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Kathy Dyson

Women's TUC Report 2006



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End Violence Against Women





Women's TUC Report 2006 for the MU

*Main Theme: End Domestic Violence
Against Women*

General Overview/Introduction

The overall theme of the conference was to end domestic violence against women and throughout, the proposed coalition between Government, Amnesty International and WTUC was flagged up as the best way to tackle this issue. Many trades unionists articulated the feeling that we have been debating the same or similar issues for years but that many seem intractable. There was a deep sense of frustration that despite 30 years of the Equal Pay Act (and Barbara Castle would be turning in her grave at the prospect), the gender pay gap is still standing at 25% for F/T and 40% for P/T workers. The success of local Unison official in Cumbria in fighting for and winning not only equal pay but also back pay for a number of women NHS ancillary workers has been muted because of the national response from Unions worried that such mass claims might bankrupt the Health Service. Similarly for women's pension provision and affordable childcare; both of these issues have involved endless debates, policy documents, consultations and so on, but remarkably little action or change has taken place. Later in the conference Diane Holland mentioned that sometimes it takes a great deal of effort just to stand still (rather than go backwards) and the statement was obvious that the price of democracy is eternal vigilance even if, in the fullest sense true equality is some way off.

Barbara White was chair and looked completely at home there! In contrast to previous chairs, she allowed more speakers in the debates which broadened the issues, and conducted the business in a calm, kindly and efficient way. The MU was ably represented and it was good for a lay officer to be chairing the conference.

Highlights included the Chair's speech in which she publicised the work of the MU as well as the work still to be done for women; visits by women from the Turkmenistan Unions and the Oil and Gas Union in Basra who represent trades unions at the frontline; our MU motion on music in schools which unexpectedly sparked a positive and passionate debate and the motion from NATFE on equality seats on the General Council which, though opposed by the WTUC C'mtee, was supported and passed by conference after a lively debate.

As with so many conferences now, there was a lot of consensus given that many of the issues revolved around the gender pay gap, the provision of childcare, women's



health, abortion rights and pensions, although there were some contentious debates. On a more national political note the presence of Tessa Jowell at the opening of the conference ensured that some 19 photographers, film crews and other media types covered the start of proceedings and indeed Tessa congratulated WTUC on the amount of press coverage we were receiving! Unfortunately they only stayed for about half an hour until it was clear that Tessa was calmly in control (and following the party line) and so, despite the disruption and distraction of their presence, there was subsequently no coverage of the conference or the issues being debated whatsoever.

Finally, despite the many achievements for women under the current Labour government and the certain knowledge that it would be much worse under the Tories, there was a strong sense of the emptiness of much of the rhetoric of the Parliamentary Labour Party and a feeling that the time for action on so many issues affecting women was needed rather than the seemingly endless consultations and policy documents. What was clear again was the sense of solid work, enthusiasm, skill and compassion of the many and diverse delegations representing women across the UK in a huge range of occupations. Despite their fighting spirit and seemingly endless perseverance, WTUC still feels like it's at the margins of both the Trades Union movement as a whole and the national political process. What can we do to ensure these changes?

Chair's Speech

Barbara began by reminding conference of the work by the MU and stated that we were 'loud, vibrant and full of energy!' She highlighted the Women and Work Commission Report and stressed the need for action both on the gender pay gap and the need for statutory pay audits. Barbara mentioned the success of the Unison equal pay claim in Cumbria for women working in the NHS there and a similar claim by PCS. The low level of women's pensions, lack of good childcare and discrimination against pregnant women were all key issues that remain unresolved and needed action not words to tackle them. Barbara also mentioned that mergers between large unions tend to squeeze women out of the hierarchies and meant that unions become more generalised whereas their strength lies in understanding the specialist nature of diverse groups of workers.

Motions

Composite Motion 1 on Pensions

This motion moved by ASLEF strongly opposed the recommendations of the Turner Pensions Commission to increase state pension age from 65 to 68. It reiterated the need for pension increases for women to enable more than the current 11% of women, to claim a full state pension. It also condemned the changes available in

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2006 that allows money from pension funds to be used to buy property, with advantageous tax incentives, thereby inflating house prices and causing shortages in housing stock. The motion called on the TUC to campaign for full state pension for all pensioners regardless of NI contributions; no increase in retirement age; an end to pension credits and an increase in state pension by at least £30 a week. Carried nem con.

Composite 2 on the Trafficking of Women and Children

The second composite moved by Community related to the organised trafficking of humans, particularly women and children, but sometimes, men as well. Harrowing accounts of the experiences of people, treated to all intents and purposes as slaves, were presented. Human trafficking is a huge issue and has overtaken drug trafficking as the world's largest illegal business. Victims are some of the most powerless people in society; on entering the country their passport is taken; they often have little or no English; they are treated as illegal migrants if they can make their circumstances known and they deliberately isolated from the mainstream of society. They are usually forced into brothels, domestic service, or forced labour. If they complain or are found, they often face cruel treatment or repatriation. The motion called on the TUC to raise public awareness; to sign the European Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings and to encourage training and co-operation for the front-line services that deal with this issue. Carried nem con.

Speech by Tessa Jowell

Tessa began by stating that of all her achievements in government, she was most proud of the Sure Start initiative for pre-school children. She was delighted to be with us on International Women's Day and (with tongue in cheek), also at the high level of media interest in the WTUC. She then listed how much the current Labour government had done to assist women. It had: instituted the minimum wage; doubled maternity leave; expanded childcare; brought in child tax credits; begun Sure Start; modernised the law on domestic violence and so on. On this issue she stated that home is the most dangerous place to be for many women and two are killed in the UK every week. Domestic violence causes the highest number of deaths each year of women between the ages of 15 and 44; more than cancer, war or malaria. The way to combat this was with an alliance between government, unions and employers, in order to break the isolation of so many women and to encourage a zero tolerance stance to this issue. She considered that the gender pay gap was a scandal but that the Women and Work commission had outlined the problems and would provide a platform to deal with it. She hoped that things were changing given that more women than ever were working and that there were now ten female general secretaries of TUC affiliated unions. Reflecting more of the tone of the Women and Work commission report she said that working conditions needed to be more flexible for women; that girls needed to raise their ambitions and aspirations (to get higher paid work) and that the lack of equality in the workforce was damaging to the economy.

Speech by Brendan Barber

Brendan stated that the issues of gender pay gap, childcare and occupational segregation were finally moving up the agenda of government and that there were 40 positive recommendations in the Women and Work commission report that were useful and would help progress. Women, he said, could not afford to wait for another generation; the gender pay gap in the UK was the largest in Europe and inequality costs some £23bn a year in lost productivity. At the present rate it would take another 80 years to close the gender pay gap, which is alarming. Brendan pointed out that the Turner report also put women's pension rights to the fore and praised the work on Jeannie Drake on behalf of the unions. The continuing undervaluing of women's work was highlighted by the fact that four out of ten women work in low paid jobs mainly because they have other caring roles which take priority. Brendan condemned the macho culture of long hours working and which he said was ruining opportunities for women and called for more flexible working conditions in both the public and private sectors. He too felt that the increase in numbers of women working and density of women trades unionists would have an effect on opportunities and working conditions for women. Brendan stated the need for the trades union movement to start growing again and that it needed a strategy for renewal. He said that in every workplace women need to know that they are not alone and that the union can provide support systems, education and organisation in a unique and valuable way. He stated what we are all aware of; that unions make a massive difference on a number of levels and that there is clear evidence of the benefits both to the workforce and the employers of having a unionised workplace.

Several questions were asked of BB: about when the men in the TUC would really value the views of women? (WTUC motions are not automatically carried to the TUC general council or taken up by them). Would the government fully implement the Warwick agreement? Would the general council take up the views of WTUC? What was the role of the women's committee? As with the politicians who attend conference it is almost pointless asking questions because the speakers are invariably highly experienced at diffusing emotive issues and skirting round the subject. The overwhelming impression that BB gives as leader of the TUC is one of moderation, pragmatism and acceptance of the current state of affairs (or fear losing a Labour government), and this should give WTUC grave cause for concern.

Emergency motion 1

Moved by the CWU this motion was concerned that the Women and Work Commission findings failed to address the importance of inequalities and discrimination faced by women in the private as well as the public sector. Women from unions who had submitted evidence to the commission were very disappointed in the lost opportunity for it to take action especially on statutory pay audits and dismayed and angered by the blame put on women in the report for lacking higher aspirations. The motion called on the TUC to engage with both Government and the

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CBI on: pay audits; rights for equality reps; a positive duty to promote equality and funding for women's training and outreach services. Carried nem con.

Motion 4 Union Equality Reps

Moved by the T&G, this motion noted the good and lasting work of equality reps in the workplace and asked the TUC to promote statutory rights for them and in consultation with the TUC Equality Commission, to produce an equality reps guide. Carried nem con.

Motion 5 Equal Pay

Motion 5 moved by NATFE welcomed the Women and Work Commission but also felt let down and disappointed by the lack of action on equal pay. Clearly a voluntary approach has not worked as 2/3rds of organisations have neither carried out equal pay reviews or intend to do so. The motion asked the TUC to campaign for mandatory equal pay audits; introduce the right for trades unions to take class actions on this issue and to restore national collective bargaining. Carried nem con.

Motion 6 Equal Pay in FE/HE

Moved by AUT, this motion stated that the rate for hourly paid lecturing staff in FE/HE had declined over the past 20 years (along with the quality of contracts and conditions of work). Although the number of female academics continues to rise, the gender pay gap in FE/HE is currently 14%. The motion asked the TUC to support education unions campaigning for equal pay. Carried nem con.

Emergency Motion 2 Women and the Local Government

Pension Scheme

This motion moved by Unison called for conference to condemn the detrimental proposals by Government and Local Authorities that threaten the already meagre pension provision of women who work in local government. Three quarters of the people who face cuts to existing pensions are women with the average pension of £1600 a year which reflects the gender pay gap, occupational segregation and past discrimination against part time workers. The motion also called for equal treatment with other public sector schemes; for support with their campaign and any necessary industrial action. Carried nem con.

Motion 7 Funding for Equal Pay

Moved by the FDA the motion noted that the gender pay gap for civil servants is increasing; that 50% of civil servants earn under £12,000 and that most of those are women. The motion calls in the Cabinet Office to implement equal pay reviews; consider the results and initiate an action plan and include equal pay as a priority issue for additional funding as part of the second pay round. Carried nem con.

Gloria Mills President of TUC Speech

Gloria began by saying that WTUC had changed the face and image of congress by being a dynamic driving force, which was vocal, visible and instigating solid progressive changes to advance gender equality. Women however, still faced discrimination at work and the also the glass ceiling in many occupations, by being passed over for promotion. She said that stereotypes are very damaging to women's roles in the trades union movement and that globalisation also had a disproportionate effect on women. She stressed the need to join with women across the world to fight the many challenges that globalisation of capitalism and the workforce has brought. Equality, she said should remain our goal and the trades union movement provides the best means of modernising the labour movement and of challenging institutional sexism. She quoted the following: 'Power without responsibility is tyranny. Responsibility without power is exploitation' and stressed that women has always has the latter and needed to take power or at least re-balance the equation.

Motion 8 Part- Time Workers

This motion moved by Connect recognised the low pay of many P/T workers and called on the TUC to work with affiliates to look at options for concessions on travel for low paid workers. Carried nem con.

Motion 9 The Feminisation of Migration

Moved by Unison, the motion noted that there are @175 million migrants worldwide and the ILO states that 48% of them are women. Often the sole breadwinner in the family, they are used primarily as cheap labour and many experience the worst pay and conditions. The motion called on the TUC to identify organisational challenges in recruiting women migrant workers and to produce a practical guide for affiliates on organising migrant women workers. Carried nem con.

conditions of women and to gain equality. In a disturbing account, Nazanin described the wars of genocide in Kurdistan and the use of chemical warfare which over a period of 80 years had devastated the population, stifled freedom and oppressed the people. Women had fought with the men against Hussein and continued to fight against the old customs and traditions which hampered the freedom and equality of women. There has been self rule in Kurdistan for 15 years and women work in all areas of life, but there are still social problems and women struggle against the old customs. Although the women's union is small it is effective and has special interest groups. In conclusion, she affirmed the need for unity and accord between women and sent her best wishes for International Women's Day.

Violet A Essa Qalaab, President of the Oil and Gas Union Basrah

On behalf of the Iraqi women oil and gas workers, Violet thanked the WTUC for the invitation to speak at conference. Under Hussein women had a bleak future; women engineers and doctors had to take any kind of work in order to feed their family. After the fall of Sadaam, things haven't improved enough; there is the constant fear of terrorism and a lack of security especially in random attacks and suicide bombers. The women's union is still active and fighting to defend the rights of women workers, in spite of the destruction all around; abandoned buildings, scarcity and disease. They are campaigning for ILO standards and social provisions for women and widows, and also for health and education. They also need to keep supplying Iraq with gas and oil and working for Iraq to become a fully democratic state with equal rights for women.

Motion 14 Pregnancy Discrimination

Moved by CSP, the motion noted that out of 440,000 pregnant women in the UK each year, about half experience problems at work during their pregnancy. The EOC investigation in 2005 discovered that 30,000 pregnant women lose their jobs annually but of the women who do experience difficulty 70% do not speak out and most are unaware of their maternity rights. The motion called on the TUC to campaign for an obligation on employers to provide written statements for paternity and maternity rights; to force the obligation of employers to provide risk assessments for pregnant employees and to campaign to make pregnancy the positive and life enhancing experience that it ought to be. Carried nem con.

Motion 15 Supporting Parents and Carers

The motion moved by USDAW called on the TUC to lobby hard on issues that support parents and carers and especially to press Government to look again at the length and remuneration of maternity, paternity, adoption and parental leave, which was stated in the Warwick agreement. Carried nem con.



Motion 16 Childcare

Moved by the FBU, this motion demanded that the General Council in conjunction with the TUC Women's Committee ensure that the fundamental provision of good quality childcare forms and integral and consistent part of the planning and organisation of every conference, course or seminar being run by the TUC. In the debate it was noted that Unison also pays for adult carers if required so that women with these responsibilities can attend meetings and courses. Carried nem con.

Motion 17 Children's Workforce

This motion moved by NUT refers (not to child chimney sweeps!) but to the diverse groups (usually women) who work to help children, especially those with educational needs, i.e. educational psychologists, special needs teachers, teaching assistants, support workers, behaviour needs teachers and so on. The motion called on Government to ensure that this workforce's skills are fully recognised, developed and paid appropriately. Carried nem con.

Motion 18 Youth, Community and Play Services

Moved by CYWU, the motion noted the important benefits in our communities of the youth, community and play services. It called on the TUC to ensure that the 4,000 more youth workers needed to meet government targets are acquired and calls for conditions of grant aid to be imposed on bodies receiving government and local government funding to ensure proper professional rates of pay and pension entitlements. Carried nem con.

Motion 19

This motion was moved by the MU and called for music to be made a core curriculum subject given the vital role that it plays in the education and life of the child and because despite innumerable initiatives, funding schemes and policy documents music education for children remains patchy and inconsistent across the regions. The speech sparked intense and long debate about the role of music and the need for education for its own sake as well as the NASUWT abstaining because they felt they couldn't support the core curriculum aspect. It was also hijacked by the RMT as a vehicle to criticise the government education white paper, but nonetheless provided a passionate and sparky debate. Carried.

Norma Stephenson Labour Party Sororal Delegate

Norma began by saying that more women than men voted for Labour at the last election because they recognise the rights of women. The Labour party had stepped

up the campaign on domestic violence; expanded childcare; increased maternity pay and time off for paternity; introduced pension credits and winter payments and so on. There was still much to be done especially in the fields of flexible working and childcare.

Motion 25 International Women's Day

Reiterating the need for action and the frustration felt by many about the same resolutions appearing at WTUC year after year, the motion, moved by the RMT reminded everyone that it used to be International *Working Women's Day* and called on the General Council to organise an annual demonstration on International Women's Day in order to raise the profile of women's issues and to campaign more effectively. Carried nem con.

Motion 26 Artistic Freedom of Expression

Equity moved this motion calling on the TUC to publicly defend artistic freedom of expression and to condemn those who use violence and intimidation to prevent a work of art being seen by others. This is in response to the closing of the Birmingham Rep's play *Behzti* and the intimidation of the playwright and many other recent instances. Carried nem con.

Composite Motion 3 Gender Duty and Public Sector Employment Practices

The motion moved by PCS welcomed the new duty to promote gender equality in the delivery of public services and in the employment practices of the public services but was disappointed that this did not extend to the private and voluntary sectors. The motion called on the WTUC Committee to lobby the government to extend the duty to all sectors and to provide adequate funding and resources so that the gender duty can be met. Carried nem con.

Composite Motion 4 The Gender Duty and Education

Moved by NATFE, the motion again welcomed the new duty but noted that it ought to refer to women (because it could be applied to men), and failed to address the issues of pay. The motion called for action on statutory pay audits and the setting of targets to end the gender pay gap. It also called on Government to ensure that all educational institutions are covered by the specific and general duties. Carried nem con.



Composite Motion 5 The Importance of Equality and Equality Pay Structures

This motion was moved by the CWU and already passed by the 2005 conference but not implemented by General Council. It called for the right of equality conferences to submit two motions to Congress and for direct representation from the equality conferences to the General Council. Carried.

Emergency Composite Motion 1 Funding of the Equal Opportunities Commission

The motion moved by the PCS noted with concern the proposed cut of £2m or 20% of its funding to the Equal Opportunities Commission and believed that this would weaken the EOC and affect its ability to address gender inequality in an effective way. The motion called on WTUC and the General Council to mount a high profile campaign to ensure that the EOC and its new replacement are funded to the level required to address sex discrimination and gender equality both now and in the future. Carried nem con.

Where are the Women? - Informal Debate

This was an open debate on how to recruit women and keep them involved in union activity. Of the many interesting contributions, here are a few highlights: Sally Hunt of the AUT said that the TUC should look properly at its own equality structures rather than paying lip service to them. Maureen Bryon of the T&G describing the situation in her union in 2004, said that out of 58 officers only 4 were women and one has since retired. So, what they decided to do was to encourage the large numbers of able women within the union to apply for officer jobs and develop a candidate development programme in which the roles were explained, the candidates helped to write a profile and pre-training in some areas was given where necessary. The result is that there is now one black officer and three more women. Also the membership in their region 2 had gone up by 50%. Megan Donnelly of Amicus said that while the WTUC was growing in vibrancy, the merging of large unions had a negative impact on the numbers of women delegates and the whole issue of women's representation in these mega unions had to be considered. Several delegates spoke of the importance of paying for women's childcare to attend meetings and conferences and several large unions do this as a matter of course. Jean Harrison of the AUT said that if you want women to be active in the union you have to redefine what an activist is to enable them to take part around all their other roles and responsibilities. You also have to make women feel valued whatever they are able to do, so for example many women can work from home at the computer, sending e-mails, letters and being in touch from there also. She saw the Charter for Women as being key to recruiting and keeping women members. The RMT has no women officers and apparently the higher up the hierarchy the fewer the women there are, however the women members have produced their own charter and are working on their own policies.

Conclusions/relevance to MU policy

Pensions are obviously just as important an issue to our members as everyone else and the provision for self-employed and gigging musicians could usefully be looked at by us again. Equal pay appears to be a musical genre issue rather than one of sex discrimination but again important. One of the key issues that came out of the conference was the need for flexible working, time off for both mothers and fathers at the birth and after, and generally a better life work balance and this is a big issue for musicians who tend to be working flat out if successful and scared to give up work for fear of never getting it back. There are health and stress related issues that are being addressed within the health and safety remit of the MU, but that we need to keep in mind. On the issue of women's equality- are we properly represented within the MU? There are increasing numbers of women officers and officials; I am unsure of the number of RC members or other activists, but we seem under represented on the EC and perhaps should seek to remedy this, by explaining the demands of the role and the kinds of issues that are discussed. The issue of migration is another important one for us and one which we are seeking to address through FIM and other international cultural organisations; all aspects of globalisation and global change have implications for musicians especially in the fields of market forces and new technology. The Education White paper is likely to affect the way that musicians and visiting music teachers are employed in schools especially in the semi-private trust schools, so it is timely that the MU is now involved in negotiations with NAMS and the NUT about proper representation for them with recognised pay scales and conditions. The issue of universal free instrumental tuition and music in school generally came over as being very important to large numbers of delegates and is probably indicative of society in general and how much this is valued. I think we need to keep up the lobbying pressure on this one and with the Music Manifesto to press government for more money and action.

Thanks

Thanks to the EC for sending us (Barbara White, Eileen Spencer and Kathy Dyson) to WTUC; it is always a positive and uplifting experience; enables us to see the bigger picture and this year gave a high profile to the work of the MU.