

Real equality for women!

WE HAVE HAD any number of commissions, reports, regulations, and even laws about equality for women. And some of the laws have been important gains. But women are still at a disadvantage.

The disadvantages will get worse with a Tory government. We campaign to remedy the disadvantages by stirring up the unions and the labour movement to force a Labour government to concede to women's demands.

This New Labour government has mostly failed to do that.

On the latest figures, women's average hourly pay is still 20.2 per cent less than men's. The pay gap is bigger in the private sector, but the New Labour government has rejected union calls to make mandatory equal-pay audits compulsory.

The Government insists (despite union demands) that money for equal pay in public-service jobs must be found from existing NHS, Local Authorities and other public sector bodies' budgets. Thus, divisive deals have been agreed in many areas, with the claims of women workers being set against male workers who then suffer pay cuts.

Women still bear most of the burden of housework and childcare. The New Labour government introduced a right to some pre-school care for all three and four year olds. But nursery provision for under-threes remains scarce and usually expensive.

And the public provision for three and four year olds is now being cut. "Thousands of children in some of the most deprived parts of the country will have their nursery provision cut by half, despite the Government's decision to delay an overhaul of early-years funding.

"Local authorities, including Birmingham and Newcastle, plan to cut free education in nursery schools to just 15 hours a week". (*Times Educational Supplement*, 12/02/10).

The average employed woman living with an employed male partner does 15 hours a week of housework. The average male in two-jobs household does only five. Some of that inequality is due to traditional prejudices that no government could fix rapidly, but those prejudices are kept in place by the economic structures which channel women into part-time and lower-paid jobs.

Women head nine out of ten one-parent families, and these women are facing new pressures under New Labour welfare "reforms". Measures introduced in November 2008 will gradually erode the length of time lone parents can claim income support. By 2011 most will only be able to claim until their youngest child's seventh birthday — nine years less than the current entitlement.

Single parents with children as young as one will be required to go on training courses and work experience. They can be pushed into a "returning to work programme" and have their benefits cut if they don't "engage with the programme".

Cuts will make all this worse. Obvious targets for the Tories are child tax credit and working families tax credit, on which many worse-off women depend.

Cuts in public services are also likely to axe more women's jobs than men's. So far the economic crisis has hit

**THE SOCIALIST CAMPAIGN TO
STOP THE TORIES AND FASCISTS**

**Keep the
Tories out but
don't trust
Brown**



**Re-elect Labour: make unions
fight to stop Labour cutting
services and jobs**

**Unite workers for socialist
policies: reject BNP racist lies**

men's jobs more than women's. We say that every one who wants a job has a right to useful, well-paid employment in decent conditions.

The New Labour government has failed to extend abortion rights to Northern Ireland, or to remove the requirement for women seeking abortions to get approval from two doctors (easy for well-off women in many areas, hard for worse-off and especially for younger women in many areas).

Conservative leader David Cameron has said he will back a cut in the legal time limit for abortion. This cut is supposed to be justified on grounds of improvement in medical science, but doctors oppose the cut. The practical result of the cut would be to deny abortion rights to some women who wouldn't get the doctors' say-so until it was impossible to be absolutely sure that they were within the time limit.

Shadow Defence Secretary Liam Fox has advocated a "huge restriction if not abolition" of abortion. Of Tory candidates in the target seats which the Tories have to win to get a majority, more than 83 per cent say they want the abortion time-limit cut.

Women need equal pay; free, state-of-the-art health care that meets women's needs; safe pregnancy, safe childbirth, safe abortion. Campaigns can win victories on all these.

Comprehensive equality for women will not be won without comprehensive equality in society, that is, socialism. Profit-hungry capital will not pay for the social provision to give all women in the world real control and real choice.

That can only be done under a democratic system that deploys resources to where they are needed rather than to where they can be hoarded.

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