

Bristol Feminist Network (BFN) Position Paper

Equal Pay, poverty and equality on the world stage

Since the 1970s, equal pay for equal work has been enshrined in UK law. However, in 2011 it still remains a distant dream for women, with the pay gap currently at an average of 17%¹. This is the equivalent in the UK, of women getting no pay after the end of October.

At BFN, we support the Fawcett Society's campaign for equal pay and each October we join them on a demo to demand our right to equal pay.

It is currently estimated that to get equal representation in government, we would need to wait 200 years if we continue at our current slow pace². Since the 2010 election, we only have four women in the cabinet, one of whom (Baroness Warsi) is unelected. The overall picture is equally as depressing, with 506 male MPs and only 142 female MPs, just 21%³. It is estimated that to get women's issues taken seriously in parliament, 30% of MPs need to be women⁴. We have a long way to go.

Feminists have long campaigned against the glass ceiling, which prevents women from breaking through into high positions such as board members or judges, as an example. The glass ceiling is still very real for women.

But so too is the 'sticky floor' which is the over representation of women in low paid, low status jobs: cleaning, caring, clerk work, cashiering and catering, or the '5 Cs'. The sticky floor traps women in low-status work into a cycle of poverty. When a job becomes more 'feminised' such as the once male-dominated field of HR, we see wages and status drop⁵.

The government budget cuts have disproportionately affected women, with 72%⁶ of the cuts money coming from women's purses. The government did not conduct a gender equality audit on their plans and despite a legal challenge from Fawcett, they got away with it because a white male judge decided it was 'an academic question'. For him it probably was. For the women losing their jobs and/or benefits, it certainly isn't.

Globally, it is women who bear the impact of poverty, because traditionally it is women in the caring, family role. Globally, women do two thirds of the world's work, earn 10% of the world's income and own 1% of the world's property⁷.

¹ 2007 Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, ONS 7 November 2007
<http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/index.asp?PageID=321>

² http://www.thefword.org.uk/blog/2006/01/only_200_years

³ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2010/may/10/mp-intake-private-sector>

⁴ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/decision.htm>

⁵ D Grimshaw and J Rubery, Undervaluing Women's Work, Mancs Uni Press/Equal Opportunities Commission, 2007

⁶ <http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/index.asp?PageID=1165>

⁷ http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/women_poverty_economics/facts_figures.php

At BFN, we believe in equality for men and women. We campaign for greater representation of women in parliament, we believe in smashing the glass ceiling and stepping off the sticky floor. We believe in more equal parental leave to remove the discrimination against mothers (30,000 pregnant women are made redundant every year⁸) and we believe that “women’s work” should be more valued in society. Globally, we believe in better education access for women, as this has a huge impact on equality and poverty. We support plans for gender pay audits and want to see more campaigns and initiatives to get women out of the private and into the public sphere. Because at the moment, it’s going backwards.

⁸ <http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/index.asp?PageID=644>