

## **REPORT FROM CWU WOMEN'S CONFERENCE 23<sup>RD</sup> FEBRUARY 2008**

The Chair of the Women's Advisory Committee, Katrina Quirke opened the 9<sup>th</sup> CWU Women's Conference, welcoming delegates and visitors and remarking that this was the largest equality conference to date. She spoke on the Women's Charter, the work the Women's Advisory Committee (WAC) was doing with regional women's committees and that despite 30 years of the Sex Discrimination Act women still only make up 10% of executives in the top FTSE 100 companies and the lack of women in positions of power is mirrored in the CWU.

General Secretary Billy Hayes then spoke on it being a privilege to address the women's conference. He went on to say that monitoring showed some advances in representation but it was slow and painful, it was intended to add teeth to equality and diversity training at General Conference with a motion that any rep who fails to attend the one day course within 6 months of being elected, without good reason, won't be a rep. The union are looking at CWU TV and podcasts and he ended by saying how fantastic it was that the CWU had a woman President this year.

Next to speak was CWU President Jane Loftus, who spoke of her first year as a baptism of fire with the postal dispute and how we needed to organise more and recruit more.

Motion 1 moved by South West & Thames Valley branch instructed the executive to enter into discussions with BT to make them aware of our members concerns about the company's approach to women returning to work at the end of maternity leave and in particular with regard to attendance patterns and to ensure that all policies and agreements are enacted throughout the company in relation to this matter. The mover talked about the guilt of mothers who go back to work to put a roof over their child's head, but managers don't follow procedures, mothers returning to work find they have attendance patterns changed, no work life balance, still expected to meet targets and BT not being family friendly. This was carried.

Motion 2 was withdrawn.

Emergency Motion 1 from the WAC concerned nominations for the Labour Party Women's Conference 2008. Pat Clouder, moving, stated that no nominations for this conference had been sought by the NEC and called for a report on the process and criteria used for selection of delegates. Dianne Hill, South East Central branch seconded. This was carried.

There was then a brief presentation from Grace Mitchell, National Officer, on 'Black Women History Exhibition'. Grace started with a quote from Maya Angelou's most famous poem, "Still I Rise":

"You may write me down in history  
With your bitter, twisted lies,  
You may trod me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

She spoke of Black History month and the hope that this will include a women's section that would become an exhibition in its own right. The CWU are hoping to sponsor a profile.

Motion 3 from Croydon & South London branch was on forced marriages, the mover remarked that with a more diverse workforce and union this was becoming a union issue, that an arranged marriage is not the same as a forced marriage, which is condemned by every major religion. This was carried.

Motion 4 in the name of Midland Regional Women's Committee was on work with "Stop Honour Killings" to highlight the issue of women being murdered and forced suicides, in the UK and internationally. This was carried.

Motion 5 by branches Scotland No.5 and South Wales instructed the WAC to work with the executives and supported MP's to campaign for life long follow up treatment for all Breast Cancer patients. This was carried.

Manchester Clerical moved Motion 6 calling on the WAC to run a publicity campaign aimed at women to highlight the issues that women are more likely to have interrupted employment histories and breaks in National Insurance contributions due to spending periods of time at home raising children or caring for dependants. However, many women do not realise that this may mean both their occupational and state pensions could be much lower than those of men of a similar age. It called for information to be provided on how to check the status of their occupational and state pensions. This was carried.

Motion 7 from Capital branch called for sex education in schools to be mandatory and should include all aspects of sex education. The mover spoke about youngsters needing to be confident about relationships, able to make informed decisions, respect themselves and others and the need to address the high level of teenage pregnancies in the UK. The WAC was instructed to call on the CWU Executive to campaign and lobby the government to legislate to bring this about. This was carried.

The North West Regional Women's Committee submitted Motion 8 regarding the lack of involvement some branches show when dealing with not only women's issues, but with the whole issue of Equality. The WAC were instructed to write to the other Equality Advisory Committees as a matter of urgency, to ask for their support at Conference 2008 in Liverpool for a request to bring a speaker on Equality issues into the General Conference each year. This will help highlight the need of why these Equality Committees are so important within our union and to bring the message of Equality to everybody and not just the committed few. This was carried.

Motion 9 from the Women's Advisory Committee instructed the WAC to work with the NEC to ensure that a 'Women in the CWU' course is delivered in all regions to enable as many female members as possible to attend; that the courses shall be funded by HQ; and that childcare facilities are provided if needed. This was carried.

Wales & Marches Women's Regional Committee moved Motion 10 stating that women's contribution to fighting for workers rights is often overlooked as many of these fights take place in small companies. They believe the CWU should honour these women and instructed the WAC to carry out a study along with the research department and the NEC, and to draw up a report to highlight those achievements, region by region in order that the CWU can celebrate these often un-sung heroines of the Labour Movement. The report should also give consideration to holding a women's event in significant locations. This was carried.

Gloria Mills, National Organiser Equalities UNISON then gave a speech on her career in unions, the importance of equality in ensuring everyone is involved in decision making, that self organisation is important, we are still fighting to close the gender pay gap and that Labour was the only party to deliver equality. A question and answers session followed. One question was whether labour could be still be regarded as the vehicle to gain equality, another was on the challenges to the Equality bill. Gloria insisted that Labour is the only party to deliver on equality but we need to continually push on equality and the equality bill.

Motion 11 in the name of Wolverhampton & District Amal stated that International Women's Day is an important event in the Labour calendar which should be marked and celebrated by the CWU and that the Women's Advisory Committee, along with the Equal Opps Department, should organise a gathering of CWU women each year, in different geographical locations to commemorate International Women's Day. This was carried.

Motion 12 from the Women's Advisory Committee deplored the decision taken by the TUC General Council at the 2007 TUC Congress not to support expansion of the current childcare provision to include out of hours provision. It called on the NEC: to facilitate for the provision of childcare "out of session" hours as an integral part of the CWU's Commitment to promote equality, which is part of this union's policy; To ensure appropriate financial support is provided to meet the cost from delegate's branches were possible, but with a commitment from the Treasurer that any hardship cases, or where branches are unable financially assist, the cost will be picked up by Head Office; That an extensive enquiry is made about the range of quality facilities that could be provided to meet delegate's needs outside of Conference for all the conferences we have commitments to as a union; For this information to be sent to branches who request extended childcare for delegates and for the delegates themselves to then arrange what best suites their own needs and that of their children. This was carried.

Emergency Motion 2 from Capital branch called for the WAC to set up a working party to look at how the CWU can highlight to members the exploitation of women in the sex industry. This was carried.

Motion 13 from Coventry branch instructed the WAC to liase with the NEC in order to campaign for the elimination of the conditions, which force women into the sex industry, and for the implementation of measures, which could

provide an exit route. These to include: - A decent minimum wage to end poverty; Restoration of the student grants and the abolition of tuition fees; For Decent Childcare; Investment in alternative training and jobs; For increased spending and investment in resources for women who have experienced abuse; For more resources for drug rehabilitation; For Safe Houses and Refuges for those who have been trafficked into the Industry.

The speaker talked about the growth in sexist imagery and the sex industry reinforces and that it perpetuates the wider discrimination which women face within society and that it has the affect of undermining women's' struggles for equality in the workplace and society itself. This was carried.

London Regional Women's Committee moved Motion 14 instructing the WAC, and all other relevant bodies, to add their voices by calling on the NEC to actively pursue the policy passed at last year's General Conference calling for the NEC to work with the Labour Party and the TUC in pursuit of a policy of decriminalising prostitution to give women rights and protection they currently do not have under existing UK law by working with groups such as the English Collective of Prostitutes and look at schemes adopted by countries like New Zealand which recognise that prostitution in itself should not be a crime. This was seconded by West London and was carried.

Motion 15 in the name of Central London branch called for the CWU to campaign for more women workers in the communications industry, noting that only 25% of CWU members are women and that in some areas, for example telecom engineering the figure is as low as 3%. This was carried.

Motion 16 from the Women's Advisory Committee stated that the time is right for the CWU to have a debate about the prospect of running the CWU Women's Conference over 2 days, with a view to this taking effect from the 2010 CWU Women's Conference. This was carried.

Motion 17 from Birmingham, Black Country & Worcester branch acknowledged the work done by the Advisory Committee, the impact on CWU policy the Conference has made and this success has come about because of the ability of those concerned to meet in a supportive and understanding arena which encourages greater participation. It called for a commitment to maintaining a separate conference for its women members. This was carried.

Motion 18 from Shropshire & Mid Wales concerned the actions of some CWU sponsored M.P.'s and called on the National Executive Committee to investigate the activities of sponsored MPS who have failed to uphold the policies of CWU in relation to the rights of women and equality. The results of this investigation are to be published to Branches to be used to formulate relevant CWU policy in deciding whether current sponsored MP's should continue to receive the support of the Union. Manchester Clerical, who said this could deny MP's accountability to their constituents, opposed this. On right of reply the mover said this was not about all sponsored MP's but about those who consistently not only fail to support CWU policy but vote against it and we should send a clear message to them. This was carried.

North Wales & The Marches moved Motion 19 instructing the incoming NEC to organise a Know Your Rights Awareness Campaign in respect of Women's rights, including Equal Opportunities, Maternity Rights, Employment Rights, etc. This was carried.

Motion 20 from West London stated their disappointment that despite rules having been introduced into the Union's Rule book 4 years ago there has been little progress in achieving the need for proportionality and positive action "until such time as the Union is satisfied that its structure reflects and supports the gender and racial balance of the members it represents ends". It instructed the WAC to work with the NEC to bring forward an action plan to the 2009 Annual conference on the positive action the Union needs to take to ensure both "proportionality and fair representation" and that our structure reflects and supports the gender and racial balance of the members we represent. A report on this action plan to be given to both the Black Workers Conference 2009 and the Women's Conference 2009.

This was opposed by South East No.5 the speaker stating she did not want to be on the NEC because she was a woman or black but because she was the best person for the job. Birmingham black Country & Worcester branch supporting the motion said the truth was that women were being stopped from going to conference, not allowed to stand for positions, not allowed to do things, we're fed up with waiting for something to be done and expecting the NEC to do it is like expecting turkey's to vote for Christmas. This was nothing new it's about implementing the current rule book! This was carried.

Motion 21 from South East Wales Amal applauded the valuable work of the Women's Advisory Committee and noted that the WAC works for the whole of the CWU and should therefore be accountable to, and elected by the whole of the CWU. It called for future WAC election regulations issued under the terms of rule 8.14.5, shall ensure that the existing constituency based lay seats are elected by the whole of General Conference using branch voting strengths. This was opposed by Manchester Clerical who said this would undermine constituencies and denies a minority a voice and also opposed by South West and Thames Valley. Coventry branch supported the motion and said this is about going back to the original system of voting, that the WAC deal with issues whatever the constituency and we should be able to vote for the people we know are able to do the job, wherever they are from. This was carried.

Conference then closed with a farewell to Michele Emerson, Assistant Secretary Equal Opportunities who is standing down this year. Speeches were given thanking Michele for her hard work, calling her a pioneer for women engineers, an inspiration encouraging, supportive and her leaving would be a great loss to the CWU. Michele thanked people for the accolade but said she hadn't done this on her own and that our strength is that we are a collective supported by men as well as women. She ended by wishing conference well for the future.

The two Motions voted to go forward to General Conference were 5 and 6.



*Outside Great Northern Centre, Belfast stands 'The Monument to the Unknown Woman Worker'. The two bronze female figures address the underlying issues of women's low-paid jobs and unpaid housework. This theme is articulated by the use of objects and utensils symbolic of women's work, such as household items, telephones, shopping baskets and cash registers, which are imbedded in the fabric of the figures and stands as a testament to all women workers both paid and unpaid.*

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Solent Branch