

Women's Network Exchange

NPC Women's Working Party
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This edition is packed with information about women (and men) who are helping change people's lives as well as articles about our history and impact that politics is having on our services, economy and beloved NHS.

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Fringe Meeting at Pensioners Parliament 2019

The impact of local government cuts on women

Speaker: Anita Wright, President of the National Assembly of Women. Chair: Rosie McGregor

Rosie opened this well attended meeting of 50 men and women. She thanked them for coming and gave a brief overview of how local government cuts are affecting the lives of women, children, families, grandchildren and those being cared for. For many the cuts deny them access to care and help. Women are also affected as workers in local government, some losing their jobs. Thus women are affected the most.

Anita thanked everyone She remembered coming to Blackpool 30 years before for a NUT Conference.

Watching the TV recently about the D Day landings and what families went through she remembered her family singing a song "It's the rich that gets the gravy and the poor that gets the blame" and "My old man". Songs about austerity and poverty which still resonate today.



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Report of Fringe Meeting at Blackpool

Anita began with the 2008 banking crisis that triggered a mistaken and damaging policy of austerity. This fell mainly upon working families and children. Despite the UK being the 5th richest country in the world the UN reported damage to the fabric of UK society.

Since 2010 funding from central government to local government has fallen by 48%. community budgets have suffered 50% cuts - hitting local communities the hardest.

There are regional differences; devolved government in Wales (and Scotland) adopt different policies. The poorest boroughs such as Lambeth, suffer the worst with 33% cuts but some more affluent boroughs receive cuts of only 9%.

Government funding policy is for local authorities to become independent and rely upon raising money through council tax and business rates. Cleaning services, waste collection, consumer protection and other services will come from local budgets. Also 200 additional statutory requirements are imposed on local authorities adding to the existing 1300 putting them under greater pressure.

The Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS) reported that poorer areas like Blackpool, Tower Hamlets, Middlesbrough are the least able to raise funds through council tax and business rates and have the most deprived residents. The IFS predict a deficit of 7.5 billion to local authorities by 2025; this could not be cancelled out by increases in council tax.

Yet a small proportion of businesses retain wealth hidden away in offshore trusts and hedge funds.

Anita listed examples of services in crisis, such as Social Care. The cost of Social Care represents 54% of total LA budgets. Even now 1.4 million people do not receive the care they need and demand will rise. The strain falls upon families who receive no help.

Child Care services are not meeting the needs of vulnerable children. Social Workers case loads are enormous and they need help. Schools from nursery to secondary are very short of funds and resort to reduction in staff. Sure Start closed 1000 of its nurseries, playgrounds have been lost and green spaces sold off to private developers.

The closure of local libraries has been a great loss to communities, for young and old. 608 libraries have been closed with a loss of 5,000 jobs. In some boroughs residents resisted the closures.

In an attempt to cope, councils resort to out-sourcing delivery of services. This causes yet more

problems - for employees worse pay and conditions of work, reduced standards and profits creamed off to contractors. We have reports with strong statistical evidence that outsourced services are less safe.

Local Authorities have been unable to provide enough rented accommodation for those in need. Anita indicated that in Europe people do not need to seek house ownership; renting is acceptable and secure. The failure to provide rented council homes to satisfy demand has driven up the number of homeless people; it was 320,000 in 2018.

Yet the government delivered to target following WWII when Britain faced a huge deficit.

Anita point out that the NHS has also suffered from austerity. Bursaries have been cut for nurses and recruitment has dropped. We need all these health professionals.

She talked about disputes throughout England where people are trying to hold onto their jobs like the cleaner's strike at Richmond Hospital.

The closure of psychogeriatric hospitals led to premature deaths within a couple of months.

Fortunately the struggle to save Princes Alexandra Hospital was a success.

Gender inequality has been made worse as a result of austerity policies. Women are more likely to be local authority employees, engaged in domestic care work and extended family responsibilities. They are likely to be employed by a subsidiary company and not belong to a union.

In addition they depend upon good local services. BAME communities have also been disproportionately affected.

Workers feel the strain of the 1 mill job losses in LAs since 2010 with fewer to do the work. Recruitment is a huge problem for these jobs; LAs depend more and more upon agencies who are creaming off profits for shareholders.

Anita ended by recommending we read the reports produced by the Women's Budget Group and Heather Wakehurst's "The Triple Whammy".

Rosie thanked Anita for the "Wake up call" and agreed that it is a terrible situation—not just for women.

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Fringe meeting continued

The audience was ready with comments and questions.

Topics included: the high cost of nurseries for working mothers, defence of striking care workers, school funding, the importance of free school meals, the loss of statisticians, the dangers of the Integrated Care Provider Contracts (ICPs) being imposed by NHS England and local councillor accountability.

In Anita's summing up:

- She urged that more attention be paid to the problems faced by LAs.
- Flexible contracts should be available for women.

- On school funding, academies got funded directly from central government, but Special Educational Needs (SEN) money was not ring-fenced and misused.
- There is a crisis in prisons. Prisons are privatised; even those probation services brought back in house are not well managed.
- There will be severe problems in restoring the NHS to the comprehensive service it once was.

Janet Shapiro

[Summarised from the notes provided by Meg McDonald that can be obtained on request.]

National Assembly of Women (NAW) Seminar

The seminar was held at the NASUWT college Birmingham 26/27 October 2019

Megan Dobney, a member of the NAW Executive, welcomed everyone. Professor Mary Davis led discussion around the Charter for Women, a campaigning programme. It brings together the key demands for which women are fighting covering three broad areas: social policy, the labour market and the labour movement. Originally launched in 2004, the Charter has been adopted by almost every union but it is now felt it needs revitalising to make a greater impact on a socialist feminist women's movement.

It was agreed that the re-launch should begin with a mapping project to find out how many women's organisations with similar view to ours would be interested in working with us.

A conference and possibly a website were suggested. One delegate suggested we could take the most pertinent issues from the charter and produce on a postcard which we could hand out at meetings we attend where we feel there may be interest – such as local Labour Party meetings.

We are not working from a blank sheet, we know the issues affecting women today. Our second speaker was Ruth Serwotka from Women's Place UK who spoke of the challenges and opportunities for women in the UK. Ruth gave a brief list of victories women

had been involved in from the 1888 Match Women's strike up to the present day including the 1968 Ford equal pay dispute. We have won where we have been organised. Ruth also spoke about 'women only spaces' which must remain and the Sex Discrimination Act must be protected.

On Sunday we listened to Lisa Eldret, a Labour councillor from Derby. Lisa spoke about the problems of being a woman councillor, particularly when bringing up children and holding down a job. There is a concern that there are only 20% women council leaders across the country. The turnover for women councillors is high and many do just one term. The cuts made at council level are predominantly made by men but they predominantly impact on women so we need more women within local authorities making decisions.

Our final speaker was Joy Johnson from Unite who spoke of the media within this country who are rarely the labour movement's friend – but we still need them. The message we need to get over is that in the 5th largest economy in the world, austerity is a political choice by governments since 2010 and is a breach of human rights and we must use the media whenever we can to put our views over. Media training helps in this

Lorene Fabian

Bad faith, a waste of time and money and a win.

A little over seven years ago a slickly produced, glossy, expensive brochure slipped through letter boxes across North West London. Glamorous photos of doctors, smiling patients, modern medical equipment and doctored pictures of new hospital buildings illustrated a message that a bright new future faced NHS users across our 2.2 million population area.

This was to be part of a new programme called **'Shaping a Healthier Future'**. We would all remain well, self-diagnose, self-treat, smile and stay out of hospital. What could be better?

But it quickly became clear that the programme included closing or downgrading Charing Cross and Ealing Hospitals, the loss of at least six hundred beds, the closure of 2 more A&Es across the area, and the movement of much treatment out of hospitals into the community, but as a result of austerity policies community services were entirely under-funded or unavailable. In addition, £2 billion pounds—the so-called savings from the new NHS, would be cut from North West London's health budget!

This obvious fraud triggered community based campaigns in Hammersmith & Fulham and Ealing boroughs. Over the next seven years -SAVE OUR HOSPITALS H&F and SAVE OUR HOSPITALS Ealing campaigned against a set of highly destructive proposals.

We gathered accurate information about local threats to NHS, attended interminable CCG and Hospital Trust meetings, read thousands of jargon written pages, leafletted week after week in all kinds of weather, organised often very big public meetings, held vigils, die ins, demonstrations, got accurate news into the local and national media. Networks of activists were built up across North West London. Crucially, we were rooted in our communities. We met thousands of our neighbours and we listened to what they had to say about attacks on our NHS.

In H&F Labour MP Andy Slaughter in the North of the borough vigorously and persistently fought the closure plans for Charing Cross and Ealing hospitals, countered in the south of the Borough by messages from Conservative MP Greg Hands that there were no plans to close the hospital; we were scare mongering at best but really lying!

Our campaigns were not party political but Labour Councils in both H&F and Ealing were in support. Ealing took the secretary of State for Health to the

courts. The Council lost but it made clear how damaging proposals were to public health. H&F commissioned one of the country's most eminent QCs – Michael Mansfield, to look into the effects of the proposals. His report – the Mansfield report which gained huge media attention made it clear that proposals were a real danger to public health. Health bosses persisted with their plans, they closed two A&Es, they insisted that it was safe to reduce hospital beds but without producing any confirmatory evidence. Right up to March 2019 closure plans were planned. **Until on March 26th reality stuck. In the House of Commons the Health secretary said he was pulling the plans. They were not safe.**

We and the local public were delighted and campaigners celebrated. MP Greg Hands who had repeatedly said in public that there were no plans to close the hospitals put around a leaflet claiming credit for keeping the hospitals open.

Over the many years local health bosses wasted well over £100m pounds on plans that just were not safe, £77m went to big consultancy firms which must have thought it was Christmas every week as money from the NHS added to their profits. We lost two A&Es but we saved Charing Cross and Ealing hospitals as major acute hospitals. And we made it plain to local NHS bosses and decision makers that the public is not going to look away when our NHS is under threat.

Seven years of persistent hard campaigning takes a toll on energy. But all of us believe in the NHS. We know that it needs proper investment, that it is severely short of staff, that it is under siege from privatisers.

Many of us are older people. We welcomed a rest, were ready to go out into the neglected garden or spend more time with neglected friends.

But now we find that health bosses plan to make huge health cuts in our area, ration services, close a much needed palliative care hospice, close a walk in centre and on and on.—We've learned from years of campaigning. Maybe we are not war weary; faced with attacks on our NHS we're battle hardened. We're not going away!

Jim Grealy

Hammersmith and Fulham Save Our NHS

Barbara Gwangwara-Tanyanyiwa

One of the keynote speakers and invited international guest at the UNISON National Delegate Conference in Liverpool at the end of June was Barbara Gwangwara-Tanyanyiwa.

Barbara is National Secretary of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions and president of Zimbabwe's Commercial Workers Union.

She spoke passionately about the current situation in her country of deteriorating human rights where innocent citizens are arrested, tortured, imprisoned and murdered by a regime that denies freedom of speech or association in a country that resembles a war zone.

She said that despite hopes for change after the rule of Mugabe the situation has worsened with great hardship suffered by the people and a humanitarian crisis developing.

President "crocodile" Mnangagwa's government's "vicious economic policies are hitting

workers hard". "Security forces are again using rape and torture as a weapon to silence and destroy our women leaders. But as we say in southern Africa: 'When you strike a woman, you strike a rock'. And we will continue fighting until we are liberated."

Many families can afford no more than one basic meal a day and items such as sanitary towels are an "unaffordable luxury".

Despite the hardships the workers remain defiant. "We are not going to suffer and die in silence" "We will peacefully protest until our cries have been heard."

Her dignified and emotional speech moved the 3,000 delegates and observers present to rise in a heartfelt standing ovation.

Rosie MacGregor

NOT THERE YET?

Cranfield University regularly checks the **Financial Times Stock Exchange** (FTSE) index for the number of female directors at blue chip firms, the latest one showing that there are still far too few women in real power.

Most of the 100 FTSE companies are likely to hit the target of a third of their board members as women next year, BUT!

Most of these women are non-executive directors, and once a firm has appointed one woman they tend to leave it at that and those that are appointed are unlikely to achieve senior positions and stay for a shorter time. In other words the firms are merely ticking boxes.

Only 6 of the FTSE 100 firms have female chief executives which is an improvement on the just 1 in 2005 But not much!

One might expect this in say engineering firms, but why is it true of major supermarkets, none of whom have female CEOs?

Even when women do get to the top there is, guess what, a gender pay gap. Now where have I heard that before? These women tend to be at the bottom of the pay table receiving on average £3m compared to the £5.8m overall.

But women are doing better in the finance sector. Debbie Crosbie heads TSB and a woman is chairman of Santander. Yet more to come? Alison Rose is tipped to become head of RBS, their first female boss. She has shown that if women launched companies on a par with men, it could create £259bn of value to the British economy.

Putting women at the head of banks could also kick start support for female entrepreneurs.

So here's to the future with women taking their rightful place in our economic society

Marion Wilson

Philippa Childs—first woman to head BECTU The Broadcasting Entertainment & Theatre Union

Bectu has appointed its first female head to succeed Gerry Morrissey, who stepped down after more than 10 years at the helm.

Philippa Childs, a former national secretary at parent trade union Prospect, now oversees Bectu's five divisions: BBC, London production, regional production, independent broadcasting and arts and entertainment.

Philippa took up her role in mid-November.

"It's a huge honour to be head of Bectu, and I'm proud to be the first woman to hold the position," said Childs.

"I look forward to working alongside our members and reps to continue to fight for – and win better working conditions for staff and freelancers in creative industries, through practical measures that make a real difference to their working lives."

The recently published 'Dignity at work' gives comprehensive guidelines as to what is acceptable for employees.

Bectu has declared support for our demand for retention of the concessionary TV licences for those over 75. <https://bectu.org.uk/news/tuc-calls-on-government-to-reverse-tv-licence-policy-2/>

Janet Shapiro

Photo by courtesy of Bectu



The NPC Annual Convention 2020

Contact the NPC Office address below to book.

The Annual Convention will be held at The Waterfront—Southport Theatre & Convention Centre, The Promenade, Southport PR9 0DZ
Tuesday 2nd—Thursday 4th June 2020.

The cost remains at £10 for the full event or £5 for either June 2nd or June 3rd.

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info@npcuk.org

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