending a hand to those who are struggling; offering a shoulder to

cry on; helping mums to give each other mutual support.

The cup of tea and friendly chat is completely absent from the Tory childcare plans. But often it is precisely these low-level interventions which build bonds of trust and set families on the path to a better future.

Sure Start is popular because it provides high quality, comprehensive services delivered with compassion and care. This is a special combination and one with vital lessons for Labour.

Of course enhanced productivity must be sought in all public services. But as budgets are slashed, it is always the human touches which are sacrificed in the name of efficiency savings.

If public services become dry transactional exchanges, budgetary pressures will drive more and more service delivery into the private sector. If the success of a public service is gauged solely by number crunching, the private sector will always tender the lowest price. But they will achieve this by losing the warmth of the human touch.

Public services must be more than this. They must be about fostering and spreading the values we want to see across society: compassion, opportunity and fairness. Sure Start epitomises these values and it uses them to change lives.

That's why it's so special. ■

# The Great British Fairy-Tale

**Link-Up aims to challenge the negative perceptions and misconceptions of immigration into the UK**

Once upon a time there was a green and pleasant land, populated by contented and peace-loving gentle folks. They danced round maypoles, tilled the land and lived in harmony. That is, until a ship called the Windrush landed carrying interlopers and suddenly they were infiltrated. Out of the belly of this great ship emerged a long procession of immigrants, who came to take their jobs, their wives and scrounge the benefits that the gentle Brits had solely contributed to.

a lot of people back with us! We have always had a diverse society.

Diversity has shaped us, our traditions, our businesses, our language, our successes and our culture. But it's not widely acknowledged. Like all fairy stories there's a darker side to each tale. 'Beware the woods children there might be wolves'. Substitute witches and wolves for immigrants and asylum seekers, or gays or lesbians, and diversity becomes a dangerous and recent phenomenon, a stranger in the dark, an external force to be resisted.

## 'Link Up (UK) wants to challenge these negative perceptions through a programme called the Great British Community'

Well that's the fairy tale, the reality is vastly different.

The problem with fairy tales is that they take on a life of their own, and people can start to believe in the myth, and ignore reality. Sadly, the myth that diversity is a recent or negative phenomenon, has taken root. Who is and who isn't 'really' British seems to be a question inhabiting so many forums, causing divisions to grow between different communities, and allows the idea that there is an 'us' and that there is the 'other' to fester. But just who is us? And who is the other?

Even the most cursory glance at a history book, (or watching Horrible Histories) will show that the 'other' has been here a very long time. Whether through Invaders: remember the Romans, the Vikings, the Angles, Saxons, hmm? Or through economic migration like the Flemish weavers and German steelmakers in Elizabeth I's reign. Some arrivals were people fleeing persecution, Jews and Huguenots are just a couple of examples. Or 'chattels' of the Empire, we brought

Modern day media 'folklore' fosters these divisions; suspicions take root through the constant drip-feeding of certain red tops. My, my Grandma, what big lies you have!

## 'Diversity has shaped us, our traditions, our businesses, our language, our successes and our culture'

Link Up (UK) wants to challenge these negative perceptions through a programme called the Great British Community. Why do we need to do this? Make no mistake, Britain is an amazing country, and we are way ahead of many other countries in terms of tolerance and integration. But there are still problems, still crimes committed against people on the grounds of their

Michelle Lawrence is the director of Link Up (UK) [www.greatbritishcommunity.org](http://www.greatbritishcommunity.org)



By Michelle Lawrence

faith, race, sexuality, age and even their disability. And whilst great work has been done to legislate against discrimination, we have yet to change the negative attitudes that still prevail. Ask yourself, who wants to simply be tolerated?

It won't be an easy task. We will need to seek out distinct audiences. We'll need to persuade people who are worried how diversity affects Britain economically or culturally of the fact that it's always been here. We'll also need to demonstrate to minorities that they have a place in our communities, a stake in being 'British'. We need to make sure that we are targeting the right audience, in the right way. Too often these discussions take place only in political or academic circles, or in the press where issues can be sensationalised. We are going to be talking directly to the public, using the internet and social media, using interactive tools and games to engage the public in a discussion about Britishness, a subject that affects us all.

During the Olympics and Paralympics, the whole country got behind supporting Team GB, and celebrated their achievements, irrespective of the faith, ethnicity or disabilities of the athletes. And now is the time to build on that legacy. That's the mission of the Great British Community, to combat prejudice and racism and overcome divisions in society. To celebrate all the contributions that have been made by our vibrant population, the contributions made by people of all ages, backgrounds, ethnicities, faiths, genders, sexualities and disabilities. To reflect British society as it is today.

Link Up (UK) want to challenge these perceptions. We want to be the woodcutter in this particular forest of lies and mistruths. We want to make a clearing and we need your help to do it. We want you to help us write a new story, a true story about our diverse nation and how much diversity truly has benefitted us. We hope you will come on board, give us your support, spread the message about our work, so contact us to find out more. ■

# Reopening A Closed Down Library

Community action reflects the power and importance of a local library

There's a world of difference between paying to read a book; and being able to read a book for free.

That's why libraries are so important. As Jeanette Winterson has written, 'libraries began with the highest purpose – to educate through the agency of a book.' They are not, as usually treated by local authorities, mere leisure facilities; they provide chances to young people on the basis of their availability rather than their ability to pay. Let's put it another way. Education isn't something that stops at the age of 18 or that just takes place in the classroom. Neither is it something that stops when a person graduates from university.

Books and therefore libraries flare passions. They are political because education is political. There is perhaps nothing more symbolic than the burning of a book to represent the erosion of freedom of expression. Of course, governments nowadays don't burn books. But they do move them, sell them, close doors from access to them, and dispose of them.

When Friern Barnet Library was reopened in September 2012, it was done so by community coercion – members of the community themselves reopened

the library and started to run it on a volunteer basis. They donated over 8,000 books. The Council then sought a possession order which proved a bit harder to obtain than anticipated. I'm now a trustee of that library, having led the legal challenge which resulted in Barnet Council's recognition of the community library, and a grant of £50,000 to reopen it.

When I describe what happened I am often asked how we can possibly trust people to return the books they have taken out. I tell them that they are invariably returned through goodwill. And, in any case, there is no urgency for the return of books; quite the opposite – we have had to impose a temporary moratorium on the donation of those books because of the overspill.

Would 8,000 books have been donated for free if what was in the library's place was a for-profit bookshop? I doubt it. Would people volunteer their time if what was in the library's place was a for-profit bookshop? Would the library operate on this sort of goodwill if a bookseller just left the till open and wandered out the back for a smoke? Again, I doubt it. That local people knew it was a library and not a bookshop completely trans-

Reema Patel is a public service consultant, and is also training to be a lawyer



By Reema Patel

formed their willingness to donate or to volunteer. The community's efforts to keep the library running reflect their belief that there's a world of difference between paying to read a book and being able to read a book for free. The library now has a grant from Barnet Council but needs to look elsewhere for other sources of income.

Internally, there has been forceful, vigorous and healthy debate about what, if anything, in the library should be charged for. The debate stems from a concern expressed by Michael Sandel. He worries that we are moving from a market economy to a market society – a society in which every good (including the things we believe have intrinsic value) is up for sale.

Or, perhaps we should express it another way; a market society is no society at all. That sounds chillingly familiar to some words uttered by Margaret Thatcher some time ago. 'There's no such thing as entitlement, unless someone has first met an obligation,' she claimed, after saying there was no such thing as society.

Try explaining that one to a child or to an adult in a library. She might well answer that books and education aren't an 'entitlement'; they're an ongoing right. ■



**CAMPAIGN FOR A LABOUR MAJORITY**



Follow all the latest on the Campaign for a Labour Majority, visit the campaign website [www.labourmajority.org.uk](http://www.labourmajority.org.uk)

# Sexism In The Capital City

The shadow Minister for London argues that next year's council and European elections offer a chance to make London a fairer city for women

The most recent census, in 2011, is interesting for all sorts of reasons. One of the things that is most striking is that in the UK, women now outnumber men by almost a million. Yet the inequality between women and men on a number of levels continues; in political representation, in the boardroom, in the media and particularly in economic terms.

**'the mission statement of Labour London must be to encourage more women to join our party'**

The coalition's austerity measures and cuts to public services are hitting women hard. The Office of Budget Responsibility now estimates 710,000 public sector jobs will be lost by 2017, which with women making up 65% percent of the public sector workforce, is of huge concern. As public sector cuts push women into the private sector, the Fawcett Society predict the pay gap between men and women could widen, a notion further supported by the Chartered Management Institute (CMI) 2012 Gender Salary Survey, which suggests that a woman can earn a staggering £423,000 less than a man over the course of her career.

I have recently been asked by Ed Miliband to be the Shadow Minister for London, where despite outperforming the rest of the UK in economic productivity, we lag behind in gender equality. A report by the Fawcett Society just before the last London Mayoral election gave a pretty damning view of London's lack of gender equality, and even went so far as to cite London as the 'worst' place to live in the UK if you're a woman!

The report found that women in London are less likely to work, earn less than men when they do, and are more likely to be sexually assaulted in the capital than anywhere else. In 21<sup>st</sup> century London we should be ashamed that this is the case. How can we Londoners, who take great pride in living in one of the most cosmopolitan and progressive cities in the world be content with the fact that women are not only getting a raw deal but are effectively being hindered from fulfilling their potential?

History tells us that the best way to get more policy on the statute books that supports women, is by having women at the heart of that policy and decision making process. Making policy decisions that close the gender pay gap, decisions that tackle gender inequality in the work place, decisions that support working

**'a woman can earn a staggering £423,000 less than a man over the course of her career'**

mothers and single mothers, and increase the level of support for those women that have been victims of crime and violence because of their gender are of utmost importance. What we need is women leading the way on these issues.

There are nearly 4 million women in London and the mission statement of Labour London must be to encourage more women to join our party so we can ensure that we mainstream the issue of fighting gender inequality. Let's be frank, if the Labour Party doesn't, no other political party will. And this mustn't just be left to Labour women to argue and push as a priority. We all need to do our bit. Men and women. We absolutely must have more women representing people in all areas of government, both locally and nationally.

As a member of Labour's National Executive Committee, I have been a sup-

The Rt Hon Sadiq Khan MP is Member of Parliament for Tooting, Shadow Justice Secretary and Shadow Minister for London



By Sadiq Khan

porter of all women shortlists in the selection of candidates and regularly encourage women that I meet to make the decision to stand for public office. This is why we are pushing forward with the Future Candidates Programme to train, mentor and encourage the next generation of Labour representation which must include more Black, Asian and ethnic minorities, disabled, working class and women candidates. And why we will select at least 6 women out of the 12 parliamentary candidates in target seats in London with at least half of the 106 target seats around the country being women also. I am really pleased that the newest MP is a woman, Emma Lewell-Buck. The first ever woman to represent a seat that has always been Labour. But we must do even more.

June 4<sup>th</sup> 1913 saw the death of Emily Wild-

ing Davison, killed whilst protesting for women's rights under the suffragette slogan 'Deeds not Words'. A century later, this call for action could not be more valid. We must make sure that we continue the push for gender equality, despite the cuts. Communities across the country are feeling the strain in these tough economic times, but if we allow women to suffer disproportionately and be sidelined in the process, then we will not only be going back in time, but we will be undoing much of good work that has been done to reduce gender inequality over the past hundred years. I hope that at next year's council and European elections, and the general election in 2015, we see a marked increase in the number of women being elected and that together we can work collectively to create a more equal society and eradicate gender inequality. ■

# Women In Wales: Fighting Back

**There are innovative ways of protecting Women from this government**

Here in Wales there is no doubt that the UK Government's economic policies and strategies to manage the deficit are impacting disproportionately on women, whether they are in work or not.

Women make up over 70 per cent of those employed in the public sector in Wales; in the health service, schools and local authorities. The public sector in Wales accounts for a third of the economy. This means that women in the public sector face a double whammy as the sector sees pay freezes as well as full- and part-time job cuts across the board. Women these days especially in the Valleys and West Wales are often the bread winners in the family as there are so few full time jobs out there to soak up the redundancies we have been seeing.

In addition, the population of Wales is ageing at a faster rate than the rest of the UK. Given the analysis at a UK level of the changes to pensions, income, and demands placed on the NHS, we can safely assume that women in Wales will face greater financial hardship and reduction in services than men.

Women in Wales rely on extended family and friends for informal care, more so than across the rest of the UK. With the retirement age being extended and the loss of pension income, that option is being lost to many as that informal network is itself being forced to extend its working age to survive. The services that women in Wales depend on are also facing huge cuts. Many, for example, will be affected by cuts to childcare, already patchy in terms of coverage and is proportionately more expensive given the low level of wages.

Cuts are also being made to refuges and Women's Aid Services, to perpetrator programmes and to vital help lines as grants to the third and voluntary sectors who are currently doing most of this work are either withdrawn or cut. Often these are women who have no idea where to go for help, but the services women rely on to

understand their benefit and employment rights are also being cut. Citizens Advice services have been cut in Wales along with many initiatives run by the voluntary sector that made sure these women had access to information and hand holding.

**'Here in Wales there is no doubt that the UK Government's economic policies and strategies to manage the deficit are impacting disproportionately on women, whether they are in work or not'**

Cuts to legal aid are also expected to disproportionately restrict women's access to justice. 55-57% of civil legal aid currently goes to women. In some areas of law, the disproportionate impact on women is significantly high: women represent 62% of the current private family law client base for legal aid.

**'Women make up over 70 per cent of those employed in the public sector in Wales; in the health service, schools and local authorities'**

Given cuts to jobs, benefits and the economy, is there any good news for women in Wales? Women are resourceful and I think we have inherited here in Wales a "despite" gene; we succeed often despite what is being thrown at us. We find ways to manage.

Angela Elniff-Larsen is a socio-economist who runs her own business. She is a visiting lecturer at Bangor and Glamorgan Universities



*By Angela Elniff-Larsen*

And we work together, to support and protect one another. I run my own business and lots of women in business are finding it hard at present, so we are networking more. We are diversifying and finding new markets

and new services we can deliver, often on a co-partnership co-operative basis. So, for example, I have recently linked up with four other single women business to form a consortium to go for larger contracts. We are now looking to register as cooperative and bringing in 3 more to widen our geographical spread and offer a Welsh language element. We will still have our existing business plus our cooperative model.

It would be better if we could use our energy in better ways, if we weren't facing the continual necessity to be flexible, to cut back to worry less about how we care for and ensure our families are not being so affected by cuts that really don't need to be so draconian.

Yes we need to see reform and better use of public money – but that needs to be done at both ends of the spectrum. I would like to see more women's officers here in Wales getting involved with these issues at a ward/ CLP level so women who are struggling can see active sisterhood in action.

I also think our voices need to be louder in parliament, in the devolved administrations, in council chambers, we make up around 50% of the population, we certainly are not making 50% of the noise! ■

# Women & The Economy

**Islington leader argues that local councils must act to ensure women play a full role in economic recovery**

Local councils have an important role to play not only in protecting residents from the effects of the Coalition's cuts, but also in taking a lead on tackling the gender stereotyping in employment that is holding back our economy.

Women have been hit hard by this government's cuts. Women make up the majority of public sector staff where job losses have been heaviest, women are more reliant on the tax credits that have been so savagely slashed and women tend to spend more time in the children's centres, libraries and day centres that are closing their doors across the country.

In Islington, I'm proud we have been able to keep all 16 of our Sure Start Children's Centres open and pledge an extra £450,000 to help provide affordable childcare after school and during the holidays. We've also kept our flagship free school meals policy, so every child in our primary schools gets at least one hot, nutritious meal every day.

But it hasn't been easy. These are difficult times for the country and for councils. With a third of our budget taken away, £121.4 million over 4 years in Islington alone, local government in deprived areas has been cut more than any other part of the public sector. As Council Leader, my priority through these tough times has been making a difference and building a fairer Islington. We have become one of the UK's first accredited Living Wage Councils, introduced a new £300 student bursary to help teenagers from low income families stay in education and we're using all the resources we have to help people into employment.

Sadly, the Tory-led government is making it even harder for women – taking away childcare grants, reducing statutory maternity pay and by removing child benefit from higher earners, saying goodbye to a society to one universal payment for all parents bringing up children.

Over half Islington's residents are female and it's impossible to reduce ine-

quality if barriers keep preventing women achieving their full potential. Affordable childcare and a decent, living wage are important aspects of that but I also want to see women at the forefront of the new jobs we need to get our country growing again.

**'A TUC report revealed that women make up 97% of childcare apprentices and 92% of hairdressing apprentices but only 3% of engineering apprentices or 1% construction – even though the average pay is much higher in these sectors'**

Take construction. Bringing forward long-term investment projects in transport, housing and infrastructure is the only way to boost our economy and get people working. In London, we've got Crossrail, Thames Tunnel and in Islington alone we're on track to meet our goal of building 2,000 new affordable homes by 2015. Yet less than 1% of on-site employees across the country are female.

The fantastic 'Women in Construction' project during the Olympics showed what can be done to change that. It doubled the number of women working on the Olympic site and trained over 400 women with many going on to secure permanent employment in the industry. We need more projects like this.

Big infrastructure developments don't just need workers on site – there's also the business support, project management and planning

Councillor Catherine West is Leader of Islington Council



By Catherine West

roles that come with it. These are all careers women can and should be considering.

To make that happen, we need good apprenticeship programmes and in my role as Chair of London Councils' Transport & Environment Committee it's something I push time and again in discussions with major contractors. Local government can be a driver of change and in Islington, we're using our budgets and our influencing power to build the London Living Wage and 'community benefit' (including employing apprenticeships) as requirements into all our new contracts.

We're also leading by example with our Junior Assistant programme that gives young people from estates in Islington with high unemployment a chance to gain the skills necessary to help smooth their transition into employment when they are older. We're doing what we can to encourage young women to apply for these roles.

Because too often apprenticeships follow traditional gender stereotypes. A TUC report revealed that women make up 97% of childcare apprentices and 92% of hairdressing apprentices but only 3% of engineering apprentices or 1% construction – even though the average pay is much higher in these sectors. Rolls Royce has a flagship apprenticeship programme with ex-apprentices occupying up to 30% of their UK senior management roles but they're still struggling to get enough women to consider these opportunities and apply. This needs to change.

As Council Leaders, we could do so much more if budgets and responsibilities for national employment programmes were devolved to local councils either individually or as part of a consortium like Central London Forward. Local government's intimate knowledge of our areas and the jobs market makes us well placed to lead on getting more local women into good quality apprenticeships and employment.

If we are serious about creating a One Nation economy, women need to be central to Labour's plans. Much more needs to be done to get women into work, to protect their careers and showcase their talents. This will be essential to our recovery. ■

# On The Edge

## A long term view is needed to protect women in the criminal justice system

The current raft of cuts being implemented across government departments is having a disproportionate impact on the poorest in our society. Upsettingly. Sickeningly. Predictably. The women who populate our prisons, courts and criminal justice system (CJS) are often among the most marginalised and vulnerable women in the country. To understand why these cuts will hit the prison constituency hard, here is a snapshot of the female prison population in England and Wales:

- Over 70% have two or more mental health diagnoses, with 30% having had a psychiatric admission and 37% having attempted suicide at some point.
- Around half report being victims of domestic violence.
- At least a third have experienced sexual abuse.
- Over 50% of girls under 18 and 25% of all women in the criminal justice system were in local authority care as a child.
- 81% of crime committed by women is non-violent.

This list begins to reveal how cuts to a range of departments, for example cuts to mental health provision and the NHS, will directly and disproportionately affect women in the CJS. A colleague commented 'Our prisons are full of those people that society has failed.' This seems more evident in this harsh economic climate than ever before: a woman received a three-month custodial sentence for stealing a lasagne from Iceland to feed her family because she couldn't make ends meet.

Oxfam's 2012 report *The Perfect Storm* on the impact of the cuts, recognised the role of women as "shock absorbers." It is

women who manage budgets and debt, who go without to ensure the family have what they need. Women in prison sometimes lose their homes, because there is no other adult to shock absorb for them and in the current social housing crisis, trying to re-find social housing is an incredibly difficult task.

## 'a woman received a three-month custodial sentence for stealing a lasagne from Iceland to feed her family because she couldn't make ends meet'

The Ministry of Justice was asked to find £2 billion of savings in the initial 2010 spending review, around 20% of its budget. All prisons are having to make cuts. Using younger, less experienced staff saves money, but these staff may not have the finely calibrated expertise in working with women who have such complex, profound needs that their more experienced counterparts have. Many prisons have gone through several iterations of regime change to save money, the basic equation being that locking people up for longer means less staff are needed, meaning a cheaper prison. There has been retendering across prison education departments, under the OLASS 4 contracts (Offending Learning and Skills Service). One prison I worked in had to cut 70% of their education budget. Many prisons are now only offering basic courses in Maths and English, so the chance of long-term or repeat offenders undertaking further education shrinks as the budgets shrink. How

Sara Hyde is a theatre maker, thinker and activist who also works in prisons facilitating arts-based work.



By Sara Hyde

the MoJ can claim to have a rehabilitation remit and then demand institutions to slash education and other therapeutic budgets, is beyond comprehension.

The selling-off of probation, the championing of privatisation as a global panacea and the unpopularity of Chris Grayling's punitive policy thrust within the sector, has an impact on those working in the CJS. An already stressful and precarious environment becomes more so against this rapidly shifting policy background. As section by section goes out to competitive tender, no-one quite knows what will happen next. The payment-by-results pilot was cancelled because it was going to take too long. It's now simply being rolled out. It might save us money. It might not. It might mean there are fewer victims of crime. It might not.

If we want to see any significant reduction in women committing crime, taking the long view is essential. We must return to striving to fulfil Baroness Corston's recommendations from her landmark report into women in prisons in 2007. Working intergenerationally, recognising most women are victims before they become perpetrators of crime, working holistically – for example funding a women's child care so that she can attend an appointment or job interview. The more money is taken out of the CJS, the more trouble is stored up further down the road. Inexperienced staff, massive reductions in education budgets and a lack of purposeful activity mean prisons become criminogenic rather than restorative.

In this climate of uncertainty and tough economic choices, we need to grapple with the WHY of imprisonment, the philosophy and ideology that drive it. The female perpetrators in the CJS, their families and victims deserve a system that rehabilitates, redeems, treats people humanely and offers genuine justice, not just one that offers exceedingly short-term economic savings. ■

# One Nation In Retirement

Without policies that recognise the difficulties many women face in saving for a pension, we risk forcing older women into poverty

## BETTER POLICIES NEEDED FOR WOMEN AND PENSIONS

Significant numbers of older women spend many years of retirement in poverty. The gender gap for retirement has grown to a record high. According to Scottish Widows' annual Women and Pensions report, women are falling almost £30,000 behind men in retirement savings; over a quarter of women are now not saving anything for retirement; women are repaying short-term debt rather than saving for retirement (Widows, 2012). There are many reasons why women are trailing men in pension savings, the main reasons include:

### LACK OF ACCESS TO STATE PENSIONS

The state pension system is based on long unbroken spells of work, which doesn't fully take into account breaks from paid work that many women take when fulfilling roles of motherhood or caring for dependent relatives. As a result many women fail to pay enough contributions to receive the full state pension. Many women, due to family commitments undertake part-time work, where they do not qualify to pay for contributions and do not meet the contributions for state pensions.

### WOMEN ARE LESS LIKELY TO HAVE A PRIVATE OR EMPLOYER'S PENSION SCHEME

Many women do not earn enough to save for a private retirement scheme due to low skilled or part time work, often combined with caring or motherhood duties.

### MANY WOMEN RELY ON MALE PARTNERS FOR SUPPORT:

According to Scottish Widows many women are relying on their partners to fund their retirement but there is little

communication between spouses or partners about how retirement will be paid for. This is a particular concern because women on average live longer than men and will continue to do so. Over three-quarters, 79%, of women said they did not discuss how to fund their retirement with their partner before they got married.

**'women are falling almost £30,000 behind men in retirement savings; over a quarter of women are now not saving anything for retirement'**

Only 15% of the divorced women surveyed said pensions were discussed as part of their divorce settlement and 78% of married women said they did not know what they would be entitled to from their partner's pension if they divorced. Furthermore, as women live longer, they are more likely to be widowed. (Widows, 2012)

### OTHER FINANCIAL COMMITMENTS AND PRIORITIES

When prioritising their family's financial commitments, women tend to put mortgage and debt repayment at the top of their list, while placing less importance on saving for their futures.

While the government claim to be dealing with this issue and have implemented some new measures (for example, the new 'flat-rate' pension) the recession and austerity measures are negating any possible improvements.

Louise Deegan is Secretary of Wimbledon Labour and a Public Policy Conference Director



By Louise Deegan

There are more women out of work than at any time since 1988, according to a report published by the Fawcett Society ( Fawcett Society, 2013). Women, who make up the majority of public sector workers, have borne the brunt of budget cuts. With 75% of these cuts still to come through, the Fawcett Society warned that, unless the government changes its policies, some 1.48 million women will be unemployed by 2018. This is exacerbating the factors above which leave women less well off in the pension stakes.

The unequal access to the economy that women face (the pay gap, the challenge of childcare and wider family responsibilities, the difficulty of finding a balance between work and family life whilst also achieving successful career progression) have become further entrenched with the government's austerity measures and have resulted in women neglecting their long term savings.

This situation clearly needs addressing. The issue of lack of pension funds for both men and women is a ticking time bomb for the future economy. However, as Dr Ros Altmann, director-general of Saga, said the figures showed women were "still very much second-class citizens" when it came to pensions (Altman, 2013).

Recommendations to improve the situation for women include (Widows, 2012):

### LINK PENSIONS TO OTHER SAVINGS

Offering flexibility around savings would enable women to save in a way that suits the flux many women experience in their lifestyle. They would be able to prioritise saving when they are able to, for example when they are in full time employment, but offer access to funds when needed.

## FAIRER SHARING OF PENSIONS

The legal requirement that pensions are taken into account during divorce settlements is being ignored.

## EMPLOYERS TO PROMOTE A POSITIVE PENSIONS MESSAGE

There is an appetite among women for employers to provide information about pensions. An increase in the tax-free allowance for financial advice funded by

'unless the government changes its policies, some 1.48 million women will be unemployed by 2018'

employers would contribute to increased understanding and engagement with pension saving.

## REACH OUT TO WOMEN WHO ARE NOT IN THE WORKPLACE

Offer saving schemes for women who are not currently in employment. For many, the whole area of pensions is confusing and therefore easily overlooked—there is a fundamental lack of understanding of the importance of the pension as an asset and its relevance for future financial security. We need a cultural shift in the importance placed upon saving for retirement. The government needs to do two things:

1. Take into account that factors that apply to women and facilitate pension saving alongside their needs—part time work, caring responsibilities etc.
2. Reverse their austerity measures which have had a greater impact on women to ensure that women aren't bearing the brunt of this recession. ■



# Labour Friends of Sure Start

## Campaigning for our Children's Centres

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