WOMEN AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

FABIANA
The magazine of the Fabian Women’s Network

ISSUE 14
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Welcome to the first of our two 1918-2018 pieces to the extraordinary Hull Headscarf Heroes of 1968. Johnson and Emma Hardy introduce the editorial tribute. They speak for themselves and for each of us, jointly and individually.

We look both at home and abroad, to struggle, to progress, to successes and to ongoing challenges – and also face the painful fact that some who have more lately taken power wish to promote regressive tactics, to undo decades of equality achievements.

This edition listens to the voices of suffrage pioneers as well as including the inspiring work of innovative women like Sonja Lokar and her phenomenal work across Europe, who wisely expresses our current condition. Where would women be if we had just accepted what hegemonic patriarchy has tried to do to us? We have ever had to be our own societal change agents - and while we can also celebrate those progressive men who have supported us, ultimately we are our own collective destiny.

We know that 1918 was only the beginning - with just a privileged minority of women property owners over 30 being allowed a franchise, while of course all men with or without property were given the vote. We also know that the government is now making it more difficult to vote and that those women who live transitory lives or don’t have access to specific ID documents will be deprived of the right to vote. It is a sad fact also that this relates more profoundly, but not exclusively, to BAME women and their families.

If we had hoped that some of the more worrying aspects of May’s thoroughly nasty party approach would have been resolved by now, we have been disappointed. It is deeply regretful that we have a female prime minister who is focused not on the good of the country or the progress of women’s equality, but simply in preserving her own position. Perhaps we should refer her to a quote from Evanne Perthick-Lawrence... ‘A change of heart is the essence of all other change, and it has brought about by a re-education of the heart’. And just as Emmeline waved to the crowds following her release from Holloway Jail in 1908 following one of many shocking force fed sentences, we give each wave of feminism a salute through the decades.

On our side, we are deliberately delighted to have a tremendous keynote piece from Shadow Minister for Equalities, Dawn Butler. A rallying cry if ever there was! I’m also delighted that two fine northern women Diana Johnson and Emma Hardy introduce the editorial tribute piece to the extraordinary Hull Headscarf Heroes of 1968.

The Mayor of London is using this year to highlight the contribution women have made to the life of London – his #BehindEveryGreatCity project is exemplified by so many Fabian women, like Bell Amere, who writes here of her success in overturning 950 years of white male privilege in the City of London.

We are also inspired by the groundbreaking work of her mother’s daughter ‘never ask permission’ change-maker Kiri Gill and that of childcare pioneer Denise Burke to support the lives of girls (and boys) into realising positive futures – often in spite of significant challenges.

Women with disability are so often sidelined – and not just in selections and elections which seem to require the fitness of a marathon runner. Our Sheila Chapman interviews another innovator, Claire Hodgson, the founder of Diverse City and creator of the phenomenal Extraordinary Bodies. We hope you will love the extraordinary photo too.

Emma Burnell tackles the very contemporary but at the same time age old issue of women in the media. Johanna Baxter tells of the fight to success by Union in proving the illegality of employment tribunal fees, who along with Heather Staff’s moving piece on working with women in the Balkans, reminds us that in the midst of turmoil and destruction, perseverance really can pay off.

Our FWN events this year are also bringing the past into the present and future – including an evening on The New Suffragettes for International Women’s Day and then later this year a major event on the implications and potential of Artificial Intelligence and how women play a role in that. So one hundred years on – we do not rest, we continue to address the contemporary challenges faced by women, not just in the UK, but across the globe.

International Women’s Day is a momentous occasion to celebrate the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women around the world and encourage everyone to get involved. I will be using International Women’s Day this year to celebrate how far we have come in the fight for equality, while also recognising what more must be done to achieve it.

This is a day to think of the great women of the past who have inspired us. People like the incredible Jayaben Desai and the Grenwick women in my constituency, who inspired so many with their campaign to improve working conditions and trade union representation in factories in Brent.

They showed us the power of people and our Labour movement in fighting for the rights of women.

Progress has been made over the years which we must be proud of. Last month we marked 100 years since some women gained the right to vote. This was only achieved thanks to the hard work and sacrifice of brave women fighting for equal rights, and it showed us the power of women.

So too in Parliament, there has been great progress with more women and more women from black and minority ethnic backgrounds than ever before. The Labour Party also has a 50-50 gender balance in the shadow cabinet and we have ambitious plans in place to ensure equal gender representation.

But while progress has been made, recent events have shown us just how far we still need to go in this fight for gender equality. Recent scandals like the Toby Young appointment and the Presidents Club fiasco have demonstrated why we need to keep fighting for women’s rights.

There still remains a culture in our society which is hostile to women with too many of us suffering from bullying, abuse or harassment. We need a change of culture but the Tories are unable to deliver it. 86% of the government’s cuts have fallen on the shoulders of women meaning the Tories only add to the burden that women face in society.

Labour has always been the party of equality. We extend the right to statutory maternity leave to a full year for employed women, introduced the Equal Pay Act, Sex Discrimination Act and Equality Act and the next Labour government will deliver the progressive change that women need again.

Labour will ensure women are treated equally under the law. Following the Presidents Club we are calling on the government to reverse the decision taken by the Coalition government to remove the Section 40 employee protections against third party harassment from the Equality Act 2010.

We will ensure women are protected in society. Specialist support services are a lifeline for women and girls escaping domestic violence. But the government’s proposed reforms threaten women’s refuges’ last bit of secure funding, housing benefit. This is plunging these services into crisis.

And to ensure women are not held back, we will take action where this government has failed to do so and conduct comprehensive equality impact assessments of our policies before implementation. Women face enough barriers in society without the government adding to it.

I have begun a tour of the country with colleagues championing these great policies. We will meet phenomenal women across the UK, listening to their ideas to ensure their voices are heard.

It is also really important that in this fight for equality we are inclusive of all groups, as previously those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds – often those who are punished the most from the government’s cuts – have been excluded. It is vital that we achieve equality for all women.

My goal this year is to travel around the country delivering a masterclass to women, sharing tools to help women tap into and elevate their phenomenal selves. In my eyes every woman no matter their colour, creed or race has something phenomenal about her. In order to achieve full equality we have to see our differences as strengths in order to build a stronger and fairer society.

There are five key areas underpinning Labour’s vision for women’s equality: Access to justice, Health and wellbeing, Economic equality, Leadership and representation and Protection for women. Labour will help not hinder women.

So as we celebrate International Women’s Day and the phenomenal women around the world, I urge everyone to come together, no matter our gender, race, class or backgrounds, and ensure that we take #THENEXTSTEP.

Dawn Butler is Shadow Secretary of State for Women and Equalities & MP for Brent Central

To tackle the scourge of period poverty, where many women from low income backgrounds cannot afford basic sanitary products, Labour will provide free sanitary products in schools, homeless shelters and airports.

And to ensure women are not held back, we will take action where this government has failed to do so and conduct comprehensive equality impact assessments of our policies before implementation. Women face enough barriers in society without the government adding to it.

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**IS THE GLASS HALF FULL OR HALF EMPTY?**

Sonja Lokar

The task of transforming mainstream politics from within is the toughest task of all. Parties, parliament and governments are the last and the most difficult institutions for change.

The political power of women as agents of change is still not recognised within parties, parliament and governments. That knowledge resides within the people; women and men alike. If we feminists can organise a bottom up strategy strong enough, build a societal consensus across all mainstream political divisions, then parties will have to follow suit, and so too, parliament and the governments. Political campaigns for the legalisation of quotas or the ratification of the Istanbul Convention in South Eastern European countries are the best proof of this.

- Change of gender power balance does not depend on the most progressive part of society but on the mainstream conservative element. If we feminists do not take this into account, our victories will be short lived - they will last only to the next conservative government. Transformation has to be won in conservative mainstream society to become sustainable. The equal right to vote and political participation is now considered a marker of a developed society, yet the ideal of gender parity in political representation is still far from our reach.

- It is neither fair nor realistic to expect that the women who make it into mainstream elected politics will immediately be the ones to take over the role of the agents of change. Consider, they are still a physical minority in decision making bodies. ‘Old boys’ networks’ continue to work actively on their strategies to prevent change in gender power balance. Men may focus on recruiting women who are willing to accept the status quo: their priorities, their rules. In this endeavour they master the use of women to diminish the women with potential to be agents of change.

- Women as agents of change are therefore still the underdogs. We can succeed only when we are able tooust the mainstream in the political arena which depends on inertia - business as usual. We need a clever, focused strategy. We need a better sense of timing and we need to be able to forge a variety of international alliances. Agents of change need systematic transfer of knowledge on how to develop transformative politics – and most importantly need sophisticated training from dedicated mentors, mutual solidarity and support.

**A QUIET RIVER BREAKS THE MOUNTAIN**

Heather Staff

The women I have met have something in common, that of determination and resolve, yet also they carry love and compassion. Many have lived through brutal regimes and suffered hatred and prejudice. One such woman whom I admire greatly has a Roma background.

She lives in Romania and has worked on project after project to help Governments and communities understand the need for empathy and care. The playgrounds she has helped build for children and the clean water projects to areas are vital, but perhaps more vital has been the persistence to show communities that rebuilding of hope can happen, and that practical change often occurs when dignity is given and systems are challenged. She works with communities of men and women to understand identity, cut through pride, and in so doing has never given up teaching people to not be ashamed of who they are or where they are from. Her friends are two women from different ethnic backgrounds who equally are rebuilding the lives of those around them.

One, a Romanian woman of the year in 2015, has been less of a quiet river and more powerful torrent of gender equality, and a voice crying out against sexual abuse. The other, a powerful persistent journalist, helped start the ‘Rasit’ movement in Romania, seeking to root out corruption and in so doing rebuild communities torn apart by a loss of integrity both local and national.

The Balkans are in parts fragile and to keep lasting stability it needs women’s voices to be heard and listened to, not just used as a point scoring exercise for rights commissions and funding bodies. To break whatever mountains lie ahead, the future must keep being a place where women are playing an active part at local and national level.

If Agents are traditionally lone wolves then these women certainly are not, they know that communities only rebuild and change through collaboration. If a mountain is broken by one quiet river how much more can be done when rivers are flowing together? For we know that community needs to be healed and rebuilt by everyone involved.

Heather Staff as Policy Adviser on Resettlement, Asylum and Migration to Kate Green MP.

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UK feminists are celebrating a hundred years from the first British women gaining the right to vote. Now, crucial factors decide if a higher number of women in party leaderships, parliaments and governments makes the glass half empty or half full.

Many women in the European Union (EU) got the right to vote only after World War Two and only as recently as the early 1970s that democratic Switzerland lifted the allowed women to vote. Thankfully globally today, there are hardly any nations remaining where adult women do not have that right and also to stand for elections. It has taken us more than two hundred years to move from the first requests of equal citizenship for women in the French Revolution to near-universal global suffrage for women.

However, we still need to remember that within many countries there are still women who fall through the voting net – particularly women from migrant communities and other groups deliberately sidelined by aggressive regimes. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Global and EU indexes of gender gaps suggest one of the biggest gender inequality gaps exists in the field of power.

Take for instance the EU Gender Equality Index, which measures gender gaps between men and women in the EU in six core domains: work, money, knowledge, time, power and health. The 2015 EU Gender Equality Index scored the gender power gap at 48.5/100. The overall gender gap in power in UK is 53/100, political 53, economic 40.8 and social 68. In the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Index for 2015, on the Political empowerment sub-index, only Iceland and Finland have closed more than 60 per cent of their gender gap.

Sadly it seems women only gain the position of party leader sporadically. This is often when the party is in real trouble, as with Merkel or May, or when the woman establishes the political party herself, like Gudrun Schyman, the founding member of the Feminists Initiative in Sweden.

Within the UK feminists are celebrating a hundred years from when a loud shout, the cry of protest has created a sharp shock to Governments at local, national and international levels, but the real change - the change found in homes, schools, in the pull booth - that is the quiet river of women’s voices seeking to be heard. I have been privileged over several years to spend time travelling and working in the Balkans, where I lecture on speaking truth to power and political engagement at initiatives such as ‘Ambassadors for a Better World’. This faith-based initiative was started around 18 years ago to make sure young people from the Balkan region were taught reconciliation, and had excellent role models showing them they could be agents of positive change. Many of the people I meet are outstanding young women seeking to rebuild their communities.

You can imagine that the Balkan region is an unusual place for a working holiday, but speaking to these passionate women tells stories not just of success in business, of breakthroughs in community work, but also of trials: the lack of role models in politics, the abuse still found in homes, inequality both gendered or ethnic, missing families from the conflict, hidden or open poverty, and the quest to tackle corruption. If you could store up all the hurt many of these women have been through then it’s true the ‘world would not be enough’, yet these women have not given up. They are the deputy justice ministers in Albania changing a political party, the church youth workers in Montenegro giving hope and dignity to young women, forensic scientists in Bosnia seeking the missing family members many have given up on. They are the refugees from Iran living in Zagreb challenging the Croatian government over attitudes regarding who a refugee actually is. They are the Serbian women providing crisis counselling and starting their own NGO’s. I could go on and on, and I burst with pride as I picture all these sisters breaking whatever mountain they are faced with.
“We are delighted that Fabiana is recognising the 50th anniversary of our extraordinary women - the Hull Headscarf Heroes. If not for them, far more lives would have been needlessly lost at sea. Their collective response gave one voice to the plight of their community and the urgent need for workplace health and safety.”

Christine Jensen, Mary Denness, Yvonne Blenkinsop and all the Hessle Rd women show us all how a group of vocal and determined women can demand change and make it happen. They are incredibly proud of their legacy - and we hope you will find their story as fascinating and inspiring as we do.”

Diana Johnson MP for Kingston upon Hull North, Emma Hardy, MP for Hull West and Hessle

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“Upon Hull North, Emma Hardy, MP for Hull West and Hessle, went to see the PM Harold Wilson the following week. She prepared to go to jail if they were not listened to. She also demanded a Domesday Book of losses, with all the vessels involved and their fishing grounds, and the government was not to destroy or remove any boat or fishery of work.”

Lil Bilocca, Christine Jensen, Mary Denness, Yvonne Blenkinsop and all the Hessle Rd women show us all how a group of vocal and determined women can demand change and make it happen. She also demanded an internet to speed it up! - and just like the suffragettes, Lil was determined to go to jail if they were not listened to. She also demanded a Domesday Book of losses, with all the vessels involved and their fishing grounds, and the government was not to destroy or remove any boat or fishery of work.

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For centuries, women have been agents of change who have been striving hard to challenge the system and bring reform either socially, politically, economically and culturally to create a world which supports women and does not suppress us. We all know that unleashing the talent of women can bring powerful positive change which results in better outcomes for our society, but still, there is no equal representation in politics or in the corporate boardroom.

The 21st century woman still faces the same old challenges of maintaining balance between family and career and constantly striving to build her credibility in terms of decision making capabilities and demonstrating emotional intelligence. I underwent these challenges throughout my professional career, but with my determination and perseverance, I’ve been able to overcome these obstacles and achieve success in business.

The challenge did not stop just with that. Even though living in a multicultural city like London, as an ethnic minority migrant woman, I had a sense of being left out on matters that affect us; be it in policy making or representation in Parliament, we are just considered as a vote winning scheme. There was this constant urge to change the system, but I did not know where to start from. Then the Fabian Women’s Network Mentoring programme came to my rescue. I am so thankful that this wonderful initiative empowered me with the right knowledge, tools, skills and mechanisms to be that change in the society. Since joining the programme there has been no looking back.

There was no better place than City of London to be and bring that change. The City’s political structure is well known as a boy’s club with white elitism. My choice of contesting the Council elections and winning against the odds was not an easy one. I underwent numerous challenges but the whole experience was remarkable.

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TV reporter: ‘How do you regard yourself Mrs Bilocca – like some kind of a suffragette?’

‘Lil Bilocca in response – ‘nah, Don’t be daft’.

Over the years, thousands of Hull’s men had died at sea and the women in their lost lives could do nothing but mourn, but in February 1968 – thanks to Lillian, a formidable woman who worked in St Andrew’s Dock as a cook, all that changed. 50 years ago, under the powerful leadership of Lil, the Hessle Road wives, mothers, sisters and daughters, gathered together in the group that became known as the Hull Headscarf Heroes, to vent their anger at their terrible loss and the lack of safety on the trawlers.

In the most dangerous job on earth, the Hull fishermen brought in 25% of the total British catch. These crews sailed right up to the Northern Lights, working 24 shifts on deck, gutting fish in up to 25% of the total British catch. These crews sailed right up to the Northern Lights, working 24 shifts on deck, gutting fish in up to 25% of the total British catch. These crews sailed right up to the Northern Lights, working 24 shifts on deck, gutting fish in up to 25% of the total British catch. These crews sailed right up to the Northern Lights, working 24 shifts on deck, gutting fish in up to 25% of the total British catch. These crews sailed right up to the Northern Lights, working 24 shifts on deck, gutting fish in up to 25% of the total British catch. These crews sailed right up to the Northern Lights, working 24 shifts on deck, gutting fish in up to 25% of the total British catch.

The ship owners had waited a full fortnight to alert the authorities for – me, their mam or their bairns? Were they fighting to get out of paying compensation?  ‘The ship owners attempted to write off the women as ‘hysterical’, saying only the men ‘counted’. In response, Lil, Mary, Yvonne and Chris led a march of over 200 down Hessle Rd. The press came too.

The four women were sent death threats and Yvonne Blenkinsop was attacked. Nevertheless – they persevered – a strong woman, Lil broke the taboo of women on the deckside and physically grappled with groups of police and successfully stopped ships without a radio operator from sailing by attempting to jump aboard. The action could have killed her and the courage involved in putting herself at risk was considerable.

‘Lor can be done petal – and will be done!’ said Yvonne to yet another reporter. ‘People should never put money above other people’s lives.’ She had lost her father at sea from a heart attack where no medical help was available; would in what would otherwise have been a preventable death.

She is now the only surviving member of the group of 4 who met and persuaded the government to change dangerous working practices on the trawlers forever. Three of the committee went to London – ‘I wanted something put right... I sat in the middle next to the head Minister. I had a long list and I said – I’m not going out of here until I’ve got them.’ And get them they did. Yes... He agreed with all of them – every one.

88 safety measures were enacted immediately. ‘Now that was good.’

The BBC documentary Hull’s Headscarf Heroes by Testimony Films was first broadcast on February 5th 2018 - from which this feature has been written by your Editor.
WOMEN GOING SKY HIGH WITH EXTRAORDINARY BODIES

Sheila Chapman interviews Claire Hodgson

When she was 18, Claire Hodgson took part in a project called ‘Sky High’ by Major Road Theatre Company in which disabled and non-disabled people collaborated to create a large outdoor show. It was a transformative experience for Claire who realised that although disabled people make up 20% of the population, they all too often lead needlessly segregated lives within a society structured to exclude their voices and talents.

Nearly three decades later Claire is the co-artistic director of the UK’s leading professional integrated circus company, Extraordinary Bodies: a company she co-founded to create political circus that puts disabled people - whether as performers, writers, sound technicians or audience members - firmly at the centre of things. She is also founder of Diverse City an award winning company that creates equality in the performing arts through performance and training.

Claire’s mission is to make extraordinary shows that represent the world as it actually is, to break barriers and transform performance to change the lives of performers, audiences and communities. She wants to challenge prejudice by showing disabled bodies that are strong and beautiful. She wants the disabled girl in the audience to feel inspired to take physical risks, to take up her rightful space and to think I can do that too.

Extraordinary Bodies’ performances are often outside. Along with the challenges inherent in circus and aerial performance, her team must ensure that the set will hold up against wind and rain, that the audience will be able to hear and that performers with a range of disabilities will be safe. This creative choice is also a political one. By putting on shows for free in city centre parks that are audio described and wheelchair accessible, Claire is democratising theatre.

Claire’s commitment to equality and diversity goes beyond disability. As a feminist and a socialist she is committed to opening up access to the Arts to those who, for reasons such as economic disadvantage, ethnicity, gender or past offending behaviour, are shut out. In this vein Claire has spent the last year travelling around the UK and inviting excluded communities to consider the question What Am I Worth?

This project has brought about artistic collaboration between groups with very different identities: adults with learning disabilities, people recovering from addiction, the elderly, refugees. By turning the typical outreach model on its head Claire hopes to foster empathy which she sees as the basis for real social change. She gives me an example of how this works. In performance that involves physical risk taking, participants must rely on one another. Those recovering from addictions - so often lead needlessly segregated lives within a society structured to exclude their voices and talents.

During our interview I ask Claire how the landscape for those with disabilities in the Arts has changed over the last three decades. She immediately mentions the Disability Discrimination Act brought in by the last Labour Government in 2005. She explains that requiring public authorities to actively promote the participation of disabled people in public life, requiring rail networks to make transport accessible and outlawing disability discrimination by clubs and landlords has increased the visibility of the disabled in the public realm.

This is important because visibility is the first step to empowerment and inclusion. Horribly, the current government has unleashed a suite of regressive policies such as shutting down the Independent Living Fund and making the Access to Work scheme so bureaucratic, it has effectively ceased to function. Claire labels this an abuse of human rights and highlights the plight of her colleagues - internationally acclaimed musicians and actors who happen to be disabled - who previously were supported to live independent and productive lives and now find themselves fighting to hang on to successful careers and to stay out of residential care homes.

But Claire is an optimist who believes that we will see a profound positive change in the Arts over the next decade. She cites the fact that the number of talented disabled artists, writers and performers out there putting on shows has reached critical mass. All the big names – the National Theatre, the Bristol Old Vic and the South Bank Centre are putting diversity at the top of their agenda and these institutions are now being led by a cohort who came of age in the 1980s and for whom identity politics is imperative. In an increasingly competitive space, theatre makers understand the artistic and creative reality that without diverse voices the work they produce will be stagnant and meaningless.

I finish our conversation by asking Claire what next? She tells me that 2018 is “the year of 51%”. She will be making sure that all her projects are worked on by teams that are 51% female and will challenge organisations partners with to do the same. This initiative is a way of recognising the suffrage anniversary and making room for women in technical, artistic and decision-making roles in the Arts where, as in so many spaces, they are underrepresented. Brava, Claire!

Sheila Chapman is a finance lawyer, a Labour council candidate in Islington and an independent monitor at a London prison and a school governor. She is also an alumni of both the FWN mentoring scheme and the Jo Cox Women in Leadership Programme.

Top left to right: Kiran and sisters, Scottish suffragette Anna Munro, Denise and family, Fabian women celebrate the vote
A Woman’s Place is in the Wrong

Emma Burnell

In 1918 the influential Swedish journalist and women’s rights activist Maria Cederschiöld commented that women journalists were more controversial in men’s rights activist Maria Cederschiöld commented. ‘Taking the culture of journalism to task. The industry has become precarious for everyone. But this was not last – and a century on, women are still not regarded as workplace equals. After decades of hard graft to earn both money and respect, through world changes and war zones, female journalists face a torrid time. Following a shocking series of revelations, a variety of industries have only just started to seriously address industry-wide abuses of women – but they have to.

In many ways, women journalists are lucky. We have the tools at our disposal that help us to speak out. Journalists are trained to tell a compelling story. We can use the training, voices and platforms at our disposal to speak out and our opinions can be heard and read, loud and clear.

Yet speaking out can be hard. While researching this article, one journalist I spoke to introduced me to the phrase ‘a woman’s place is in the wrong’. That is certainly how it can feel when you are often forced to do something that will cause not just disagreement and debate (which as journalists we can and should welcome) but countless, relentless hours of abuse. The very nature of our work means that we are in the public eye – this means that we have no respite from the constant criticism that comes with being women who have our opinions published.

Speaking up has only really been possible because the moment made it so. Brave women like Jane Merrick and Kate Malby have put their careers on the line, creating the space for other women to disclose. While hysterical Daily Mail commentators belittled their stories and accused them of being careerists for speaking out, it was deafening that their public revelations would benefit them professionally. Political journalism works on sources and tips – which is one reason women are often forced into uncomfortable relationships.

Men who know they got away with harassment but the whole culture of journalism. We can try to develop and grow as a writer. I have written on a number of personal subjects, but I know that doing so comes at a cost. Will I still be taken seriously when I write about politics? When we women wear our human faces, we are disregarded as trivial, but when political men do the same they are praised for having the ‘common touch’.

This pressure has led to women censoring what we speak, think and write about, stopping us from discussing certain subjects through fear of the abuse that may follow. ‘There are numerous topics that women may want to write about, from parenting to body image, from gender wars to politics and from a broad spectrum of perspectives, with views as diverse as our diverging experiences. But to access journalists dive into these topics and a myriad of others, we no longer ask ourselves simply ‘do I have something to contribute to the debate?’ Now we ask, ‘do I think that saying something is worth the damage that will come to my mental health, knowing I am subjecting myself to likely abuse?’

Women are self-censoring and being silenced. Women are opting out of poorly managed workplaces and being passed over for promotions. Women are being abused verbally and sexually. None of this is unique to journalism.

It will take massive change at every level to make journalism a profession where women can have the same successes as men do, and on equal terms. This is not just about sexual harassment but the whole culture of journalism. We can help ourselves to a degree through projects such as ‘The Second Source’. It is through the media’s lens that we see our national issues, and through journalists’ pens that we interpret events. If we are to adapt to the wider culture of journalism, we will need to continue telling the stories that change the world. To do so, we need first to adapt the storytelling space to make it one that is more welcoming to all storytellers.

The industry has become precarious for everyone. But this is felt particularly by women. As staff jobs become rarer, more work is being done freelance.

Time pressures on staff jobs are also increasing, so it is harder to make these flexible around caring responsibilities (still mainly taken by women).

Women’s fear of new stories who to work more flexibly, and many make a success of it, but they are less likely to advance to more senior roles such as section editors. Even those women who work as in-house staff in the industry report a tendency to be working in production roles. One journalist described her in a male dominated workplace as ‘the off mum’, cleaning up other journalists’ copy as a sub-editor.

Another key area where women in journalism suffer is that of reporting topic. Copy on ‘non-hard news’, subjects can be written off as ‘fluffy’, no matter how good the content is. This is a huge consideration. As I have tried to develop and grow as a writer, I have written on a number of personal subjects, but I know that doing so comes at a cost. Will I still be taken seriously when I write about politics? When we women wear our human faces, we are disregarded as trivial, but when political men do the same they are praised for having the ‘common touch’.

What this actually did was deter claimants with legitimate cause for complaint, but without the funds to pay a fee up front, from getting the justice they deserved. For many of us in the trade union movement, fees were simply a tax on justice which we knew would hit the most vulnerable hardest.

Whilst many trade unions debated the impact this would have on the service they provided and whether or not they could cover the fees in taking claims for their members one union stood firm against fees from day one. That union was UNISON, who on the very day the fees were introduced, went to the High Court to seek permission to bring judicial review proceedings.

UNISON’s argument in court was that the introduction of employment tribunal fees was unlawful because the fees interfere unjustifiably with the right of access to justice under both the common law and EU law, that they would frustrate the operation of Parliamentary legislation granting employment rights, and would discriminate unlawfully against women and other protected groups. They lost. The judge said that the claim brought was premature and new proceedings should be lodged if and when further evidence was available.

Undeterred, UNISON set about gathering data on how many people were accessing employment tribunals, to see if the numbers were going down.

In May 2014, our union tried again and was this time granted permission to appeal to the Court of Appeal. Meanwhile, the government had decided to publish the stats on employment tribunals on the Ministry of Justice website, and they revealed that the number of claims was dropping rapidly. Official figures for October 2013 to December 2013 showed there had been a 79% drop in claims, compared to the same months in 2012. And April to June 2014 saw an 81% drop from the same period the year before. At the same time there was an even bigger drop in discrimination claims, disproportionately impacting women and other marginalised groups.

In July 2014, as a member of the Labour NEC I submitted an amendment to Labour’s Work & Business Policy Document which was put before the National Policy Forum, calling on the NPF to commit a new Labour government to abolishing employment tribunal fees.

Many in the shadow cabinet were sceptical, stating that this would be a spending commitment too far. One shadow minister went as far as telling me it was irresponsible to call for a £1bn spending commitment that would cost the Party it’s commitment to scrapping the bedroom tax’ (despite the fact that the total cost of the tribunal system at that time only came to £4bn...).

I refused to sign up to ‘compromise wording’ which would have committed the Party to a ‘review of employment tribunal fees’. In the end we secured a commitment from Ed Miliband that cost would not be a barrier to justice, and the Party came out on the right side of history.

Which is just as well, because UNISON’s persistence in the courts led to their appeal being heard in front of the UK Supreme Court in March 2017 and in late July 2017 the Supreme Court ruled that the government had acted unlawfully and unconstitutionally when it introduced the fees. The Supreme Court decided that employment tribunal fees conflicted with the right of access to justice, and therefore undermined the rule of law.

The judgement, which quoted the Magna Carta, determined that the rule of law was undermined because, if people couldn’t reasonably afford to bring employment tribunal claims, this damaged the ability of the courts to enforce the law, and if the laws Parliament makes cannot be enforced, then the electoral process could become “a meaningless charade”.

Not only does the result mean that anyone who needs to take their employer to court can once again do so for free, it also means that people had to pay for access to justice over the last four years will be reimbursed.

The next time anyone asks about why they should join a trade union tell them about this. The leadership demonstrated by UNISON on this issue protected the rights of workers across the land. Standing up for the rights of their members. Standing firm in the face of adversity. That is the power of a union.

Johanna Baxter is a member of the FWN Executive Committee and a UNISON Official. She writes here in a personal capacity.

There’s Power in a Union

Johanna Baxter

In 2014, as a member of the Labour NEC I submitted an amendment to Labour’s Work & Business Policy Document which was put before the National Policy Forum, calling on the NPF to commit a new Labour government to abolishing employment tribunal fees.
When I was a child back in the 1950s and 1960s, my grandparents lived across the road and my mum happily looked after me whilst my mum worked part-time. I loved those days, making dens with the dining room chairs and old curtains, learning how to make steamed pudding that boiled on the stove for hours. Happy memories.

As the years passed by, my mum was then around to care for my nan and grandad in their old age. We were typical of many families who had their extended family around them but today things are different for me. I live miles from my elderly mum and even further from my daughter and grandchild, yet I juggle the same caring responsibilities as my mum and nan did all those years ago but with added logistical issues. We all want to do the best for our families but modern pressures of juggling work and other priorities sometimes get in the way.

Over the years these pressures have divided communities as well as families. Brexit Britain is dogged by divisions - we are divided by class, income, race, geography and age. Older people have been pitted against younger people over issues like housing, wealth, debt and pensions. This was seemingly reflected in voting patterns in the 2017 general election as well as the EU referendum in 2016.

The mistrust that arises from such divisions is fuelled by the lack of connection between different generations. Britain is one of the most age segregated societies in the world, particularly for the youngest and oldest generations. This can breed myths and stereotypes, misunderstanding, ageism and exclusion. That’s why we believe mixing matters.

In its work since 2010, United for All Ages which I co-founded with my husband Stephen, who had previously been CEO of the Daycare Trust and then Counsel and Care, has been highlighting issues arising from age segregation or ‘age apartheid’ and how it can be tackled.

United for All Ages sees mixing between generations as key to tackling age apartheid. The benefits are many – not just for those directly involved but for their families and wider community. We also believe shared sites will improve not just the experiences of those using care services, for example, but ultimately it will improve the quality of care and other services used by different generations.

While the government is absorbed with delivering Brexit, Britain is crying out for positive change. Economically, more needs to be done to address intergenerational fairness through affordable housing, wealth and taxation. Socially, mixing through shared sites could provide thousands of opportunities across the country to bring people together for the benefit of all generations. Local people and their communities are taking the lead. By 2022 United for All Ages expects to see at least 500 shared sites across the UK.

Along with others of the sandwich generation I will continue to wrestle with how to cope with competing family responsibilities, yet it is a training programme to offer teachers the opportunity to learn how to help their children from the older generation when their child is in crisis.

Kiran says that her late beloved mother Dawn, who as a single mum had adopted her two sisters, inspired her to know that no child should be made to feel they were unaccepted – because that will only make them more likely to exhibit even more alienated and challenging behaviour.

‘Children and young people today have to face daily mental health stress. They have poor schools and in families under stress, and also with so much risk of exploitation online. We now need the education sector to evolve to catch children unawares. Instead of years of improving outcomes, Kiran says, “we find the latest ‘No Excuses’ culture can result in rapid exclusion when a child is in crisis, which makes it even more difficult for some children to succeed.”

She has the evidence. Child psychologists know that disruptive or antisocial relationships can affect children’s ability to interpret and control emotions, which impacts on effective learning. Children who are permanently excluded are 4 x more likely to be from a low-income family and 9 x more likely to have a special educational need or disability. Just 1% of this group achieve 5 GCSEs with English and maths. They are twice more likely to be in care or have been in care and find themselves under threat of dismissal for anything from ‘loitering in an ice cream queue’ to travelling beyond the ‘city limits’ without prior written permission ( from a man), or for climbing into a car with an unrelated male person ( LGBT women were obviously not even considered). Marrying was forbidden, let alone a civil partnership – all helped along by a dress code demanding a minimum of 2 petticoats to ensure added layers to their navy flannel ankle skimming skirts , with an added bar on hair colouring for good measure.

And as for the daily work out – no need for the gym with the rigours of compulsory blackboard cleaning, classroom floor sweeping and weekly floor scrubbing. These women had a career path – but at a heavy price.

I don’t know about you, but I just envisage these put upon teachers trying to devise every possible way to bend and break these corset-tight constraints to their best advantage, for let’s face it – in order to change any kind of male hegemonic status quo, women have had to be the rule breakers, change makers and innovators, because the rules have been made by men for men.

Just like the 1915 petticoat rebels, Kiran Gills from ‘The Difference team’ is leading women who have always had very, very determined and self possessed and very, very bad at waiting for permission – and definitely without permission, she decided to set up a new innovative programme to offer teachers of at least three years experience a leadership position in the alternative and challenging provision of a Pupil Referral Unit.

Kiran says that her late beloved mother Dawn, who as a single mum had adopted her two sisters, inspired her to know that no child should be made to feel they were unaccepted – because that will only make them more likely to exhibit even more alienated and challenging behaviour.

After a long week of marking tests and report writing, teachers of today can perhaps make themselves feel better via a quick time travel into the archaic employment terms of 1915, where female teachers had to obey a daily 10 hour curfew and found themselves under threat of dismissal for anything from ‘loitering in an ice cream queue’ to travelling beyond the ‘city limits’ without prior written permission ( from a man), or for climbing into a car with an unrelated male person ( LGBT women were obviously not even considered). Marrying was forbidden, let alone a civil partnership – all helped along by a dress code demanding a minimum of 2 petticoats to ensure added layers to their navy flannel ankle skimming skirts , with an added bar on hair colouring for good measure.

The Difference is a new programme specifically designed by to raise the status of teaching these vulnerable children and young people.

Founder Kiran says “ it is everyone’s job to help them, but we need trained staff to reduce the risk and help them to achieve their potential. The government outlines in the Green Paper on Mental Health that each school is to have a mental health lead, however this must not be a short term shallow unskilled fix. She continues “The Difference will train teachers on the programme a two year placement in a pupil referral unit (PRU). After that time they will be skilled to cascade their knowledge in schools and hopefully prevent many children in future from being suspended or excluded. Kiran believes this will leave a legacy.”

‘I’ve been to pupil referral units where kids are getting GCSEs and A-levels and they go on to university. I’ve seen kids who might have had a string of foster carers and then have a really stable relationship with the PRU staff - a relationship that is about forgiveness and being honest about what is OK and what isn’t.”

Participants will gain a Masters, with modules in mental health and child development, focused on understanding the multi-disciplinary nature of children’s services.

We need more people to help keep both girls and boys in the classroom before they get to the point of being excluded and more teachers who can catch them if they become PRU pupils.

Innovator Kiran launches the first teachers into ‘The Difference programme in Autumn 2019 – so teachers out there, if you want to help leave a lasting legacy of success for your most challenging but worthwhile pupils, please contact Kiran and The Difference team www.the-difference.com/contact-us/.

In 1914, most children left school at 14, now we want to make sure that the focus stays in education for as long as their potential can keep them there - and no permission needed.