

Issue 11 (APRIL 2016)

FABIANA

Contributions from:

Kate Green MP
Cllr Sarah Hayward
Cllr Judith Blake
Cllr Nick Forbes
Sarah Ditum
Deborah Stoate

and others.

Devolution:
Power to the People?

EDITORIAL

By Cllr Beth Knowles, Co-Editor

This is my first Fabiana as Co-Editor. As I sit in Manchester City Centre, the ward with the highest levels of economic growth in the North of England and at the epicentre of the so called powerhouse, I could not really have chosen any topic other than devolution for our first edition of 2016.

Manchester enjoys doing things first. With suffrage, democracy as we know it, conditions of the working class, the ice cream cone, Mancunians have demonstrated themselves to be generally bang on trend before everyone else even knows what the trend looks like. Devolution is this decade's attempt at being first in line and the rest of the North, South, East and West seems desperate to keep up.

However, I am not the only one who sees devolution as much as a concern as an opportunity. For this reason, I wanted this edition of Fabiana to not only look at what devolution can be (because not many of us know yet), but look critically at the opportunities and potential pitfalls before we trip up on them.

From where I sit, the greatest opportunity in this new deal lies in devolving devolution further than simply shifting power from Westminster Palace to Manchester Town Hall. As politicians and policy makers, we need to be asking Manchester's people what they want to see from the city's New Deal and perhaps more importantly, ask what ideas they have for re-designing their public services and spaces. It is especially important we ensure younger people are brought in on this (which has not happened at all so far) - after all, any services shaped will be theirs to provide and utilise in the future.

As Kate Green, Labour MP for Stretford and Urmston (a bit of the 'Greater' in Manchester), puts it in her piece for this edition: "The disillusion with politics felt by the public won't go away if we simply substitute the priorities of political leaders in Greater Manchester for those of politicians in London. Engaging the public in the devolved government of our city region, ensuring that their voice is heard, that their concerns shape our policies, is a key challenge."

This second wave of opportunity is not something that will come around again anytime soon. We need to make sure that as citizens of our devolved cities we are asking for change where we want to see it. We also need to ensure that local public leaders and service providers are listening, not just as a rubber-stamping consultation exercise, but as part of our new democracy. 'Demo-lution' (democratic Devolution) is something that a fellow North-Western Fabian woman, Clare Devaney, has written about for Fabiana before. We need to be radical enough to ensure democracy is properly devolved along with the piles of cash and responsibility. If we can truly design the alternative to national control anywhere, it is in this city and this is potentially the greatest opportunity we have ever had to do so.

We're proud to open up the debate about devolution and about 'demo-lution' in this issue, collecting a wide range of perspectives on how this can be achieved. I would like to thank my colleagues on the Fabian Women's Network executive committee for their assistance in commissioning, designing and delivering this publication. We would also like to thank Unison for their support in sponsoring this publication.

FABIANA // APRIL 2016

Representation in local leadership Cllr Judith Blake	4
Equality and devolution Kate Green MP	6
Abortion in Scotland: devolving for choice? Sarah Ditum	8
Interview with Angela Rayner MP Ellie Cumbo	10
Police and Crime Commissioners - a cautionary tale? Cllr Rachel Rogers	13
Devolving power to whom? Cllr Sarah Hayward	15
Labour would not design devolution like this Cllr Nick Forbes	17
Party reform and devolution Cllr Alice Perry	19
Empowering the Voluntary Sector Cllr Rakhia Ismail	21
The Origins of the Fabian Women's Group Deborah Stoate	23

**FABIAN
WOMEN**

Fabiana is the magazine of the Fabian Women's Network ('FWN'). The views expressed are those of the writers only and do not represent the collective position of the FWN or the Fabian Society.

Editors: Ellie Cumbo, Beth Knowles, Reema Patel
Production Editor: Reema Patel

All images used in this publication are under a creative commons license (2.0)

Representation in local leadership

Cllr Judith Blake

Leader, Leeds City Council

Description



It is hard not to see high profile women in politics on our TV screens or in the news. Nicola Sturgeon, Kezia Dugdale and Ruth Davidson are the new faces of Scottish politics and in England the likes of Yvette Cooper MP, Theresa May MP, Sayeeda Warsi MP, and Harriet Harman MP frequently make the headlines.

However, famous faces like these obscure the true scale of the underrepresentation of women in senior political positions. In 2016 more than half our population is female but less than a third of MPs. There have been fewer women MPs throughout Parliament's history than the 459 male MPs currently sitting in the commons. Only 4 of 18 English directly elected mayors and only 51 of 352 English local government leaders are women.

'Only 4 out of 18 English directly elected mayors and only 51 of 352 English local government leaders are women.'

As devolution progresses at speed we must take action to ensure this lack of representation is not built into the fabric of future local leadership. When Greater Manchester signed their devolution deal in 2014 all 12 signatories were white men. That area has seen an increase in female representation since 2014 and the Core Cities leaders now include both myself representing Leeds and Julie Dore from Sheffield.

However, it still appears that there is very little likelihood that any of the upcoming mayoral elections will feature female frontrunners. We must aspire to much greater increases in female representation in what should be a new style of devolved politics.

Getting women into senior political roles is more than just a matter of principle. In a representative democracy politicians should reflect the society that elected them. However, increasing the number of women in senior political office is also about adding value to the process of policy making. Women bring different skills and judgments to a role, which improves decision making and therefore outcomes for local people.

Devolution has the potential to deliver long-term change across many policy areas. The evidence shows women have already been hit disproportionately hard by seven years of Tory cuts. Without female representation in devolved politics this situation risks being exacerbated.

Political parties have a significant part to play in driving change. Where parties have adopted positive measures to promote female candidates we know this has delivered results. In 1997 the number of female MPs at Westminster doubled overnight from 60 to 120, largely thanks to the use of all women shortlists by the Labour Party. By running half its all women shortlists in winnable seats in 2015 the Labour party still increased its number of female MPs despite a disappointing election result overall.

'As devolution progresses at speed we must take action to ensure lack of representation is not built into the fabric of future local leadership.'

More women were elected to the Scottish Parliament in one day in its first election in 1999 than had been elected to represent Scotland in the House of Commons since 1918. Again, this was largely the result of Scottish Labour using 'twinning' to boost the number of women running in winnable seats.

In the first elections to the Welsh Assembly the Labour Party and Plaid Cymru adopted measures to increase female representation. Both these parties moved to more informal measures in the Assembly's second election. However, they still built on their initial success to such an extent that the Welsh National Assembly became the first legislature in the world with equal representation of women.

‘All parties must do more to change perceptions amongst women about what it means to stand for political office’

Wales and Scotland have also taught us that when the impetus for positive action decreases the proportion of female representation also decreases. When planning devolved structures, we may need to consider whether voluntary action by political parties now needs to be backed up by statutory requirements such as gender quotas – as have been adopted already in the likes of Belgium, France and Ireland.

All parties must also do more to change perceptions amongst women about what it means to stand for political office. This would counter the reluctance of some women to pursue political candidacy in what has traditionally been a male-dominated world. There are practical considerations for any potential candidate to weigh up before pursuing a political career. The Government's decision to scrap councillor pensions is a serious discouragement for many of working age. However, many women also still take on the majority of responsibilities at home. This can create an extra challenge when trying to work out how to reconcile work and family obligations with a political career. Achieving cultural change in political organisations to allow more flexible working would enable a more diverse field of candidates to overcome these barriers.

An increase in the number of female deputy council leaders does offer hope for the future for both representation across local government leadership and involvement with the devolution agenda. But a commitment to positive action in relation to devolved politics would take that further.





Equality and Devolution

Kate Green MP, Labour's Shadow Minister for Women & Equalities and MP for Stretford & Urmston in Greater Manchester says devolution can change social outcomes for the better.

Manchester politicians are enthusiastic about Devo Manc. And we're right to be. The opportunity to take decisions as close as possible to the people they affect, based on knowledge of local circumstances and a first-hand understanding of the city region's economic potential goes to the heart of the empowerment and agency of communities to change things for the better that is fundamental to our Labour values. It can make politics feel real, relevant and important to an electorate that's become increasingly disenchanted with decisions made by distant figures in Westminster, too often seen as overriding their views.

'The opportunity to take decisions as close as possible to the people they affect...goes to the heart of the empowerment and agency of communities to change things for the better that is fundamental to our Labour values.'

But the disillusion with politics felt by the public won't go away if we simply substitute the priorities of political leaders in Greater Manchester for those of politicians in London. Engaging the public in the devolved government of our city region, ensuring that their voice is heard, that their concerns shape our policies, is a key challenge. Of course, I'm glad that we have taken the opportunity to bring powers back home to Greater Manchester. But now our local politicians must ensure that they deliver for every one of our people here.

We live in a great city, but let's be honest, the challenges we face are enormous. Even as our city thrives, enjoying international recognition for its cosmopolitan vibrancy and world class innovation, levels of deprivation, poor health, inadequate housing, ine-

quality and worklessness remain shockingly high. Addressing those will take energy, imagination, effort, a willingness to work across boundaries, and move out of our comfort zone. It will also take resources that the devolution settlement may leave well short.

Take health. Greater Manchester is a centre of expertise for some of our most complex health conditions: stroke, transplant surgery, respiratory disease. But it also has some of the poorest health outcomes, the widest health inequalities of anywhere in the country. The devolution of responsibility for health without the necessary resources will exacerbate this situation. One bad winter, one epidemic, a rise (as we are already seeing) in diseases associated with poverty (such as tuberculosis or rickets), and we need to call on the wider support of the *national* (my italics) health service as part of the system of pooling and sharing of risk that lies at the heart of our welfare state.

Similarly with social security. We live in a city with high levels of need. Asking us to meet those solely out of our own resources would be very challenging, no matter how dynamic our management of our local economy. Greater Manchester promotes and supports talent and expertise, to the benefit of our economy, nationally and internationally. The deal must be that the rest of the country supports us in turn. Not out of charity: it's an investment in the shared future prosperity of all of our country. Narrowing inequality in Greater Manchester will enable us to contribute even more innovation and energy to the UK.

'The deal must be the rest of the country supports us in turn. Not out of charity - it's an investment in shared future prosperity.'



So devolution doesn't mean we draw our boundaries narrowly. Instead we want to position Greater Manchester at the heart of the overall success of the UK. Only if we do that can we address the inequality that holds us back. And we know what needs to be done to tackle that.

It means a relentless focus not just on economic growth, but on how the proceeds of growth are shared equitably, with proactive, redistributive policy integral to our plans. We must skill up our young people for the well paid jobs that will be available in our city, invest in our infrastructure to improve the quality of housing, childcare, and social care that creates good jobs and improves the prospects and quality of life of the most deprived communities, and harness the power of our communities to develop systems of support that are designed, commanded by, and serve the priorities of local people - credit unions, local food projects, neighbourhood transport schemes, community job hubs.

Crucial too is to set in place the political architecture and mechanisms that exemplify as well as support our drive for equality.

'Equality isn't just about what we do, it's also about power, and where, how and by whom decisions are made'

The devolution settlement doesn't give much voice to local people – or for that matter to their elected representatives. It overlooks the demand for diversity in our representation that a diverse city demands. Many were appalled at the sight of George Osborne with an exclusively white, male line-up of local leaders signing the devolution deal. Equality isn't just about what we do, it's also about power, and where, how and by whom decisions are made.

So let's open the debate about participation, scrutiny and engagement, and the equality infrastructure that we must put in place. Devo Manc brings great potential for a more just and prosperous city. But equality won't happen by accident, and trickle-down, big-ticket projects on their own won't deliver the goods. Today, we have a great chance to do politics differently in Greater Manchester. Let's use all of our creativity and boldness to design a political system that embeds equality into our plans, policies, and structures - from the start.



Abortion in Scotland: Devolving for Choice?

The planned devolution of abortion law must be an opportunity and not a threat, says the New Statesman's **Sarah Ditung**.

The Scotland Bill is due to receive royal assent before the Holyrood elections in May. It will devolve many new powers to the Scottish parliament, including abortion law – making it, in a quiet way, one of the biggest shifts in abortion law in the UK since the 1967 Abortion Act. Quiet, because discussion of the issues have been somewhat limited for such a major change, although a few pro-choice voices have sounded concern, and a few anti-abortion campaigners have given validation to those alarms.

‘The Scotland Bill...will devolve many new powers to the Scottish parliament, including abortion law.’

In November, Yvette Cooper MP warned that “it would be naive to think that anti-abortion campaigners won’t try to change the law or to test the commitment of the Scottish Parliament over its new jurisdiction”. A representative of anti-abortion organisation the ProLife Alliance confirmed this suspicion, telling the Herald last year that “Scotland has always been more conservative on pro-life issues... We think there would be much more conservative legislation on these issues in Scotland”.

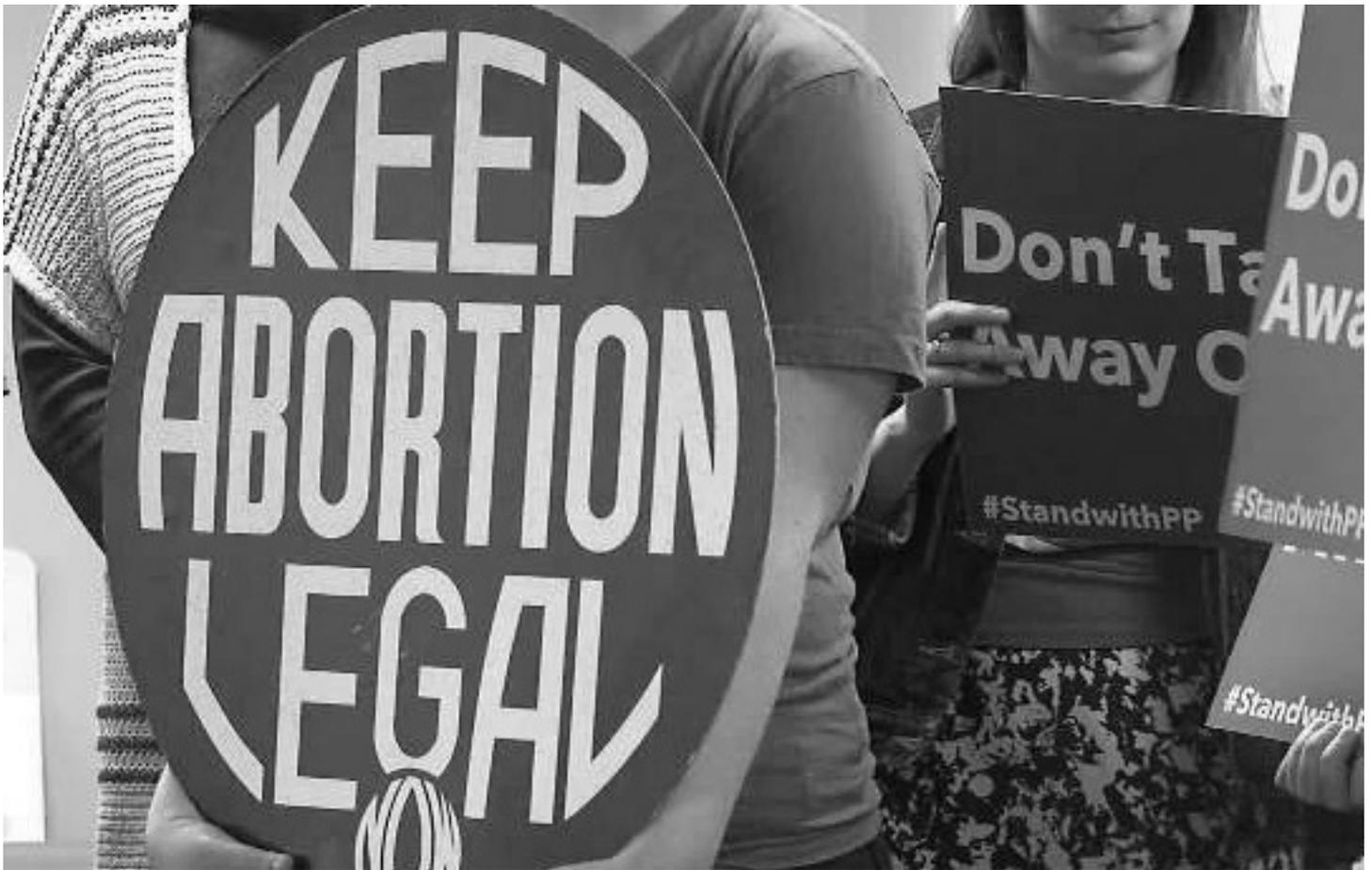
But not all pro-choice activists share Cooper’s fears. Naomi McAuliffe, programme director for Amnesty International in Scotland, says the devolution of abortion powers is “more of an opportunity than a threat”. She points out that the current Scottish Parliament is overwhelmingly pro-choice, including all five party leaders. The nature of the Holyrood Parliament itself could even be protective: “At Westminster there is a almost constant stream of attempts to restrict access to abortion. The parliamentary process at Holyrood does not lend

itself to these kind of tactics. Any changes would be consulted on widely and deliberated on,” says McAuliffe.

Ann Henderson is a member of Abortion Rights, the UK’s pro-choice campaign, and sits on the Abortion Rights Committee Scotland. She points out that anti-abortion campaigners have been more active since the prospect of devolution appeared – for example, Forty Days for Life has been holding a vigil outside Queen Elizabeth University Hospital in Glasgow. However, these tactics don’t appear to have had much influence. “There’s no evidence of a shift in public opinion or a move in party positions,” says Henderson. “The [pro-choice] campaign feels positive. Only fringe groups are speaking about reversing the legal opinion.”

‘The perception that the UK has one law on abortion has always been something of a fiction.’

In some ways, the perception that the UK has one law on abortion has always been something of a fiction. There’s the obvious exception of Northern Ireland, where the 1967 Abortion Act has never been extended. Because of this inequality, hundreds (possibly thousands – the stigma against abortion makes accurate figures hard to come by) of Northern Irish women travel to England every year to end their pregnancies. These include rape victims, teenagers, mothers who don’t want any more children, and women pregnant with wanted babies who have a fatal abnormality. The NHS does not fund terminations, travel or accommodation for Northern Irish women coming to England, and many rely on the charity Abortion Support Network to help cover costs.



But even in Scotland, where the Abortion Act does apply, women have limited provision compared to England. Despite abortion being legal up to 24 weeks, over 100 women each year travel from Scotland to England because there's a lack of medical expertise for late-term abortion in Scotland. And although the NHS provides funds for the procedure, transport and accommodation when Scottish women travel to England for abortion, there's variation within Scotland on support for companions for patients. This means that many women have to go through abortion alone, in a strange hospital in a city they don't know, or be financially penalised.

For Henderson, addressing this has to be the priority: "We need to focus on planning for provision, skills and facilities. And we have to stick to our guns, because it's rotten that women have to travel." And the devolution of abortion powers in the Scotland Bill could provide the occasion to sort things out, according to McAuliffe, who says that devolution has "arguably focused attention on this issue and motivated the Scottish Government to address it. Devolution has given organisations and health providers the opportu-

nity to look at issues around abortion, and reflect on what can and should change."

One issue that hasn't been explored in the devolution of abortion to Holyrood is the rationale behind it. The report of the Smith Commission, where it was originally recommended, says: "The parties are strongly of the view to recommend the devolution of abortion and regard it as an anomalous health reservation." Framing abortion as a health issue is a subtle but important step away from framing it as a criminal issue.

Abortion law in the UK has never been solely, or even principally, concerned with women's wellbeing: one of David Steel's major preoccupations in introducing the 1967 Act to parliament was to protect (implicitly male) doctors from prosecution under the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act. If the devolution of abortion is the beginning of decriminalising women's healthcare, then it really could be a critical advance for women throughout the UK. But the threat to abortion rights is rarely quiet, and those working to defend and extend women's rights will need to learn quickly how to negotiate the UK's new framework.



Interview : Angela Rayner MP

Fabian women's network committee member **Ellie Cumbo** interviews **Angela Rayner MP** about devolution, Brexit, Fabianism and positive action.

Angela Rayner was elected as the MP for Ashton-under-Lyne in 2015, and after a period as a junior whip, was recently appointed as shadow pensions minister. In an extremely busy week, which included both the return of the Welfare Reform Bill to the Commons, and an Opposition Day debate on the controversial situation for older women hit by the increase in the State Pension Age, she sat down with Ellie Cumbo to talk devolution, Brexit, positive action and Fabianism- all in one afternoon!

You're busy preparing for the pensions debate this week. How easy is it to get up to speed on complex issues as a new MP?

From my previous job as a home carer, coming into Parliament has been absolutely surreal- it's a hundred miles an hour. Coming from that background, and perhaps being a woman as well, I have very high expectation of myself, so it has been a massive learning curve. And at a time when even the pensions experts are struggling with the pace of change, I've had to become an expert in the space of three weeks! But it's really interesting once you get involved- and you get cross about the inequality and injustice, and pensioner poverty.

This being our devolution edition, are there any issues you've worked on in your time here which you actually think should be decided at the local level?

I see the opportunities with the Greater Manchester devolution agenda, especially with my social care background, and as a former union official. I do believe in making those decisions where the need is, but there's no point if the framework and fiscal responsibility aren't there. I believe you can save money- I've done it- but you won't get buy-in if people think it's about cuts, not providing better services. George Osborne is undermining his Northern Powerhouse- or Northern Poorhouse! He's good at giving away the powers of other departments, but he keeps the Treasury under lock and key.

So what has worked well in Greater Manchester?

Well, we've got opportunities with transport now. Someone who works in Oldham, in my constituency, can't get to the other side without taking three different buses and paying three different amounts. The devolution deal has an opportunity to change that. And we know there are particular health needs in Greater Manchester- from life expectancy to children's teeth. I see things already starting to happen that could make a big difference across the Greater Manchester conurbation.

What would the key difference be if a Labour government were building the Northern Powerhouse?

Labour understands you have to invest, and that there will always be a need for a public service safety net. Conservative ideology is that you live and die by yourself, and you'll do great if you work hard. Well, I know lots of people who work tremendously hard, but will never get equal opportunities by themselves.

Labour understands that we have to create level playing fields by enabling support in areas that will not do as well- that's the difference.

How do we make public scrutiny of all the different political levels work when more powers are devolved?

I don't think we've got it quite right yet, and the key is local government. When it comes to local elections, people genuinely feel their vote makes a difference. That's why I like health and social care coming together at that local level too, because health has never been as democratically accountable as local government. But the public has to understand what the reporting lines are.

I think the elected mayor could be a really powerful force- imagine the Mayor of Manchester and the Mayor of Liverpool coming together to say what they want. As with London, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, the North needs that voice. It's still in its inception and we're still consulting and talking about which executive leads what. But if we listen to stakeholders, including employees and people who deliver services on the ground, the public will decide if it works for them or not. If we fail, that would be incredibly disappointing, because I think devolution could really change people lives.

Where do you stand on Police and Crime Commissioners, who have been going for four years already?

I'm pleased that the proposal is to combine the new elected mayor and the PCC in Greater Manchester, because the public don't want to see layer upon layer of politicians. Personally, I was opposed to PCCs. I think Tony Lloyd's done a fantastic job, but as a concept I didn't see how that fitted in, although some of that is because of the constant police cuts. What we need to do is concentrate on making the system simple so people can hold them to account, as with Members of Parliament.

Just a small question next- what's your take on "Brexit"?

As a trade unionist, I'm an internationalist, but the trade union movement doesn't speak with one voice! I personally think we're better off in Europe- my constituency gets a tremendous amount out of being in. But we have to change the debate from immigration and who gets benefits and houses, because Europe is much more important than that. One thing that I say back to the trade union movement when people say that the EU market undermines workers' rights is that it's our inability to organise with European sister organisations that allows that to happen. The best protections have come from Europe, so the benefits outweigh the negatives.

Why do you think it can be hard to make that case?

It's whether you're speaking with your head or your heart. We have to give the facts, but we need simple messages- united we stand; divided we fall. What makes me proud to be British is some of the things we've done for others- I see that in my constituency surgeries every week. We wouldn't let someone fall on the street some of the things we've done for others- I see that in my constituency surgeries every week. We wouldn't let someone fall on the street without picking them up- that's not the British way. But when it gets twisted by media scaremongering, we lose out as a nation, and we lose what's great about Great Britain.

You've been an active Fabian Woman for a long time- why do you think we still struggle with women's representation in local government?

A year in Parliament has made me more of a feminist- with a capital F! I've noticed even more how crucial it is to get more women in, as well as people from BAME and other different backgrounds. I think the Labour Party have made fantastic moves, but we've got to do more to make politics more woman-friendly. I've felt personally attacked, and I'm a paid politician- what about councillors, who are volunteers?

I've had that question on the doorstep- "what are you going to do with your kids?". My husband looks after the children now, while I work long hours. It took the school months to understand that if there was a problem, my husband was the first call and not the second- they kept ringing me because there's still that bias towards the mum. And then you feel like some sort of Cruella- yet no man in that situation would have those feelings!

We have lots of new Labour members now, especially young people. Do you think they understand that gender inequality is still an issue?

I think they do; I'm really pleased with our strong membership compared to other parties. But we've got big challenges- the boundary review will see a lot of the gains we've made in female representation under threat. I stood for selection in two seats at the General Election- an open marginal and a safe Labour seat which used an All Woman Shortlist. I believe I was the best candidate in both, but I lost the open one and won hands-down in the AWS. I don't believe for one minute that I would be sat here today as a shadow minister if it weren't for AWS. I can hold my own against anyone in here, but I'm clear on that.

What are the reasons for that?

There are complex reasons, and some of it is to do with the idea open seats are for men and you should go for a "woman's seat". So all these dynamic, fantastic women are fighting each other for the same seat!

You worked very closely with the newly-elected MP for Oldham West and Royton, Jim McMahon, during his by-election. What did you learn from that?

When you're the candidate, you don't get to enjoy an election, because you worry about doing and saying the wrong thing. But helping Jim, I got to benefit from enabling someone else to shine. I really enjoyed that- and it shows that when Labour works as a team and puts the work in, we can make a massive difference and win again. That's the message I'd give any worried members: Jim won because he delivers for his local community; not because of what was going on in Westminster.

Should we put more emphasis on selecting local candidates?

I think so. Like recruits like! People say to me "you're not like those other politicians", but actually, even the Tories believe they're trying to make a difference for their local communities. The difference is whether people can see the connection, and see you as being part of them. You might not have grown up in the area, but if people can see that you're listening, you'll always have the hearts of your community, and you'll always win elections.

What can Labour do to get more people to stand from working-class backgrounds?

They can learn from organisations like Labour Women's Network and the trade union movement. There are huge finance and education barriers, and while I wouldn't cap selection costs, we should make sure people can find the networks to support them.

I'm trying to practise what I preach with my recruitment. I've got an amazing apprentice from a college in my constituency, and she'll be paid the living wage too. I use positive action in my recruitment; it was one of my pledges to recruit people from BAME backgrounds, as well as a local emphasis, and I've gone out to find those great people instead of expecting them to be among the people who already write to me.

Give us your best and worst moments of the job so far.

The worst is work/life balance. One MP said to me "you spend years trying to get in here, and then you spend all your time here trying to get out"! It's getting better, but it's nowhere near where it needs to be.

The highlight was when I first stood as the dispatch box that Opposition leaders had touched for years and years, and delivered a speech about the pension reforms. I had a constituent whose husband was terminally ill, and was worrying about what was going to happen to her on his death bed. I thought that was really important to say.

What does being a Fabian in 2016 mean to you?

I'm the sort of person that likes to think big and have other people colour in the detail, and the Fabians are your conscience- your detail conscience! It's good to start with a concept, but the proof is in the pudding- and the Fabians give you the menu to ensure the pudding is exactly what you're expecting.



Police and Crime Commissioners - A Cautionary Tale?

With the second PCC elections around the corner, former PCC candidate and councillor **Rachel Rogers** looks at what went wrong. Rachel Rogers is chair of the Labour Group on Weymouth and Portland Borough Council.

The election of Police and Crime Commissioners was the Conservatives' first real attempt at devolution of powers and, the inadequacies of that election serve as a cautionary tale as we introduce more local 'democracy' in the shape of elected mayors.

When, in 2011, the timetable for the introduction of PCCs was announced, the Home Secretary said she was expecting 'big hitters': well-known public figures who might take on the role of fronting up public safety provision across the country.

Instead, the 2012 elections returned a hodgepodge of victors: local business people, retired armed forces officers, local and national politicians, whose previous careers ranged from barrister to electrician, a TV presenter and eight former police officers, all male, many of whom had stood as so-called 'independents', although one of these was, at the time, a member of the Liberal Democrats. Former police officers became, in effect, the third largest 'party' of PCCs and, of these, many had served in the very forces they were now charged with overseeing.

The election of former police officers poses an immediate question about the effectiveness of the rushed legislation. One of the roles of the PCC is to 'hold to account' the chief constable of a police force, with the ultimate sanction of dismissal. The reality of a relatively junior former police officer holding in his palm his former chief's career, and being responsible for investigating complaints against the same police who were recently his colleagues, hardly fits the description of 'independent scrutiny'.

However, this is far from being the only questionable

aspect of governance. The PCCs replaced not chief constables but police authorities, the bodies which used to hold the chief to account. So the legislation added a further layer of governance, policing and crime panels, to scrutinise the PCCs themselves. These, sadly, have largely proved to be toothless, with a 2014 National Audit Office report saying that they "lack powers".

As police authorities were, the panels are largely composed of local councillors, in a political ratio which reflects that of the police force area. However, in place of an operational police chief, the panel is now holding to account an elected politician, who will, in many cases, be of the same political hue as the majority of the panel members. It is thus less 'opposition scrutiny' and more a rubber-stamping exercise. One panel member in Hertfordshire has resigned, saying "It's a waste of time, money and space. They need to throw the legislation out and start again".

Of course, the ultimate scrutiny lies in the ballot box, where the public can change its decision every four years. Unfortunately, this is not always an informed decision: there was, and is, is widespread lack of awareness of what the PCC role entails, not just amongst the electorate but also amongst journalists and politicians, panel members and police, and even, in the early days, some PCCs themselves.

PCCs are intended not to run the police but to scrutinise them; to be the Voice of the Public: the role includes not only extensive consultation with that public, but also commissioning services for victims and crime prevention, and bringing together community safety and criminal justice partners to ensure that locally agreed priorities are joined up.



PCCs are not thief-takers but communicators, consultants, negotiators, networkers, commissioners, contract sponsors and overseers of huge and complex budgets. They are powerful local politicians, with a significant impact on government policy.

Sadly, the public knows little of this extended remit, which the Home Secretary plans to augment further by adding responsibility for Fire and Rescue Services, thus handing another huge slice of public funding to people who may have no experience of either consultation or commissioning. As the Electoral Reform Society has pointed out, the Government was largely to blame for this widespread misunderstanding. In late 2012, it ran a populist TV advertising campaign, portraying a PCC as a vigilante ‘Supercop’, an image which has largely stuck.

The Government then refused to allow PCC candidates to access the freepost leaflet to which candidates for parliamentary and European elections are entitled, with the inevitable result that most people had no idea for what or for whom they were supposed to be voting. Indeed, the vast majority of people didn’t vote at all: the election was held on a rainy autumn day and the turn-out was 15.1%. Hardly a triumph of popular democracy.

There are also, of course, huge questions about the representation of minority communities and particularly of women. In 2012, just 35 female candidates stood in 41 areas, so many slates were all-male affairs. The Labour party proudly stood 17 female candidates but, as with any election, the question of ‘winnability’ was stifled. Closer examination reveals that, of those 17, only 3 or 4 stood any chance of victory and, in the event, only two were elected – Jane Kennedy in Merseyside and Vera Baird in Northumbria. Of the other 39 PCCs, only four are female; this makes a total of 14.6% compared with the then-government’s figure of 22%.

Disappointingly, the 2016 candidates appear to be even more male and pale. PCCs are supposed to represent the diversity of the public but the Supercop myth has led many to believe the self-fulfilling prophecy that ‘it’s no role for a woman’. Political parties and indeed groups of ‘independents’ need urgently to find a way of capturing that diversity for these and all devolved elections if the concept of community representation is to have any meaning at all.



Devolving Power to Whom?

The lack of women in local government matters, says the Leader of Camden Council, **Cllr Sarah Hayward**.

The Tories are embarking on the largest-scale devolution from central government we've seen in this country since the creation of the devolved administrations in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. And yet women are almost completely absent from both the debate and the new centres of power.

In contrast to one third of Cameron's cabinet, and 50 per cent of those attending Corbyn's shadow cabinet, fewer than 15% of council leaders are women. While all the national parties take some steps to boost women's representation at a national level – however mealy-mouthed – only Labour has measures to increase the number of women councillors. In multi-member wards at least one has to be a woman- although in many cases this means only one, and in others dispensation is given because 'no women can be found'. In my experience, that usually means the party hasn't looked hard enough.

If women aren't selected as councillors, they are not going to end up in the cabinet member and committee chair posts that are the training ground to be a leader.

This matters. The responsibilities being devolved are wide-ranging. We've already seen the politicisation of policing through the police and crime commissioners (17 per cent women). Now, through negotiated settlements with regions and sub regions, huge amounts of money and power over a huge range of activities have been or are being handed over. This includes extending the reach of local government over health, economic growth, transport, house building and more. It matters who runs these services. It matters who makes decision about them. And it matters who benefits. It's never been more important that our local politicians represent us

And yet, local government is the most likely place in politics where you'll find yourself in a room full of (often bald) white men. There's nothing wrong with white men, bald or otherwise. It's just they don't make up 80% of the population, so why do they have 80% of the power?

'It matters who runs these services. It matters who makes decisions about them. It matters who benefits. It's never been more important that our local politicians represent us.'

We can, and must, change this. But we need help from the top of our parties, and we should expect it. The Tories and the Lib Dems need to catch up on positive action. And in Labour, we need to challenge ourselves to go further. Sheffield Brightside & Hillsborough just became the first parliamentary by-election to use an All Women Shortlist. We do not have these at all for mayoral selections. With many new mayoral positions coming up for 2017, we should demand half these selections are done with All Women Shortlists.

We could also have quotas for executive positions and committee chairs. My own Labour Group is pretty good at self-selecting equality. Our deputy leader and half our cabinet are women; the mayor and deputy mayor are both women, and more than half our committee chairs are too. Camden is the exception, but not the rule. And if groups can't choose it for themselves, then we need to think seriously about imposing it.

We also need to ask some tough questions about what councillors are for and how they're remunerated. Like it or not, women still do the bulk of family caring work. But being a councillor, and leading a council, are serious jobs that take time. Camden's annual gross budget is in excess of £1bn. We're



responsible for vulnerable children and vulnerable adults. We pick up the pieces from domestic violence and gang violence. We're one of the biggest house builders in the country. All the while, we're also trying to make sure the bins are collected, the parks are kept nice and the libraries have books in them.

Increasingly, councillors will have to forego other activities – by which I mean work – to do all this. If they're bringing up children, they'll need help with childcare and possibly maternity leave and more. None of these are a given for local councillors.

And, although decision-makers in local government have larger budgets and greater responsibilities than backbench MPs of any party, and many junior ministers, this simply isn't recognised in allowances. If we're not going to recognise it, then we need to fun-

damentally change the role to something more akin to a non-executive director, rather than the executive job it is at the moment. Political accountability demands the former, but the current allowances regime assumes the latter. At some point this is going to break, not just for women, but for local government as a whole.

Most of all, we have to help ourselves. Women often need to be asked to seek positions of power; we must get better at putting ourselves forward. But we also need to encourage and support each other. If you know someone who would make a good councillor, a good cabinet member, a good leader - tell them. And tell them they should put themselves forward, and that you'll help them. As women we need to seek power, and, crucially, expect and be expected to get it.



Labour would design devolution differently

Cllr Nick Forbes, Leader of Newcastle City Council and LGA Labour on the importance of Labour resolving its ‘devolution quandary’.

Labour is in something of a devolution quandary. We want to take powers out of Whitehall and into our town halls. The cost though is a deal with a Chancellor who punishes our councils even as he seeks to convince us he wants to create a powerhouse in the north.

Let me be clear; Labour would not design devolution like this. We would not insist on an elected mayor. We would not have officials in Whitehall quietly deciding what they might just about trust the regions with while across the country the call for a more radical offer is ignored. Labour has made clear, were it in our gift we would implement the findings of a constitutional convention designed to push through devolution based on what our communities want, not what our civil servants hand down.

‘We would implement the findings of a constitutional convention designed to push through devolution based on what our communities want’.

But this Tory version is the offer we have, and as Jon Trickett said when he set out the party’s devolution policy, we have “a duty to negotiate the best deals we can with the government”.

So we find ourselves at the start of a journey we know could be so much more ambitious. Labour councils must do what they think is best for the people they serve, and each will know individually whether the government has done enough to justify councils starting down the road towards full devolution.

Devolution is not without risk. If there is insufficient weight behind the deals being agreed with Treasury they will let the Chancellor off the hook when it comes to investing in our cities. But there is another risk.

George Osborne’s Northern Powerhouse is an idea in search of an achievement, a policy which has yet to cement itself in success, and one way for the Chancellor to get round this lack of action is to box Labour into the corner, to paint us as the opponents of devolution. Labour councils turning down devolution deals will spend the rest of this parliament being told they could have had billions of pounds to solve local problems but refused to do a deal. It is a trap the Chancellor would love us to step into.

There is another reason why we have to embark on devolution. By making those who take the decisions much more accountable to those who potentially benefit, we take ourselves closer to achieving a more equal society.

Look, for example, at the role of women in our work force. Women are the losers in a nationally-focused economy. We have yet to achieve gender equality in our economy, and I fear with this government in charge we will come no closer to it. In the last year of the coalition we saw that half of the net growth in female employment came from women moving in to lower-paid part-time jobs, a trend that shows no sign of changing.

‘By making those who take the decisions much more accountable to those who potentially benefit, we take ourselves closer to a more equal society.’

Women are being increasingly casualised in the work-force. Devolution isn’t the only answer to this, far from it, but it brings workers closer to decision makers.

In the North East, for example we have a clearer commitment to seeking more and better jobs through devolution. Jobs are vital to our self worth and should be a route to our ambitions.

By handing local leaders control over skills training cash we can work with unions and businesses to ensure all sections of our workforce has the ability to meet their ambitions.

If you want to know why devolution is important in the equality debate, look at the findings of Liverpool City Council's Employment and Skills Committee report on agency workers. The committee found that employers, particularly in sectors with a majority cleaning and hospitality sectors, were increasingly using staff from recruitment agencies as an alternative to employing staff directly. And as the TUC makes clear, thanks to an EU loophole those women are in some cases are not even entitled to equal pay.

That's women not only denied a job with the career progression or security that comes with a permanent contract but denied gender equality even in some of the country's lowest paid jobs. Devolution won't change this overnight, but in the North East it hands those of us who are determined to fight social injustice a powerful tool. Devolving control over millions of pounds in skills funds means

people here in the region can finally have a say over how we respond to the challenges we face. It means a complete review of post-16 skills training and a promise to make sure there is enhanced employment support for harder-to-help claimants in the North East.

Or look at transport. For those in low income jobs, affordable public transport is vital for everything from getting to work to getting the shopping in. But the bus companies behind those services are interested only in profit. Devolution gives us the chance to let locally elected leaders intervene directly and ensure the market works for those who have most to gain.

That's just two of the many reasons why when it comes to devolution pragmatism has to be our watchword. I want a more ambitious devolution offer from the government. I want our town halls to be empowered to tackle the issues we as a party say we are dedicated to solving.

We won't do that from the sidelines. While we wait for a Labour victory we owe it to those we seek to serve to make the best of our situation even as we prepare for real devolution.





Party reform and devolution

Labour Party local government NEC representative, **Cllr Alice Perry**, on how the national party could respond to the devolution agenda.

There is going to be a parliamentary by-election in the Welsh constituency of Ogmore. The sitting MP is standing down from parliament to contest an election to the Welsh Assembly. Many people have moved from local to national politics. As more powers are devolved to local communities, a move like this from national to local government reflects the changing face of the political landscape.

So how does the national Labour Party respond to the devolution agenda in terms of our structures and organisation? The Labour Party National Executive Committee has established a Working Group, Chaired by Tom Watson MP, to review how we can improve campaigning, communications and engagement through digital technology and party reform. Party reform covers a number of important areas, including reforming local and national party structures, improving equality and diversity of representation, reviewing our policy making, campaigning and organising, providing greater support for and responding to the devolution agenda.

The NEC Party Reform working group was established with six work strands, each chaired by an NEC member, including a work strand on devolution.

In response to the growing devolution agenda, we will look at how Labour might change the way it operates. For some time colleagues in Scotland and Wales have been calling for the national party to give them more say over key decisions on issues like selections, campaigning and organisation. The new English devolution deals, creating regional directly-elected Mayors, also pose new questions, including issues such as:

- Which decisions can/should be devolved to local parties?
- How should we organise selections, including for new positions such as the new Mayoral elections, which do not fit into current party structures?
- What is the practical impact of growth of membership on selections in areas such as spending limits and mailings to members?
- How do we ensure that directly elected mayors are accountable and engaged with the communities they serve and the wider public?
- What can be done to ensure a diverse range of candidates are able to stand/win elections?
- With many devolution deals focusing on the Midlands and Northern metropolitan areas, how can the issues and concerns of Counties, particularly in the South of England, be better represented within the Labour Party?

A key aim of the Party Reform work is to improve diversity among our elected representatives, including increasing the number of Labour's female Councillors and women in leadership roles within local government. This involves identifying the barriers that prevent more women (and candidates from other under-represented groups) from standing for election and fulfilling their leadership potential, as well as working to remove these barriers. Deputy Leader Tom Watson has also written to all Labour Council Leaders to ask them how they plan to improve diversity within their Groups. Anyone who has seen the recent photos of the predominantly male Council Leaders signing devolution deals will know we have a lot of work to do in local government. It also increases the cost of selections, potentially creating an extra barrier to selecting a diverse range of candidates.

The new Mayoral models may make this work more difficult. For example, the growth in membership increases the cost of selections, potentially creating an extra barrier to selecting a diverse range of candidates.

The Fabian Women's Network will help disseminate information about the various consultation strands such as improving diversity of representation, responding to devolution, reviewing policy-making and more.

Please do contribute to these consultations and make sure your voice is heard. You are also very welcome to contact the relevant lead NEC member directly. Since 1997, devolution has changed the face of British politics and together we must continually adapt to these changes in a way that reflects our Labour values.





Empowering the Voluntary Sector

Devolution has the potential to increase the participation of excluded groups, says **Cllr Rakhia Ismail**.

Devolution and the much vaunted shift in powers to councils and communities have the potential to shift power even further down to neighbourhoods and individuals.

The danger we face in the current debate around City Deals and the Northern Powerhouse, is that the potential role of the community and voluntary sector is not truly realised. Devolution, if done properly, has the potential to give councils the power to govern in partnership with local people – helping them to build and shape their futures.

‘Localism has the potential to increase participation amongst often marginalised groups, such as black and ethnic minority women.’

The arguments for how devolving key powers over housing, transport, crime and rehabilitation, as well as health and skills, will deliver better results have been well made. The principle that decisions made closer to people often lead to better results, when operating within a national set of standards, is accepted by many. But what we are missing is how this transfer of power can empower communities that are often cut-off from decision making.

The voluntary sector has a clear role to play if devolution is going to address inequality. The voluntary sector often works with and represents groups of people that can feel powerless compared with more privileged groups. We need to ensure that all communities have a say in how the new opportunities that devolution represents can be best utilised. Certainly a one-size-fits-all approach, even when administered from a local authority, will not address this disempowerment. Evidence has shown that women from black and mi-

nority ethnic (BME) communities face particular discrimination and challenges in accessing paid work. For example, the Islington Employment Commission published in 2014, found that many people from minority ethnic backgrounds, for example Muslim women, continue to feel discriminated against and feel excluded from the labour market. Language and literacy skills are significant factors affecting many people in getting work, and these barriers are amplified in particular ways for refugee and immigrant women who are new to the system.

Localism has the potential to increase participation amongst often marginalised groups, such as black and minority women. It is crucial that marginalised groups such as refugee and immigrant women have an equal say in local decision making in order to ensure that services are not merely designed around their needs, but by these women themselves.

Based on my own lived experiences of working in the voluntary sector for over 20 years, I am positive about the localism agenda and how it can increase the presence of black and minority ethnic women in local decision making and to help give them a voice. I sometimes think these women have been let down by successive governments and voluntary sector funding bodies, simply by not setting a higher aspiration for women to achieve a better quality of life, other than endless training that only produces certificates that gather dust.

Something must change. It is critical now that Labour and Labour women should take the lead to champion the voluntary and community sector for women, in terms of stimulating social enterprise, cooperatives, and small businesses. Most refugees I have worked with in the past have all the business, craft, or cooking skills you need to get a social enterprise, business, or community group off the ground.

However, without the access to services in place, these skills remain unrealised. A lack of employment has led to many different types of illness for BME women and men, particularly mental ill health, which in the years to come will be a growing issue. As I have been championing for many years, we must do more to provide services and support for women to be financially independent and to help BME people into work as well as supporting their health and wellbeing.

The voluntary sector, including funders, need to offer better outcomes as they have a massive responsibility to encourage BME women to be resourceful, inspirational, and bold. This includes co-designing projects

with women, which not only benefit the women but also their families and Britain's economy in the future.

‘We must do more to provide services and support for women to be financially independent, and to help BME people into work.’

We live in a complex changing world, and we need to have a different approach. Devolution and genuine localism has the potential to empower these women and to unleash their creativity, which can help reduce inequality.





The Origins of the Fabian Women's Group

Deborah Stoate, the Fabian Society's Local Societies Officer, explores the origins of the Fabian Women's Group.

'The modern Feminist wants work, she wants the control of her own financial position, and she wants education and the right to take part in the human activities of the state, but at the same time, she is no longer willing to be shut out from marriage and motherhood.'

You may be surprised to hear that this topical *cri de coeur* was written, not in 2014 but a century earlier in 1914 by Mabel Atkinson, a founder member of the Fabian Women's Group (FWG), in her pamphlet 'The Economic Foundations of the Women's Movement'. It is profoundly disappointing that the demands articulated here remain so depressingly familiar today and that – as the Fabian Women's Group put it – 'the Woman question' remains pertinent today.

The FWG was formed in 1908, 24 years after the formation of the Fabian Society. The Society up until then had shown little interest in suffrage or women's position generally – an anomaly as women formed half the membership, sat on the Executive and contributed fully to the Society – in name at least. Margaret Cole suggested that this was because male Fabians believed that Fabian Socialism created a tolerant atmosphere in which feminists could pursue their aims – Fabian women came to disagree and felt that the Society did not do enough.

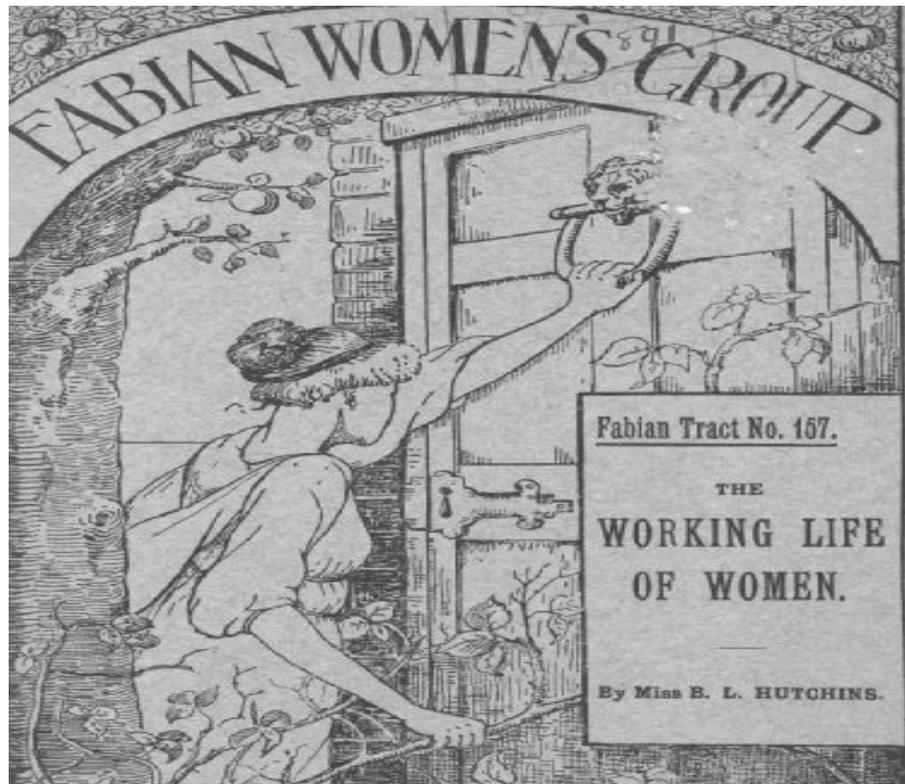
Also, Beatrice Webb was, in her own words; 'bored and irritated' by suffrage and the woman question in general. She wrote 'I have never met a man, however inferior, whom I did not consider to be my superior', and '...at the root of my anti-feminism lay the fact that I myself had never myself suffered the disabilities assumed to arise from my sex. Quite the contrary'. Beatrice Webb found it hard to generalise from her personal experience to the position of women in society and felt that feminism was a mere diversion on the road to socialism. She then recant-

ed later on her anti suffrage stance (being an astute politician) and continued to use the FWG as unpaid clerks and researchers.

However in 1908, Maud Pember Reeves dragged the Executive into altering the words of the 'basis' of the Society to include the words; 'The establishment of equal citizenship between men and women' The FWG was formed and was to be much more than just a suffrage society. At their first meeting they resolved, firstly to further the principle of equal citizenship both within and without the Society, and secondly, 'to study women's economic independence in relation to socialism'. The membership came – in Beatrice Webb's words – from that class of persons who 'habitually gave orders' – and were drawn from occupations which had always been open to women of audacity and ability – writers, journalists, teachers and also single women of means with enough money and leisure to combine study of social conditions with plans for their alleviation, in the best Fabian tradition. At the end of 1909, there were 215 members.

The work of the FWG began in earnest and a board of studies was formed to investigate 'the conditions of economic independence for women under socialism and the steps whereby it might be gained' and to 'examine the role of women as producers as well as consumers of the country's wealth'. They aimed, by research and publication of educational tracts – about 18 in all – to influence, not just the Fabian Society, but social policy as well. The general conclusions of the study group were these.

They believed that women suffered from two-fold economic dependence, firstly in the home and secondly as unskilled cheap labour which resulted from the custom of marriage by purchase, and the focus on sex which a man's desire for legitimate heirs imposed on his wife. Motherhood, they believed



instead of being recognised as ‘a valuable act of citizenship’, rewarded in state pensions and co-operative households, was a stigma and a woman’s sex lowered her value in the labour market. The sexual division of labour was fixed because of sex, with women caught in a treadmill of economic dependence with their poverty forcing them not only into low paid, unskilled jobs, but possibly into prostitution or marriage – which they believed was a legalised form of the first!

They argued then that the woman question was essentially an economic one. Women should not have to rely on men’s property or wages for their subsistence but could achieve economic liberty, so long as in waged work the laws of the market were tempered by judicious legislation and in the home through state pension and co-operative households. This was revolutionary thinking indeed – a ‘Reorganisation of Domestic Work Committee’ was set up envisioning transforming housework into an attractive professional occupation or setting up co-operative households. The fatal flaw in this however was the fact that most Fabian women – wanting love and work consequently need domestic employees to run their houses and take care of their children and those employees were generally working class women. Mrs Reeves generously proposed the the role of domestic servant be changed to ‘trained expert’ and that ‘clubs be established to which servants of all classes could belong.’ Easy to mock statements like these viewed through ironic 21st century glasses, but who’s looking after your children or cleaning your house as you read this?

The FWG demanded more than just economic change – they sought self- fulfillment and to achieve this they had to throw off the chains of mental subservience to men that went hand in hand with economic slavery. Many agreed with Shaw who wrote that self sacrifice – the least attractive human quality – was the essential attribute of the ‘womanly woman’ and argued that ‘socialism brought about by a democracy contending with a plutocracy for very life must, whatever its theory, will only be achieved by those who know how to demand and take it. Women will never obtain this equality by mentally hanging onto the coat tails of men.’ (Fabian News , Feb 1910).

These women – the forbears of what is now the Fabian Women’s Network (FWN) – were serious socialist feminists, promoting their ideas thorough research, election to public bodies, self-improvement and self-fulfillment.

They believed in education as the path to collective as well as individual self-improvement, and their main intention was apparently to spread rational thought and education in citizenship. This aim they pursued with single-minded austerity, which was reflected in their personal lives. Their dilemmas and debates about identity and self-fulfillment sound very modern and still reverberate and their work on women’s citizenship and their economic research was highly influential in its day. Change? ‘The greatest stumbling block we found in our way was that women have not studied the (woman) question scientifically in their own interests.’ These women were formidable - in every sense of the word.

Fabian Women's Network Executive Committee (2016-2018)

Ivana Bartoletti (Chair)
Paulina Jakubec (Secretary)
Reema Patel (Treasurer)
Sara Hyde (Vice-Chair)
Ellie Cumbo (Editorial Committee)
Beth Knowles (Editorial Committee)
Vicki Butler
Kate Talbot
Jayne Almond
Jos Bell
Sarah Sackman
Felicity Slater
Abena Oppong-Asare
Jessie Jacobs
Alex Sanderson (co-opted)
Charlotte Proudman (co-opted)
Christine Megson (honorary member)

The Fabian Women's Network would like to thank:

- all those who contributed to Fabiana
- the public services trade union Unison, who kindly supported the printing of this magazine
- all those who have read, engaged with and deliberated the contents of the magazine.

**Fabian Women's Network
c/o The Fabian Society
61 Petty France
London
SW1H 9EU**

