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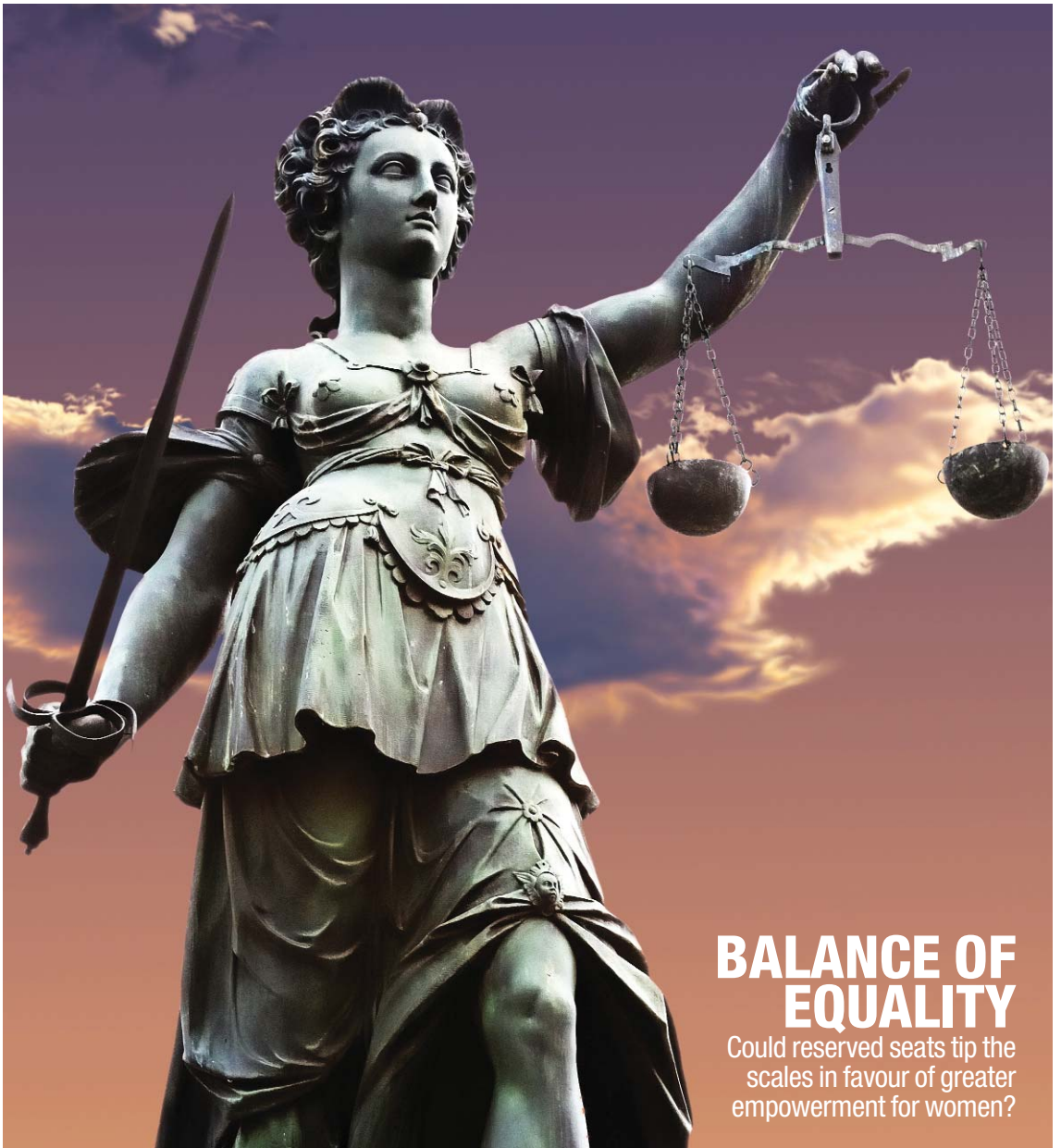
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WOMEN'S TALK

The communications union

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BALANCE OF EQUALITY

Could reserved seats tip the scales in favour of greater empowerment for women?

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WOMEN OF HISTORY

BILLY HAYES
GENERAL SECRETARY



The first man in space was Yuri Gagarin. Almost everybody knows that from quiz nights. Ask who the first woman in space was and the reaction will be puzzlement. I tried that question at the Women Chainmakers Festival and I was surprised how few people – including the speakers – recalled her name.

Or, that a woman was the instigator of the Solidarnosc revolution in Poland, her sacking in

1980 sparked the Gdansk Shipyard strike. Yet, to all the world, the central character was Lech Walesa. He took the lead because it was felt a woman lacked credibility.

These women have been hidden through time. We must continue to do our part so that Valentina Tereshkova is remembered as well as that bloke from Russia and Anna Walentynowicz equals that guy with the big moustache.

On the frontline

KEVIN SLOCOMBE
HEAD OF COMMS

For those who haven't seen it, I recommend watching the film *Made in Dagenham* to see how women organised and fought for equality at the Ford plant.

Women are often the most vulnerable in times of cuts so it's vital that you stand up and be counted in the workplace and through union activism. This edition of *Women's Talk* reviews the film and discusses the pros and cons of reserved seats that ensure women have a

presence at senior levels. Tell us what you think: info@cwu.org



New Year cheer

ANNMARIE MCCALL
EDITOR

Welcome to the winter edition of *Women's Talk*, with some good articles and follow-up news from the summer edition.

It has been a hard year with all the cuts the government have made, and I think it will have affected many people. I hope that you all had a good Christmas and New Year and that we all have a brighter 2011.

Should you want an article printed in the magazine, or perhaps a letter, simply email it in word format to: annmarie.mccall@hotmail.co.uk or you can contact me on 07925 507365.

You don't have to have your name in the article or letter.



IS THERE A SOLUTION TO THE PAY GAP?

November's Equal Pay Day coincided with unemployment figures that suggested women are still bearing the brunt of job cuts. **Sian Jones** reports...

Women still have a raw deal when it comes to jobs and pay.

Influential women's organisation the Fawcett Society, in partnership with the TUC, Unison and the Equality and Human Rights Commission, chose Equal Pay Day to launch its report – *Equal Pay: Where Next?* Equal Pay Day, on November 2 last year, marked the day when women in effect stopped getting paid because of the 16.4 per cent pay gap between women and men.

The Equal Pay report showcases the latest thinking by business, unions, employers, policy makers and campaigners on how to close the pay gap between women and men. It includes key recommendations for government and others on tackling one of the largest inequalities still remaining between men and women in the UK.

The report advocates action is needed in four key areas in order to have an impact on the pay gap:

1) Debunking the myth that equal pay is bad for business, and showing that, in fact, equal pay 'pays'.
2) Making equal pay law fit for purpose – starting by implementing, in full, the 2010 Equality Act with its

measures to improve employer transparency on pay rates.

3) Changing working practices to reflect the modern workforce and support families, for example by increasing flexible working and job shares.

4) Tackling outdated and stereotyped ideas about men and women's roles – in particular through education.

Grim milestone

Welcoming the report, Ceri Goddard, chief executive of the Fawcett Society, said: "With job losses in the public sector and spending cuts already threatening women's overall economic independence, robust action on equal pay is more not less important."

The report was also timely because, later in the month, official unemployment figures marked a grim milestone with unemployment among women passing the one million mark for the first time since 1988. This is part of a disturbing trend which has seen female unemployment climb over the last two years by 35 per cent, while, in contrast, joblessness among men has been falling,

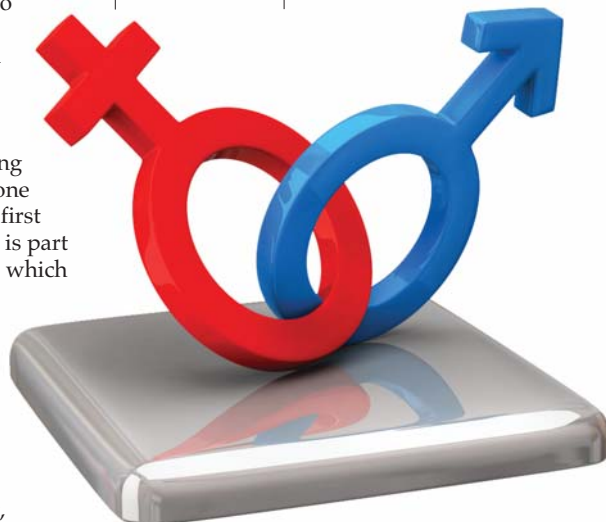
60

... days women in effect work for free because of the pay gap with men

highlighting a worrying gender divide.

CWU general secretary Billy Hayes said: "The trade union movement faces many challenges as government cuts and the removal of key social benefits begin to hit. Equality cannot be thrown by the wayside in the scramble for jobs. It's disgraceful women are still paid less than men and we must remain united in our fight for equality and job protection for all."

Women are heavily represented in public-sector jobs, including health and education, which are suffering from government cuts. Given further projected cuts, women could face mass removal from an already unequal labour market.



The UNI delegation included assistant secretary Grace Mitchell and NEC member Katrina Quirke



Women's health day is a success

EVENTS

Expert advice was offered at a women's health day at Santander's head office in September.

The Bootle event, organised by local CWU health and safety officer Beverley Kenyon, saw advisers from the NHS, including nurses specialising in cancer, weight and sexual health – as well as smoking and alcohol related issues – providing advice and leaflets.

NHS staff handed out booklets on health and safety at home and in the workplace and how best to look after your back, as well as freephone numbers for a free fire service alarm check.

The event proved to be very popular with Santander staff, and, because it was held as taster, Beverley now knows what subjects staff are particularly interested in and can arrange for a nurse to come in to provide follow-up advice.

As a result of the event the branch is looking at holding similar events in the future.

Women show unity across the globe

EVENTS

CWU reps joined 500 women representing 182 unions from 66 nations for the UNI women's conference in Nagasaki.

The November conference united around demands that governments across the globe focus on creating jobs and protecting the rights of women workers.

Assistant secretary Grace Mitchell led the delegation, which included NEC member Katrina Quirke, Scotland No. 2 branch women's officer Helen Ogilvie, North East branch women's officer Jean Sharrocks and Coventry branch vice-chairwoman Melanie Patterson.

Key economic indicators show that women are being hit

particularly hard by the effects of the global recession.

UNI women president Denise McGuire said: "It seems the only time women are given priority is when companies are cutting back."

Along with discussing and

500 women from 66 nations attended

developing strategies to combat lower pay, lack of paid maternity leave and mistreatment of women workers, delegates talked of the successes women trade unionists had achieved.

Inspiring examples of women fighting, and winning, included shop workers employed

by IKEA in Australia, who won 26 paid weeks of parental leave through their union the SDA; cleaners in the Netherlands – many of whom are Muslim migrant women – who, after a nine-week strike, won a living wage; and cleaners in Houston, Texas – almost all of them Mexican – who had no health insurance until they successfully won their right to a union with UNI help.

Katrina Quirke said: "This shows all of us that when women workers stand together in unity, they can fight and win against even the most unscrupulous bosses."

Summing up the conference, Grace

Mitchell said: "The speech made by the speaker from Sierra Leone about women as weapons of war was incredibly moving, as was the debate on the issue of trafficked labour and both forced and non-forced migration of workers.

"The optimism of the women in attendance was demonstrated by the joyous and spontaneous singing during the event, mainly by the women from Africa, and the theme of 'Breaking Through' was an important one as it reinforced the need for women to be better represented in work, in their unions and in UNI."



CWU spotlights cervical cancer in young women

CAMPAIGN

CWU is joining with other organisations in calling upon the government to restore cervical screening for women under 25 in England.

The campaign follows a motion to conference in 2009 mandating the union to raise awareness of the issue.

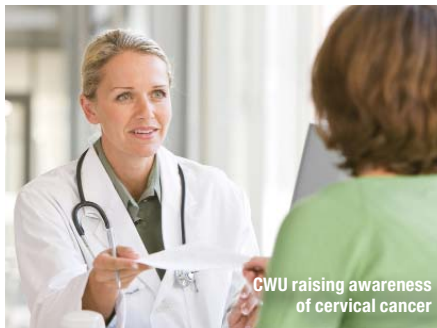
Cervical cancer is the most common cancer in women aged 20-29 and the second most common cancer in women under 35. Action is important because every day in the UK eight women are diagnosed and up to three women die of cervical cancer.

The decision to

raise the age of the first cervical screen to 25 in England was taken in 2004. An expert panel – the Advisory Committee on Cervical Screening – reviewed this decision in 2009 and concluded that screening is of little or no benefit to women under 25. The rest of the UK may follow and raise the screening age to 25.

The NHS view is that cervical cancer is extremely rare in younger women and since raising the age of the first screen there has been no visible change in the number of women aged under 25 developing or dying from cervical cancer.

However, trends are being closely monitored and if



changes are seen then the age will be reconsidered.

CWU has held meetings with two major cancer charity organisations – Cancer Research and Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust, the UK's only charity dedicated to women and their families and friends affected by cervical abnormalities and cervical cancer.

This contact has helped inform the

CWU's work on the issue and the union is collectively supporting the programme of cervical cancer HPV vaccinations for 12 to 18 year olds and improving awareness among young women.

● For more information on CWU work on cervical cancer, contact Dave Joyce, national health, safety and environment officer on djoyce@cwu.org quoting reference number P5/10.

InBrief

CWU Women's Conference 2011

CWU Women's Conference will be held in Edinburgh at the Edinburgh Training Centre, 16 St Mary's Street, EH1 1SU. This city centre venue is just a short walk from Waverly train station, the airport bus terminal and local buses. Lunch and unlimited tea, coffee, biscuits and fruit will be provided throughout the day, plus a complimentary breakfast on arrival.

> Should you wish to attend please contact your branch secretary or visit the CWU website www.cwu.org.

Inequality coalition

CWU has condemned the government's announcement that the socio-economic duty, created as part of the 2010 Equality Act, will be scrapped. Home Secretary and Minister for Women and Equality, Theresa May, outlined a new approach to equalities in November, breaking with what she described "pointless political correctness and social engineering". CWU's Linda Roy condemned the move, saying: "With this announcement 13 years of progress have been eradicated. This measure demonstrates what the coalition government is about – inequality."

Inglis appeal sees sentence reduced by five years

COURT CASE

In the last edition of *Women's Talk*, Pauline Granstan looked at the controversial issue of euthanasia and highlighted the case of Frances Inglis, who was convicted of killing her brain-damaged son in 2008.

After being found guilty of murder at the Old Bailey last January, Ms Inglis

was originally sentenced to a nine-year minimum tariff by Judge Brian Barker.

Making her appeal to the high court in November, Ms Inglis's legal team put the argument that her trial should have been allowed to hear the defence of provocation, given that she believed that she had been acting to end his suffering.

But the presiding judge, Igor Judge, the Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales ruled: "The law of murder does not distinguish between murder committed for malevolent reasons and murder motivated by familial love. Mercy killing is murder."

Lord Judge also ruled that "the appellant's actions were deliberate and

premeditated, and her compulsive objective was indeed to kill her son."

However, recognising that Mrs Inglis had been psychologically traumatised by her son's condition and his suffering, Lord Judge – sitting with Mr Justice Irwin and Mr Justice Holroyde – reduced her minimum sentence to five years.



TACKLING PROSTITUTION

Some people argue that prostitutes are “sex workers” who should be encouraged to join unions and fight for collective rights as other workers do. But here, **Anna Bowden** of leading feminist charity Eaves, insists that prostitution is always abuse, should never be seen as a “job” and that our efforts should be geared towards helping women out of this lifestyle...

Eaves has been working for more than 30 years to tackle all forms of violence against women and sexual exploitation.

To date, via its nationwide Poppy Project, Eaves has supported up to 600 women who have been trafficked into prostitution, helped many women exploited in prostitution in London to leave the sex industry safely, and, via its LEA Project, has provided high-quality housing and support to vulnerable women.

Based on many years of

experience working with these women, Eaves defines prostitution as a serious form of exploitation rather than a legitimate form of work.

Abuse on the “job”

There is no other “job” in the world where you are trained or groomed for it by being abused as a child.

Up to 85 per cent of women in prostitution in the UK have experienced physical abuse, and 45 per cent were sexually abused during childhood. Many were recruited as children from care homes, often by an older pimp masquerading as a

600

...the number of trafficked prostitutes Eaves has supported via its Poppy Project

“No other job exists where violence is an integral part of everyday experience. Half of women in prostitution have been raped or seriously assaulted”

“boyfriend”, and 70 per cent of women in prostitution in the UK have a background in the care system and three-quarters were drawn into prostitution as children.

No other job exists where violence and abuse are such an integral part of the everyday experience. Half of all women in prostitution have been raped or seriously sexually assaulted, and at least 75 per cent of them are physically assaulted at the hands of pimps and “punters”.

It’s hardly surprising then that so many women turn to drink and drugs to try to cope

with the reality of selling sex, and why so many are literally dying to escape. In a global survey of women in prostitution across the world, nine out of 10 said they would leave prostitution if they could.

Decriminalisation

What women in prostitution really need is care and support to exit the sex industry safely and pursue more positive life alternatives.

And they also need to be decriminalised – too often, vulnerable women in the UK are arrested, fined and given ASBOs for being a

“nuisance,” rather than being given the help they really need.

That said, decriminalising women and girls in prostitution should *not* be confused with *decriminalising the whole of the sex industry*. If we do this, we open the doors to the pimps, traffickers and organised criminals who make billions of pounds from sexual exploitation.

Last year, Eaves and its partner organisation OBJECT

(www.object.org.uk)

launched the *Demand Change!* campaign to place a new focus on the men who buy women and girls in prostitution.

Different model

One of the key aims of the campaign is to call for the introduction of the “Nordic model” for addressing prostitution in the UK.

This model, which works effectively in Iceland, Norway and Sweden – three of the world’s most sexually equal societies – fully decriminalises everyone in prostitution and helps them to exit the sex industry, while placing a blanket ban on the purchase of sexual services.

The *Demand Change!* campaign is calling on the CWU, as a union which cares about women’s rights and is against all forms of exploitation, to support the introduction of the “Nordic model” into the UK.

● To find out more about how to support Eaves please visit www.eaves4women.co.uk

● To learn more about the Demand Change! campaign go to www.demandchange.org.uk

Could reserved seats
tip the balance of male
and female power?





EQUALITY AND INCLUSION

CAN RESERVED SEATS HELP?

Are reserved seats a key way to empower women in the labour movement or mere tokenism that guarantees mediocrity? Regular WT columnist **Pauline Granstan** takes a look at another controversial issue affecting CWU women...

The question of whether reserved seats – the practice of reserving a number of positions on elected bodies for under represented groups – will advance sex equality is a complex one, which requires robust debate between the differing viewpoints.

The notion of women and men playing completely different roles in society, distinct from one another, has its roots in customs and practices spanning thousands of years. The position of women in relation to men often depended on whether society was patriarchal – male dominated – or matriarchal – female dominated.

Female or male society?

Under patriarchal systems, the roles women played had strong elements of what would now be considered to be discrimination. Their lack of visibility on decision-

making bodies was pronounced and women often could not own property and were, in many respects, considered the “property” of either their father or husband.

In contrast, in matriarchal societies women were far more central to decision-making within communities, often playing leading roles in their societal group.

And, just as the power relations between the sexes have been an issue through history, so have other aspects of equality, such as the fight against discrimination on grounds of ethnicity, disability, age, sexuality, sexual identity and religious belief.

Reserved seats – the pros and cons

Advocates of the policy of reserved seats say that it is a positive means by which disadvantaged groups can gain access to forums that they may otherwise feel excluded ►



◀ from and that it is vitally important that all citizens are enabled to participate in a meaningful way in civil society.

Conversely, when specific groups within society lack access and interaction, negative consequences result, such as widening disparities between the different groups of individuals.

Opponents of reserved seats argue that there should be a meritocracy and that this is a more democratic manner of ensuring that we get the best person for the job. For them, anything else smacks of special treatment and tokenism.

Other points made against this policy claim that “special groups” set up for the primary purpose of achieving inclusion are frequently ineffective, attract under performers and are too costly to maintain.

Sex inequality

Across the country as a whole, sex inequality still exists despite equality

legislation spanning more than 40 years. Full-time women workers, on average, are paid 17 per cent less than their full-time male counterparts.

Other aspects of inequality are also highly prominent. Disabled people are more likely than any other group to be unemployed, while black and other minority ethnic groups are twice as likely to be unemployed as their white counterparts, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans-sexual people are targeted for their lifestyle.

It is clear that legislation, in itself, is not enough to provide equal access for all communities, groups and cultures.

The question of how to effectively increase the representation of disadvantaged groups within the CWU in a positive way can be a vexatious one, especially as CWU members appear to be unconvinced on the question of reserved seats.

However, unions such as the GMB and PCS have shown that, when properly implemented, reserved seats can and do work.

Above: it is crucial that all citizens can participate in a meaningful way in society

Tackling under-representation

The pros and cons of reserved seats are numerous and this article touches on a very narrow aspect of the subject. Nevertheless, CWU needs to be honest when addressing the question of under representation of particular groups.

We need to ask: what do our policies, rules, practices and customs tell us? Are we unwittingly contributing to the exclusion of minority groups through our structures? Can changes to our structures help us to improve?

The trade union movement has always been a catalyst for change and empowerment, so let us continue to move forward in reflecting CWU members’ needs and aspirations at every level within the union.

As we grow and improve in our communication with people of all ages, sexuality, sexual identity, ethnicity and religion, the images we project in time will show we are committed to equality of opportunity for all. Then, perhaps, the conversation on reserved seats may no longer be necessary.

17%

... full-time women workers paid less than male counterparts

THE CWU WEBSITE IS
WWW.CWU.ORG

KEEPING INFORMED AND INVOLVED?

Linda Roy explains the work of the CWU Equal Opportunities department and encourages members to stay informed through the tailored literature produced

Since taking up the equal opportunities officer post almost two and a half years ago, I've made it a priority to ensure that the communications, publications and resources we produce are useful, relevant and up to date.

Recently this has entailed producing information about the complexities of the new Equality Act, which has now come into law. We also produce an equality e-bulletin, an online equality toolkit, and the Advisory Committee magazines *Women's Talk*, *Out Talk*, *Disability in Focus* and *Drum*.

These are augmented by a multitude of factsheets for members on issues such as:

- Maternity and Paternity Rights
- IVF
- Motor Neurone Disease
- Dementia
- BT Passport Scheme
- Domestic Violence
- Dyslexia
- Flexible Working
- Harassment in the workplace

We also use a multitude of methods to distribute these materials, from the CWU's main website and the equal opportunities micro site, where you will find much of what we produce, my personal blog and Facebook account, the CWU women's network on Facebook and direct mailing mainly within *The Voice*. In addition,

we have a database of contacts ranging from regional secretaries, branch secretaries, branch women's officers, workplace equality reps, and individual members.

To get members involved, the equality department holds annual advisory conferences covering all the strands of equality. All branches are entitled to send delegates to these. We also hold an equality officers' seminar once a year.

At regional level our CWU women's committees meet four times a year and regional equality committees meet regularly. Many branches have a women's officer and equality officer. All hold meetings for members and it's through all these methods that my

Below: Linda keeps members informed via her personal blog

department and the union hopes to keep you informed and also encourage all members to make their voice heard.

If you feel that we can improve the way we do things please let me know. If you would like to be added to our mailing list or you want information, advice or support then please contact me directly by email at lroy@cwu.org and by phoning 020 8971 7238. There is also a wealth of experience and resources in your branch.

You can also join me and the CWU women's network and other CWU groups on Facebook. You will need to open an account.

● My blog is <http://equalitylinda.blogspot.com/>



BEATING THOSE PERIOD PAINS

Women's Talk editor **Annamarie McCall** offers practical advice and information on PMS and PMDD – two common conditions that in severe cases can interfere with women's everyday lives and wellbeing

Every woman has experienced premenstrual tension (PMS) at some point, whether personally or through the experiences of friends and family. PMS spans all ages of women, affecting quality of life and relationships. A more severe form of the syndrome is premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD) which can interfere substantially with everyday life by affecting emotional wellbeing.

PMS and PMDD differ in severity, but the types of symptoms are the same. Common symptoms can be grouped into emotional, behavioural and physical categories, and this article gives an overview of symptoms to look out for and some available treatments.

Below: Eating a healthy diet can reduce bloating and cramps associated with PMS

Symptoms

More than 100 symptoms have been associated with PMS:

Emotional and behavioural symptoms can include:

- Anxiety
- Mood swings
- Tiredness
- Irritability
- Depression
- A loss in confidence
- Clumsiness
- Crying for no reason
- Losing your temper easily

Physical symptoms can include:

- Headaches and possibly migraines
- Feeling bloated
- A change in your appetite
- Pain in your joints
- Tender breasts
- Abdominal (tummy) pain
- Swollen ankles
- Weight gain

These symptoms aren't unique to PMS – it's the timing that is the telltale sign of the condition. The symptoms will appear during the two weeks leading up to your menstrual period, get better once your period has started and then come back each month.

There are no specific tests



“Many of us simply reach for the hot water bottle and comfort food to take our minds off period pain”

that can diagnose PMS. Your GP will usually make a diagnosis based on a description of your symptoms and at what point in the month they occur.

Treatment

There are a number of treatments that can help relieve the symptoms of PMS. These are normally medicinal but in some extreme cases surgery can be an option.

Many women find that light exercise can help relieve uncomfortable period pains or other PMS symptoms. Getting active through gentle swimming, walking or





cycling is a good way to relieve pain. Other lifestyle treatment options include changing your diet to see what effect this has on bloated feelings and cramps. And, of course, many of us simply reach for a hot water bottle and comfort food on the sofa – anything to take our minds off period pain!

Medicines

If you have pain from premenstrual headaches, backache or other aches and pains, it may be relieved by over-the-counter painkillers, such as paracetamol, ibuprofen or aspirin. Always read the patient information

that comes with your medicine and if you have any questions, ask your pharmacist for advice.

For symptoms that disrupt your life, and don't improve with self-help measures or painkillers, see your GP as they may prescribe you medicines. This could include the combined contraceptive pill, diuretics or hormone regulating medication.

Surgery

A hysterectomy (removal of your womb) with oophorectomy (removal of the ovaries) is a permanent solution to PMS as it stops

your menstrual cycle completely. The procedure is only rarely performed for PMS however, since less severe alternatives can usually be found. If you're considering this operation, your doctor may suggest an injection of a gonadorelin analogue first to see if this improves your symptoms. If this makes no difference, it means your symptoms aren't linked to your menstrual cycle and therefore it's unlikely that surgery will help.

● For more information contact National Association for Premenstrual Syndrome on 0870 777 2178 or visit their website www.pms.org.uk

WHY IS PAY STILL UNEQ

PAUL DONOVAN

reports on the excellent film *Made in Dagenham* that focuses on the strike of women workers seeking equal pay at the Ford plant in 1968



Women workers fight for their rights in *Made in Dagenham*

UAL 40 YEARS ON?

Image © Paramount Pictures

Inequality and friction are at the heart of *Made in Dagenham*. This cleverly constructed film deals with inequality on a number of levels but the basic dispute is between the management and the female workers, who insist they should not be getting half what the men are getting for doing the same grade of job.

This leads on to other frictions within the male dominated trade union, with the senior officers trying to collude with Ford's management against the women.

As the dispute goes on, work stops for the men as well, and they are laid off, and this causes tensions between the men and women, reflected in the marriage between two of the central figures Rita and Eddie O'Grady.

It's all resolved by the end, of course, with the women gaining their famous victory. They get substantially what they were seeking and, with the intervention of then employment secretary Barbara Castle, the equal pay act comes into effect two years later.

Strike sequel

If there were a sequel to the film it would have to focus on what has happened – or not happened – to bring about equal pay in the 40 years since the equal pay act became law.

Women are still discriminated against in the workplace, the difference being – as with many forms of discrimination – that it has become more covert.

As a result of the Dagenham strike, the women initially got 92 per cent pay parity with men. Today, despite equalities legislation and cultural change, the gap is 17 per cent in full time jobs and 38 per cent for part time. Women tend to be disproportionately represented in the lower paid and part-time end of the jobs market. At the other end, things are little better with women making up just two per cent of chief executive officers and a mere 17 per cent of directorships.

At Parliamentary level things seem to have gone backwards with a decline in female representation in both the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly since 2005. At the present rate of progress it will take another 200 years before women get parity with men at Westminster.

Union leadership

In the trade union world things have fared little better. While unions have been at the forefront of the push for greater equality in the workplace, they themselves remain unrepresentative of women in the most part.

Take the Communication Workers Union. Here, the number of paid women national officers went down from 22 per cent

in 2005 to 15 per cent in 2008. This is despite women making up 25 per cent of the membership.

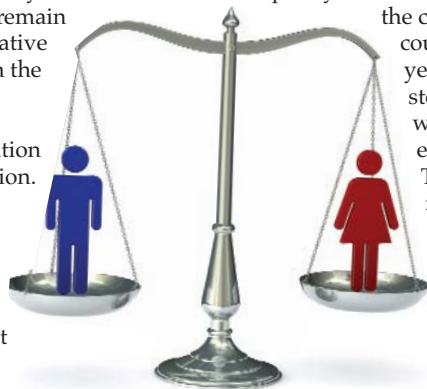
General secretary Billy Hayes and senior deputy general secretary Tony Kearns have both indicated their displeasure at this situation and desire to see it change. Indeed, Tony has criticised the way that unions in the UK are in the main “led by 50 plus white males”.

Struggle continues

Ultimately, there is still much to be done if equality is ever to be attained in the workplace. The cuts agenda being pursued by the coalition government threatens to hit women disproportionately hard. Given the ideological desire to dismantle the public sector, where 70 per cent of jobs are held by women, the likely effects are obvious.

The victory of the Dagenham women marked a high point in defeating sex discrimination in the workplace but in the 40 years since we have seen slow progress towards true equality. The danger is that

the cuts agenda could prove yet another step back for women's equality. The struggle for equal pay goes on and it seems there is still a long way to go.



FESTIVAL IS CREDIT TO CHAINMAKERS

Vera Kelsey reports on the speeches, songs and support that made this year's centenary to mark the historic victory of the chainmakers such a successful event



The 2010 centenary celebration of the historic victory of the women chainmakers drew more than 4,000 people with 2,000 trade unionists.

Visitors came from far and wide to enjoy the late summer sunshine at the Black Country event in September, with delegations from the south west, Ireland, and Scotland, some wearing historical costume.

Both the Midland region and Midlands women's region hosted a reception on the Friday night at the Quality Inn in Dudley, and it was great to see it well attended by women from across the UK.

The evening was a good networking opportunity with a buffet, disco, drinks and much talking. It was good to meet old friends and make new ones.

A raffle held at the event raised £136, which was donated to the CWU Humanitarian Aid charity youth project, and the evening ended with everyone looking forward to the centenary festival next day.

Solidarity and support

The Right to Work stall was extremely busy on the day with hundreds of leaflets handed out, as was the CWU stall which was completely cleared of everything well before the end of the festival.

General secretary Billy Hayes was a key speaker at the celebration and told the crowds: "The women chainmakers' struggle 100 years ago showed if you fight for what is right then you can make a difference and you will be remembered and honoured for doing so."

Other speakers included Mary Turner, president of the

Above: More than 4,000 people turned out to mark the Chainmakers centenary

GMB, and local MP Sylvia Heal. After the banner parade – which was the biggest seen at the festival and very well supported by the CWU – speeches were made by Eleanor Smith, vice president of Unison, and legendary leftwing figure Tony Benn, who received a fantastic response and urged the crowd to resist Tory attacks.

Stacey Blythe gave a good rendition of her chainmakers' song, backed by the Nottingham Clarion Choir, and the headline act Unthanks continued to play despite afternoon downpours.

As it was a family day out, there was also a children's area, trips down a mine, rides on a trolley bus and authentic shops – all set around the chainmakers' struggle, which was played out in various parts of the living museum.